FROM PALESTINE TO HOWARD BEACH AND HOUSTON:
MEIR KAHANE, MOSHE CAHANA, AND THE ANTI-COLONIALISM OF
AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLES

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"I am not a Jew with trembling knees. I am a proud Jew with 3,700 years of civilized history. Nobody came to our aid when we were dying in the gas chambers and ovens. Nobody came to our aid when we were striving to create our country. We paid for it. We fought for it. We died for it. We will stand by our principles. We will defend them. And, when necessary, we will die for them again, with or without your aid."

Menachem Begin to Sen. Joe Biden, 1983

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the political lives of cousins Rabbis Moshe Cahana and Meir Kahane to illuminate the diverse spectrum of Jewish political experience and the tensions around race and civil rights during the twentieth century. This study reconsiders the prominent New York ethnic nationalist Kahane through his seldom explored family ties, and is the first to introduce Cahana, a religious leader in Houston who marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. and became a national voice on Jewish non-violence. In this transnational study, I trace how the cousins' distinct connection to their Hasidic family in pre-1948 Palestine shaped their divergent approaches to Zionism, European imperialism, American political inequality, and African American civil rights. Raised in Safed during the British Mandate, Moshe Cahana participated in the anti-British Jewish underground movement before moving to the Houston, Texas in 1959 and engaging in civil rights activity. Cahana's example reveals new ways in which American racial ideologies and political developments often transcended national boundaries and offers another angle on how American civil rights struggles borrowed ideas and strategies from post-World War II decolonization struggles. In contrast, Meir Kahane internalized Jewish struggles in fascist Europe and in Israel, concentrating on a quest for Jewish survival. What inspired one cousin to non-violence, set the other on a path to build a Jewish militant organization, the Jewish Defense League, in 1968. Kahane saw African Americans in Brooklyn as threats, creating a fissure in the Black-Jewish relationships Moshe Cahana worked to deepen. Through this discussion, I highlight the often-murky relationship Jews had with imperialism and colonialism, further uncover transnational and inter-racial politics in the American civil rights movement, and reveal the malleability of Jewish racial and religious identity in Israel and the Diaspora.

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Introduction

In the spring of 1965, Moshe Cahana left his home in Houston to participate in the civil rights march from Selma, Alabama to the state capitol in Montgomery. Cahana left for Alabama at the behest of civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Forman, who believed the presence of white religious leaders would curb the amount of violence activists would face from police and white segregationists. Three years after Cahana marched in Selma, his cousin Meir Kahane stood with Jewish militants outside of New York's Temple Emanu-El hoping to stop a disruptive protest by James Forman. Kahane sought to protect the sanctity of Jewish services from a guerilla tactic he deemed an anti-Semitic.

Moshe Cahana and Meir Kahane's respective activism during the 1960s civil rights struggles set them on opposite ends of the American political spectrum. Cahana, a rabbi in Houston, Texas, was a prominent civil rights activist who led integration and equality pushes in southeast Texas and was close friends with Martin Luther King, Jr. Meir Kahane, on the other hand, was a far-right ethno-nationalist rabbi in Brooklyn who believed that civil rights efforts in New York fostered black and Latino anti-Semitism and presented an existential crisis for local Jews.

Understanding the two Kahanas, however, moves beyond their place in American politics.[1] While they occupied different positions in the U.S. political spectrum, their views on Jewish nationalism and Mandate-era politics aligned. Both

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[1] Since "Kahana" is a Hebrew and Yiddish last name not derived from the Roman alphabet, there is no single transliteration. In this dissertation, "Kahana" is used to discuss the family in general. "Kahane" refers to the spelling Meir and his side of the family used, and "Cahana" refers to Moshe and his side of the family.

men were ardent Zionists, both were followers of Ze'ev Jabotinsky's Revisionist movement, both drew political motivations from the violence of the British Mandate, and both applied anti-colonial interpretations of Revisionist Zionism onto American civil rights politics in the 1960s. Both were also part of the same Hasidic Orthodox family from Safed, Palestine, and remained close to one another throughout their lives. As a result, Moshe Cahana and Meir Kahane cannot be fully understood apart from one another.

The politics of the Kahanas are primarily separated by time and place. Moshe Cahana was a native of Safed, born under the British Mandate for Palestine in 1922. His experiences as a British subject in Palestine in the 1930s shaped his politics. These experiences fostered in Cahana a Zionism that focused primarily on political decolonization and the establishment of a Jewish state from a British colony. Ten years Cahana's junior and a native of New York, Meir Kahane understood Zionism's role differently. Kahane's experiences as a youth viewing Palestinian violence from afar in a world focused on growing Nazism fostered a Zionism that villainized Arab Palestinians as a hindrance to Jewish stability and security in the emerging State of Israel.

The second factor that drove the Kahanas apart politically was their application of Jewish law to mid-20th century Zionism. Moshe Cahana, viewed as a religious prodigy when he was a child, engaged in study of the Musar movement.[2] This movement arose among Orthodox Lithuanian Jews as a response to the social changes

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[2] Sometimes also spelled "Mussar"

brought about by the Enlightenment, and the corresponding Haskalah movement.[3]

Musar responded to growing anti-Semitism, the assimilation of many Jews into

Christianity, and the impoverished living conditions in the Pale of Settlement which

caused severe tension and disappointment. By the 1700s, Jewish institutions in

Lithuania began to dissolve and religious Jews feared that their way of life was

slipping away from them; observance of traditional Jewish law and custom was on the

decline. To remedy this cultural decline, Musar emphasized moral teachings based on

the ethics taught in traditional Jewish rabbinic works. Instead of focusing solely on

the rigidity of Jewish law, Musar approached the law as ethical guidelines that could

be molded to modern Jewish life, both religious and secular.[4]

    While Musar was not a movement Moshe Cahana's family followed or even

believed in, they allowed him ample opportunity to study it alongside his other

religious studies. This early study of Musar also distinctly affected his world view. He

applied the principles of the Musar movement to political Zionism, allowing him to

see Zionism as an ethical principle and guideline rather than a strict political doctrine.

Cahana's ideology of ethical Zionism centered on the principles of political autonomy

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[3] The Haskalah was a Jewish enlightenment movement that pursued two complementary aims: to preserve the Jews as a separate, unique collective and worked for a cultural and moral renewal, most notably a revival of Hebrew for secular purposes.

[4] See Dov Katz, *The Musar Movement: Its History, Leading Personalities and Doctrines* (Tel Aviv: Orly Press, 1975), Hillel Goldberg, *The Fire Within: The Living Heritage of the Musar Movement* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1987), Ira Stone, *A Responsible Life: The Spiritual Path of Mussar* (New York: Aviv Press, 2006), Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar movement: Seeking the Torah of Truth* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2010); Geoffrey Claussen, *Sharing the Burden: Rabbi Simhah Zissel Ziv and the Path of Musar* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), and Chaim Zaichyk, *Sparks of Mussar: A Treasury of the Words and Deeds of the Mussar Greats* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2014).

and social equality, which he applied to American struggles for political equality, namely African American civil rights in the southern United States.[5]

In contrast, Meir Kahane believed in strict interpretations of Jewish law. As an ardent Religious Zionist, Kahane argued that Zionism and the creation of Israel in 1948 represented fulfillment of biblical and Talmudic prophecies on the recreation of the ancient Jewish kingdom. In Kahane's estimation, if Israel was the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, then it should likewise be governed by biblical law. To this end, Kahane crafted his ideology of Maimonidean Zionism which argued that Maimonides' Law of the Kings should be the governing force behind Israel and should be the framework for how Jews interact with non-Jews. In the Law of the Kings, Maimonides proposed that non-Jews living in a Jewish kingdom or territory would have three options: they could remain and live as "resident strangers" with limited rights, leave willingly and receive compensation, or be forcefully removed. Applying this to American racial politics, Kahane's Maimonidean Zionism preached ethnic separation as the only recourse for what Kahane saw as the existential problem of anti-Semitism in black and Latino communities in New York.

Understanding Jewish History through Biography

Addressing Moshe and Meir Kahane together offers numerous insights into the way their lives developed together. The divergent ways that both men developed their activist careers arose from the similarities of their youth. It was their shared

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[5] Moshe Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories*, interview by Michael Cahana, 2000; Moshe Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century* (Houston: self-published, 1999).

experience of interethnic violence and British imperialism that shaped the political

movements both Kahanas eventually led. As a result, it is impossible to understand

their contributions to the 1960s without understanding early developments in their life.

Biography is the best way to draw linkages between the early experiences of the

Kahana family in late-19th century Palestine and the later activism of Moshe and Meir

in mid-20th century America.

By looking at these larger questions in Jewish life shifts, this dissertation

breaks away from traditional biographical models and embraces analytical biography

as a central methodology. Instead of solely addressing the how lives of both Kahanas

progressed, I use their life to analyze broader questions in Jewish life during the 20th

century. Through examination of the Kahanas, the malleability of Zionism, the

importance of place in Jewish identity, and the complexity of Jewish political identity

in the United States all come to the forefront.

Addressing the two men through analytical biography also allows me to

expand my analysis beyond the boundaries of time and place. Instead of focusing on

specific movements in the United States or Palestine/Israel, examining the Kahanas

through the lens of biography allows the inclusion of transnational themes and the

examination of political patterns that stretched three continents. Biography as a

medium also allows for analysis beyond the time constraints of individual political

movements. By examining the Kahanas through biography, the connections between

seemingly disparate movements come to the forefront. Without the broad

periodization and localization of biography, the connection between the Meora'ot

Tarpat in Mandate-era Palestine and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers' strike in

1960s Brooklyn would remain unexamined.

Using biography also allows me to reclaim Jewish colonial identity as an

analytical tool. Though they approached it differently, both Kahana cousins possessed

a strong colonial identity, forged under the Ottoman and British empires. Their shared

familial history of political marginalization typified the colonization and inequality

that accompanied Jewish physical and ideological statelessness in the 19th and 20th

centuries. This is a facet to Jewish identity that is often overlooked when examining

Jewish communities, movements, or cultures as a whole. By looking at the Kahanas

individually, their colonial identities become the central focus, rather than just a single

facet of a wider culture.

Finally, biography allows for the reclaiming of Zionism as an anti-colonial

movement. Since Israel captured Palestinian territory in during the 1967 War and

began an over fifty-year occupation and colonization, political discourse has largely

treated Zionism as a static concept. It became a one-dimensional ideology designed to

colonize territory and displace indigenous Arab populations through a process of

ethnic cleansing. This myopic view of the movement obfuscates how many Jews

viewed Zionism's relationship with European colonialism. Examining Zionism as an

ideology or a movement only serves to embolden this interpretation of Zionism, as

these were the most publicized goals of the movement. However, by examining the

Kahanas individual Zionist ideologies, a more textured and complex image of Zionism

as a vibrant and evolving movement comes to the forefront. For the Kahanas'

interpretations, Zionism was not a European colonial movement, but rather actively fought against European imperialism and influence in the region.

In adopting a biographical approach in this dissertation, I rely heavily on the written works of both Moshe Cahana and Meir Kahane. Despite his importance to Southern civil rights efforts, Moshe Cahana kept very little archival material. He did not keep copies of his writings, opted against publishing his work beyond a lone self-published book, and mostly eschewed an overly public life. When asked about his aversion to discussing his past, he told his son, "It's not easy for me to talk about memories because I live in the present and think about the future."[6] As a result, Moshe Cahana maintains little archival footprint and is only found in collections dedicated to other people. This archival invisibility caused Cahana to fade into the background, so much so that, when writing on Meir Kahane, Robert Friedman referred to Moshe as Meir's uncle and cited him as living in Dallas.[7]

Despite this archival invisibility, I utilize a number of newspaper columns and writings by Moshe Cahana, found across several archives. Cahana maintained semi-regular columns in both Houston's *Jewish Herald-Voice* and Bellaire Texas's *Bellaire & Southwestern Texan*. Cahana used both columns to champion civil rights efforts, expound upon his religious philosophies, and teach readers about Judaic traditions and religion. He also published his book *Ethics for the 21st Century* in 2001 which detailed his ideology of ethical Zionism. Though not a widely published book, it

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[6] Moshe Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories*, interview by Michael Cahana, VHS, 2000, in possession of Cahana family.

[7] Robert I. Friedman, *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane, From FBI Informant to Knesset Member* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990), 23-24.

proved invaluable in understanding the ways in which Cahana translated anti-colonial Zionism onto the African American civil rights movement. Finally, this dissertation relies on a handful of personal interviews and home movies compiled by Cahana's two sons, Michael and Ronnie, in which he discusses much of his early life, service in Etzel, and relationship with Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights activists.

Meir Kahane proved a more prolific writer than his cousin, publishing dozens of books over his lifetime. These books explain his philosophies on Zionism, Jewish self-defense, life in the Diaspora, and the role and requirements of Jews in interethnic conflicts. Due to Kahane's prominence in New York City and his continued devoted following, these works continue to be published into the 21st century, most recently by his ideological successors at the Institute for the Publication of the Writings of Meir Kahane.

Kahane also held weekly columns, under several different pennames, in Brooklyn's *Jewish Press* from the early 1960s until his death in 1991. At his zenith with the newspaper, Kahane published six or seven articles per week. I draw heavily from these articles, as they are key to understanding Kahane's Maimonidean Zionism and the ways in which he adapted this ideology to American racial struggles in the 1960s.

Since both men were public figures, much of their life was reported on in local newspapers. As a result, I relied heavily on *The New York Times*, *New York Amsterdam News*, *Bellaire and Southwestern Texan*, and *Houston Chronicle* for discussion on both men's activism in the United States. For their early lives in Palestine, I draw heavily from the *Palestine Bulletin*, *Palestine Post*, and *Jewish*

Telegraphic Agency for English sources, and *Davar*, *Ha'aretz*, and *Doar Hayom* for Hebrew sources. Bringing in these sources allows for a greater understanding of the world around the men that existed. For example, immediately above the *Bellaire and Southwestern Texan* article announcing Moshe Cahana's hiring at Brith Shalom was the front-page rundown of a contentious school board meeting over segregation. The activism of both Kahanas was a reaction to the spaces in which they lived. Thus, to fully understand their activism, one has to have a full appreciation of the world around them.

Finally, it should be stated that both subjects prove to be unreliable narrators. As both men sought to frame their activism as righteous, they often manipulated details and narratives to fit their own view of their political activism. To counteract this, their own words have been checked against outside sources such as newspaper reports, service records, and organizational documents. When Moshe Cahana discussed his Etzel service, he framed a narrative of nonviolence and pacifism. His national service records detailed a much different story, causing a conflict of information. In such cases, I rely on third-party sources and conflicts are noted in footnotes to give the reader a fuller account of both men's ideologies and activism.

The Kahanas' Place in Historiographic Literature

The story of the Kahana family provides significant insight into postwar Jewish political frameworks. While this dissertation increases our understanding of two important historical figures in American and Israeli histories, its historiographic importance extends beyond this. The Kahana family's experience expands our

understanding of politics in the 1960s, particularly in the Jewish community, the fluidity of Zionism and its impact on American Jewish politics, and postcolonialism in Jewish identity and history.

Moshe Cahana is largely absent from present scholarship on Jewish politics and activism. In monographs on Jewish American civil rights activism in the 1960s, he appears in a handful of footnotes or anecdotes. These footnotes focus primarily on Cahana's involvement in the 1963 Birmingham Campaign and he is relegated to mention as one of 19 participants from the Rabbinical Assembly. His work in Birmingham, role as a leader of the group of rabbis, and his connection with Martin Luther King remain unexplored.[8] No works offer substantial analysis of Cahana's life, work, or activism. Even in biographies of Meir Kahane, Cahana is rarely mentioned.[9] This historiographic omission exists despite Cahana's participation in some of the most important events in Jewish history both in Israel and the United States. Instead, Cahana appears only as an aside.

As a highly visible and controversial public figure, several studies on Meir Kahane do exist. However, since these works focus on Meir Kahane as an individual, or as a leader of a political movement, they overlook the impact of his family's

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[8] Cahana appears as footnotes in Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University Press of Alabama, 1997) and Marc Schneier, *Shared Dreams: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Jewish Community (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999).* He is mentioned only in passing in Bryan Edward Stone, *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011) and Michael Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). All four books mention Cahana in relation to his 1963 trip to Birmingham.

[9] Robert Friedman mentions Cahana in passing in his biography *The False Prophet: From FBI Informant to Knesset Member* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990)*,* but Friedman discusses nothing beyond his residence in Houston. Other works fail to mention him altogether, even when discussing the murder of Cahana's mother.

turbulent and violent history as colonial subjects in Palestine on his eventual political

activism. Instead, previous works focus primarily on his racism, calls for violence, or

political extremism. Hasia Diner's *We Remember with Reverence and Love* and

Michael Staub's *Torn at the Roots*, for example, partially analyze Kahane's political

extremism as a countercultural reaction to the dominant Jewish political culture of

liberalism and assimilation in the postwar period.[10] To Shaul Magid and Gal

Beckerman, Kahane's politics was a form of post-Holocaust trauma and an extreme

reaction to anti-Semitism.[11] In *Jews in Gotham*, Jeffrey Gurock argues that Kahane's

popularity stemmed from the economic stagnation and misfortune of Brooklyn's

working-class Jews in a decade of increasing white flight that included affluent Jews.[12]

The problem with these three approaches is that they all treat Kahanism as

exceptional. For each, Kahanism is a unique reaction to geographically and culturally

specific circumstances.[13] By maintaining this narrow focus, important elements of

Meir Kahane's ideology are lost, primarily his articulation of Revisionist Zionism.

Revisionism formed the core of Kahane's philosophy and served as his primary

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[10] Hasia Diner, *American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust, 1945-1962* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[11] Shaul Magid discusses Kahane in *American Post Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), while Gal Beckerman discusses Kahane in *When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2010).

[12] Jeffrey Gurock, *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); for more on Jewish racial positioning in postwar New York, see Henry Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), Edward Shapiro, *Crown Heights: Blacks, Jews, and the 1991 Brooklyn Riot* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2006), Joshua Zeitz, *White Ethnic New York: Jews, Catholics, and the Shaping of Postwar Politics* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

[13] Kahanism is the term for the extremist Jewish ideology formed from the political stances of Rabbi Meir Kahane, the Jewish Defense League, and the Kach party in Israel.

political motivation. By ignoring Zionism, previous authors cast Kahanism solely as a reaction to anti-Semitism in Europe. While German and Soviet anti-Semitism were immediate catalysts, the roots of Kahanism lay in Palestine.

Further, these analyses do not hold up when looking at the Kahana family as a whole, an approach that uncovers a more expansive, transnational character of Jewish politics. By analyzing Moshe and Meir Kahane together, the Kahana story shifts away from a story of extremism and toward a story of Jewishness and nationalism. Thus, I argue that Meir Kahane and Moshe Cahana cannot be understood apart from one another. The family history in Brooklyn and Safed, Israel, and their respective relationships to colonialism and imperialism, affected both men and informed their later activism.

Since their history as colonial subjects in Safed impacted their American political activism, the Kahana story needs to be discussed transnationally. Existing scholarship on the Kahanas remains largely rooted in either the United States or Israel. Works such as Aviezer Ravitzky's *The Roots of Kahanism: Consciousness and Political Reality* or Janet Dolgin's *Jewish Identity and the JDL* focus on Meir Kahane's activism in Israel and the United States, respectively, but do not address the ways in which the two theaters were connected.[14] Approaching the Kahanas solely through their American or Israeli activism fails to address the linkages between American and Israeli historical developments that shaped Jewish communities in both places. It is impossible to understand Kahane's conservatism or Cahana's liberalism

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[14] Aviezer Ravitzky, *The Roots of Kahanism: Consciousness and Political Reality* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1989); Janet Dolgin, *Jewish Identity and the JDL* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

without addressing the ways in which Jewish and Arab violence in Palestine and Israel affected them.

In examining Moshe Cahana's liberalism and Meir Kahane's conservatism, this dissertation complicates our understanding of American politics in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite numerous political differences, Moshe and Meir Kahane maintained large amounts of political overlap, an aspect to postwar politics largely overlooked in scholarship. Led by William O'Neill's work, the prominent theme in scholarship on the 1960s is political disintegration. In *Coming Apart*, O'Neill focuses on the process of political fragmentation on the left and the emergence of strong opposition from the right.[15] This became the dominant theme in scholarship for several decades. John Morton Blum focused on fracture in his synthesis of the 1960s, *Years of Discord*; Sandra and David Burner emphasized the "self-destruction" of the American left in *Making Peace with the '60s*; Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin suggested the level of political fragmentation was reminiscent of the sectional crisis from a century prior, in *America Divided*; and Klaus Fischer emphasizes the 1960s as a stormy period that revealed a bevy of pent-up social and generational conflicts unseen since the Civil War, in *America in White, Black, and Gray*.[16] This is a sentiment echoed in scholarship on American Jews in the 1960s, which argue the Jewish community suffered the same fracturing fate as American society, particularly over the embrace of

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[15] William L. O'Neill. *Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960s* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 1971).

[16] John Morton Blum, *Years of Discord: American Politics and Society, 1961-1974* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); David Burner, *Making Peace with the '60s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Maurice Isserman & Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Klaus P. Fischer, *America in White, Black, and Gray: The Stormy 1960s* (London: A&C Black, 2006).

liberalism in the 1960s.[17] This emphasis on fracture attempts to disassociate Jewish

liberalism from Jewish cultural heritage to explain an increasing number of

commentators from the middle and right ends of the ideological spectrum. However,

this ignores Jewish communities coalescing around Zionism in the 1960s and 1970s.

In the wake of Arab-Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973, Zionism became a unifying ideal

that brought together liberal and conservative Jews under a banner of shared ethnic

nationalism.[18]

Focusing on the Kahana family, I argue against the idea of fracture in the

Jewish community. Despite their disparate political ideologies, Moshe and Meir

Kahane maintained similar attachments to Revisionist Zionism. Indicative of the

larger Jewish community in which they lived, cultural and political attachment to a

Jewish state in the 1960s, particularly in the wake of the 1967 war, united the Kahana

family. Examining the two through their familial relation highlights the aspects of

their lives and Jewish identities that drew them together. Through these ties, the

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[17] See Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (New York: Basic, 1993); Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York: Free, 1995); Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Seth Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind: A Crisis of Liberalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Samuel G. Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[18] For more on Zionism's impact on American Jews, see William F.S. Miles, *Zion in the Desert: American Jews in Israel's Reform Kibbutzim* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), Shirli Brautbar, *From Fashion to Politics: Hadassah and Jewish American Women in the Post World War II Era* (Boston, MA: Academic Press, 2012), Emily Alice Katz, *Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture, 1948-1967* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), Michael Barnett, "The New Tribalism," in *The Star and the Stripes: A History of the Foreign Policy of American Jews* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), Sara Yael Hirschhorn, *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

Kahanas shared a history and religious upbringing, both of which not only created a

continual bond between the two, but also informed their political differences.

Aside from arguing against the theme of communal disintegration, this

dissertation will also build on recent historiographic trends around the impact of

Zionism on American political movements and the disintegration of interethnic

activist coalitions. Previous authors have conflated attachment to Zionism with a

Jewish trend toward political conservatism. Scholars on Jewish racial activism such as

Murray Friedman, Jonathan Kaufman, and Michael Staub each credit the breakdown

of interethnic political coalitions, in part, to the fervent embrace of Zionism by

American Jews in the wake of the 1967 and 1973 wars.[19] American political scholars

have gone a step further in arguing that the embrace of Zionism led to a rightward

shift in American Jewish politics.[20] Recently, however, this view of American

Zionism has shifted. In his 2006 book, *American Jewish Political Culture and the*

Liberal Persuasion, Henry Feingold argues that Zionism's relationship with American

liberalism was more complicated than previous scholars suggested.[21] Instead of a

rightward shift in American Jewry, Feingold shows that American Jews have

consistently negotiated the contestations between Zionism and Liberalism to achieve a

balance between the two in their identity. In *City on a Hilltop*, Sara Hisrschhorn

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[19] See Jonathan Kaufman, *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1988), Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation & Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York: Free Press, 1995), Michael Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), and Cheryl Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[20] Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) is a prime example of this trend.

[21] Henry L. Feingold, *American Jewish Political Culture and the Liberal Persuasion* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013).

pushes the connection a step further, arguing that settler Zionism was a political outgrowth of American liberalism in the 1960s, as settlers used the language and ideals of the New Left to justify increased settlement in the West Bank and Sinai.[22]

The Kahana story adds to this historiography by repositioning Zionism's role in American Jewish political alignments. While Meir Kahane is often at the center of the argument that attachments to Zionism caused a Jewish shift toward political conservatism, placing him alongside his cousin Moshe demonstrates that Jewish American politics is not reductive or inevitable. Both men placed Zionism at the center of their political ideologies, seeing it as cohesive with either American conservatism or liberalism. Instead of only being a conservative political movement, the picture of Zionism that emerges is that of a fluid and dynamic political framework applicable to any number of political movements and positions in the United States. Meir Kahane was able to use Zionism to justify political conservatism, anti-black and anti-Arab racism, and violent activism. However, Moshe Cahana used Zionism to inspire civil rights activism, feminism, anti-war activism, and labor reform.

Ultimately, the Kahanas add to our understanding of both American liberalism and conservatism. Early postwar scholarship on American politics focused primarily on American Liberalism as intellectuals largely presumed that liberalism had become the dominant national ideology. When early scholars on 20th century American politics, such as Richard Hofstadter, addressed political conservatism, they often did so in a derisive manner, likening it to paranoia.[23] It was not until conservative

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[22] Sara Yael Hirschhorn, *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[23] See Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," *Harper's Magazine* (April 1964).

electoral victories in the 1970s and 1980s that scholars began treating American

conservatism as a political movement on equal footing to American liberalism. This

refocusing on conservatism was an attempt to answer the question of how

Conservatives won control. This approach suggests that American political

movements were reactionary in nature.[24] Viewing emerging conservativism in the

1960s and 1970s as reactionary, however, fails to address the numerous ways in which

political movements on the left and right were intertwined and connected.

Focusing on the Kahanas demonstrates that American liberalism and

conservatism are intertwined and often arise from similar ideologies and experiences.

While Moshe Cahana was politically liberal and Meir Kahane was politically

conservative, their ideologies similarly arose from Revisionist Zionism, both believed

Jews needed to take an active role in political struggles over African American civil

rights in the 1960s, and both saw Jews as colonial subjects in need of large-scale

decolonization, participating in many of the same political movements, such as

evacuating Soviet and Syrian Jews to Israel. These facets to their respective

ideologies brought the Kahanas to political cooperation as often as dissent.

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[24] For works that address conservatism as a reactionary movement, see Mary D. Edsall and Thomas B. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); David Farber and Jeff Roche, *The Conservative Sixties* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Vintage, 2006); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Bruce Schulman and Julian Zelizer, *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010); Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York, Anchor, 2011).

The Kahana story challenges how we understand Zionism in the United States and Israel. By addressing the divergent ways in which both men interpreted Revisionism, this dissertation demonstrates that Revisionist Zionism is far from a monolithic movement. Though existing scholarship addresses Revisionism as a homogenous ideology, Ze'ev Jabotinsky remained vague in his ideology, and multiple interpretations arose. Thus, Revisionist Zionism became a diverse and nuanced political movement.

Despite being an ideological forerunner to modern Israeli conservatism, Revisionist Zionism and early Revisionists escaped the attention of scholars for years. Early scholars on Zionism and the creation of a Jewish state focused on the Labor movement, which long controlled the Zionist establishment. This coincided with Labor's ideological domination in Israel, which manifested in the historiography.[25] Revisionists were not represented in most Israeli cultural and academic publications.

Early works on American Zionists followed this trend. Monographs by Melvin Urofsky, Naomi Cohen, and Richard Stevens examined American leaders who overwhelmingly supported the Labor establishment in Israel.[26] These scholars, therefore, portrayed Zionism as a homogenous and monolithic movement. American

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[25] Robert St. John, *They Came From Everywhere: Twelve Who Helped Mold Modern Israel* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1962); Avraham Avi-Hai, *Ben Gurion, State Builder: Principles and Pragmatism, 1948-1963* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1974); Michael Keren, *Ben Gurion and the Intellectuals* (De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1983); Michael Keren, *The Pen and the Sword: Israeli Intellectuals and the Making of the Nation-State* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1989); Myron J. Aronoff, "Myths, Symbols, and Rituals of the Emerging State," in Laurence J. Silverstein (ed.) *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State* (New York: New York University Press, 1991) 175-192.

[26] Richard Stevens, *American Zionism and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1970); Naomi Wiener Cohen, *American Jews and the Zionist Idea* (Brooklyn, NY: Ktav Publishing, 1975); Melvin Urofsky, *We Are One!: American Jewry and Israel* (New York: Anchor Books, 1978).

Revisionism received little attention. The few works that dealt with Revisionism, such

as Rafael Medoff's *Militant Zionism in America*, emphasized the militancy and

increasing violence of the movement without examining the philosophical and

political intricacies that separated it from the Zionist establishment.[27] Beginning in the

1990s, scholarship shifted toward understanding Zionism beyond early Labor leaders.

This scholarship attempts to tell the story of the other groups and forces that were part

of the history of Zionism but had largely escaped attention, including Haredi Jews, the

national-religious and settler movements, and Revisionist Zionism.[28]

Analyzing the Kahanas also highlights the evolution of American Zionism

beyond statehood in 1948. Instead of approaching American Zionism as a movement

that faded after World War II and did not regain momentum until after the 1967 War,

the Kahana story demonstrates that American Zionism remained vibrant and dynamic

in the years between the 1948 and 1967 Wars. Since 2000, scholars of American

Zionism have attempted to move beyond examining movement leaders to offering a

fuller picture of how American Jews interacted with Zionism in Israel. This move

involved expanding beyond 1948, since previous scholarship on American Zionism

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[27] Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926-1948* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

[28] Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Samuel Almog, Anita Shapira, and Jehuda Reinharz *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998); Tzvi Rabinowicz, *Hasidism in Israel: A History of the Hasidic Movement and Its Masters in the Holy Land* (Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson Inc, 2000); Yosef Salmon, *Religion and Zionism: First Encounters* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2001); and Motto Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy Confronts Modernity, Zionism, and Women's Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016) all address how Jewish orthodoxy approached political Zionism in different ways; Gresham Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006); Motto Inbari, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); and Sara Hirschhorn, *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017) all deal with the expansion of the national religious movement and the growth of settlements in the wake of the 1967 and 1973 wars.

omitted American Zionism after the formation of the State of Israel. New studies on

American Zionism focused on cultural attachments to Zionism, American political

movements and Zionism, Christian support for Zionism, and America's intervention in

the Palestinian conflicts.[29] Where these studies come up short, however, is in their

discussion of the Zionist political activism of American Jews. These works either

discuss Zionism as a cultural framework for American Jews, or they portray Jews as

third-party objects in American political movements. While Moshe and Meir

Kahane's Zionist identity was in part cultural, it was also distinctly political. Thus,

examining the Kahanas demonstrates how Zionism factored into postwar Jewish

political identity in the United States and served as an impetus for political activism by

American Jews.

This dissertation also complicates how scholars should view Zionism in

relation to postcolonialism, a theoretical approach concerned with the lasting impact

of colonization in former colonies. As Jews, Moshe and Meir Kahane possessed a

strong colonial identity that shaped the way they approached political nationalism.

Both men saw Zionism as the culmination of a decades-long decolonization effort

aimed at freeing global Jewry from statelessness, inequality, and anti-Semitism. In

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[29] For ideological attachment to Israel, see M.M. Silver, *Our Exodus: Leon Uris and the Americanization of Israel's Founding Story* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2010); Emily Alice Katz, *Bringing Zion Home: Israel in American Jewish Culture, 1948-1967* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2016) is the current standard bearer for postwar American Jewish cultural attachment to Israel; For American Political Movements and Israel, see Noam Kochavi, *Nixon and Israel: Forging a Conservative Partnership* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), Robert Wistrich, *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, the Jews, and Israel* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2012), and Sara Hirschhorn *City on a Hilltop: American Jews and the Israeli Settler Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); For Christian support of Zionism, see Richard Francis Crane, *Passion of Israel: Jacques Maritain, Catholic Conscience, and the Holocaust* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), and Shalom Goldman *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

this way, both believed that Zionism aligned with concurrent decolonization struggles around the world.

Scholarship on the nature of Zionism has largely swayed one of two directions when approaching the colonial nature of the movement. The first is to view Zionism as not conforming to any conventional model of a colonizing state. This view dominated early scholarship and teaching on Israel, with scholars emphasizing how the founders of the state of Israel abhorred contemporary European colonialism. Israeli sociologists similarly argued that the Zionist movement did not conform to any conventional model of a colonizing state. Instead, for early scholars, the relationship between Zionist ideology and its quest for land demonstrated that it was a unique movement. In his book *Zionism and Territory*, for example, Baruch Kimmerling suggested that the scarcity and high price of land available for Zionist purchase countered traditional models of colonialism as a capitalist enterprise. For Kimmerling, Zionism was not traditional European colonialism because Jewish colonization of Palestine made very little economic sense.[30]

The second, and more recent, historiographic trend is to view Zionism as a colonial movement akin to its European counterparts. Beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, a new generation of scholars arose who, following the lead of Arab and Western scholarship on the modern Middle East, made the link between Zionism and colonialism central to their scholarly endeavors. This new trend has been dominated by economic historians who have pointed to the British sponsorship of migrating

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[30] Baruch Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory: The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983).

Jews, heavy reliance upon Arab labor in Zionist plantation colonies and urban industries, and the purchase and nationalization of Arab land as indicators of the colonial nature of the Zionist project.[31] Political historians point to the expulsion of Arabs during the 1948 war as further proof of the colonial nature of Zionism, arguing that it fit the mold of previous colonial expulsions in the Americas.[32] Finally, social historians explore how Jews and Arabs have interacted in the modern Zionist state and suggest the subjugation of Arabs in Israel and Palestine denote the region's relationship to colonialism and imperialism.[33]

Focusing on the Kahana family and their Zionism allows me to explore how Jews and Zionism were both a colonizing force and a colonized population. In the recent book *Colonialism and the Jews*, Derek Penslar suggests that Zionism was historically and conceptually situated between colonial, anti-colonial, and post-colonial discourse and practice.[34] He argues that attempts to establish complete congruence or total separation between Zionism and colonialism do not fit the

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[31] For British sponsorship of migrating Jews, see Tom Segev, *One Palestine Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (New York: H.H. Holt, 1999), and Paul Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism: History of a Divorce* (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 2012); see Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) for further discussion of the impact of labor segmentation and land purchase on the creation of Israel.

[32] For discussion on the Palestinian expulsion, see Ilan Pappé *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: One World Publications, 2006), Benny Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), and Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

[33] See Ilan Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories* (Boulder, CO: One World Publications, 2017), Avi Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry: Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), Shira Robinson *Citizen Strangers: Palestinians and the Birth of Israel's Liberal Settler State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), and Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multiple Citizenship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) for further discussion of the societal relationship between Jews and Arabs in Israel and Palestine.

[34] Derek Penslar, "Is Zionism a Colonial Movement?" in Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, *Colonialism and the Jews* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017).

multitudes of Jewish experience. Zionism was not only colonizing, but it also was an anti-colonial movement and a venture in post-colonial state-building in conversation with simultaneous state-building in Africa and Asia.

This dissertation looks at the colonial identities of both men and argues that their interpretations of Zionism do not conform to one side of the colonial spectrum. Moshe Cahana was a native of Palestine who grew up under the British Mandate. He adopted Zionism in the wake of nationalist violence breaking out across Palestine. For Cahana, Zionism was an anti-colonial push designed to wrest control of Palestine away from an oppressive British empire. He drew connections between Zionism and anti-colonial movements across British imperial territories, particularly the push for Indian independence. Meir Kahane, ten years Cahana's junior and a Brooklyn native, believed violent anti-Semitism and Arab "occupation" of Israel were the colonial forces directly affecting Jews. To Kahane, decolonization meant maintaining Jewish sovereignty and eliminating potential threats of anti-Semitism. This meant ensuring a strong Jewish-centered government and the expulsion of "hostile" Arab populations.

For the Kahanas, Zionism was both a process for colonizing Palestine and the expression of Jewish national independence from Western colonial powers. Despite their identity as colonial subjects being central to their conception of Zionism, both Kahanas championed traditional colonization models. Both applauded territorial gains during the 1948 and 1967 Wars, both pushed for mass Jewish migration to Israel, and both decried Arab national movements in Palestine. This typifies the murky relationship Zionism holds with colonialism.

Examining Moshe and Meir Kahane also adds to scholarly understanding of black-Jewish relations and the transnationality in the African American civil rights movement. Both men understood civil rights struggles in the 1960s through the lens of their own transnational identities as Jews from a Middle Eastern family. Their actions in American politics were informed by the experiences of their family in Palestine and Israel as much as they were by American political developments. As a result, they cannot be understood through a purely national lens. The transnational nature of the African American civil rights movement has only come into focus in the past 30 years of scholarship. Early scholarship in civil rights focused on movements and leaders solely from a local or national perspective.[35] Gerald Horne first discussed the impact of foreign policy and international politics on black civil rights activists. His books *Black and Red* and *Communist Front*? address the ways in which black activists such communism and early Cold War politics, particularly around liberal and conservative consensuses on containment and interventionism.[36] Despite Horne's intervention in civil rights scholarship, civil rights scholars did not embrace transnational examination on a large scale until the late-1990s. Even works that addressed transnational movements, such as Communism, did so only from a national

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[35] See Robert Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1980); William Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King Jr and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: William Morrow, 1986); and Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

[36] See Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986); and Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickenson University Press, 1988).

perspective.[37] In the closing years of the 20th century, civil rights scholars such as

Mary Dudziak, Brenda Gayle Plummer, and Thomas Borstelmann began embracing

the transnationality of the movement *en masse*. These new works focused on the ways

African American activists tied their plight to American foreign policy goals during

the Cold War, and the impact of segregation on America's global image. This new

scholarship placed African American civil rights in a global perspective that works

before it sorely lacked.[38] Concurrent to this new line of scholarship was in increased

examination of the ways in which African Americans viewed themselves in relation to

global struggles for decolonization. These works in the late-1990s and early-2000s

situated black activists alongside decolonization movements in Africa and Asia, and

demonstrated that black activists viewed their own struggle for civil equality as an

anti-colonial movement.[39] The bulk of this scholarship focused on African American

engagement with decolonization movements in Africa. African American engagement

with Middle Eastern politics remained largely unexplored. It was not until Keith

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[37] Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

[38] Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

[39] See Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Feldman's book *A Shadow Over Palestine* that a historian offered a deep discussion of

African Americans engaging with Israeli and Palestinian politics.[40] Feldman's work,

however, failed to address Jewish colonial identity in relation to civil rights efforts in

the United States. The activism of Moshe and Meir Kahane fills in this gap in

scholarship by placing Israeli political developments at the center of Jewish

approaches to African American civil rights struggles in postwar America.

The Kahana story will add a new layer to the transnationality of Jewish history.

Theirs is a story of diasporic nationalism and how an Israeli consciousness translated

into American political philosophies. However, where authors like Matthew Frye

Jacobson have looked at diasporic nationalism as a one-way phenomenon manifesting

in American politics, the Kahana family's story suggests that diasporic nationalism for

Jews was more dynamic. When Moshe Cahana arrived in the United States, he

translated an Israeli political identity into the American system. This distinguished his

political activism from his contemporaries as most American Zionists were still

American, even as Israel became a fundamental part of their identity. Meir Kahane

also reshapes the ways in which we view diasporic nationalism and Jewish

transnationalism. Upon migrating to Israel in the 1970s, Kahane brought an American

political consciousness to the Knesset. This is a facet of Jewish diasporic nationalism

that largely remains unstudied. Aside from Sara Hirschhorn's recent book, no

scholarly works have examined the ways in which American migrants to Israel

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[40] Keith P. Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

translated an American identity into Israeli politics. Examining the Kahanas will add to the scholarly understanding of the saliency of Jewish nationalisms.

Transnationality is an idea that has only recently gained traction in scholarship on American Jews. As scholarship on American history has embraced transnationalism, scholars of Jewish history have increasingly analyzed transnationality of Jewish life and identity. In a 2015 review of Kahn and Mendelsohn's *Transnational Traditions*, Riv-Ellen Prell argues that "Jewish history is transnational at its core, but its American branch has been somewhat slow to embrace it."[41] This is not to say that scholarship on American Jews has never had transnational elements. The bulk of transnational scholarship on Jews centers around European Jews or European immigration to the United States.[42] These works offer insight into how their respective Jewish communities were affected by events occurring outside their geographic boundaries, as well as how Jewish culture became a transatlantic exchange between both continents.[43] However, they lack extended study of the mutual entanglements of global Jewish populations as they primarily focus on migration and the cultural exchange that accompanied it. These works also focus

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[41] Riv-Ellen Prell, "Remapping American Jewish History as Transnational," H-Net Review, August 2015.

[42] See Tobias Brinkmann, *Migration and Transnationalism: Perspectives of German Jewish History* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012), Lois Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste: Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), and Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and the Russian Jews, 1862-1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[43] See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), Hasia Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), and Tony Michels, *A Fire in their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

solely on Jewish migration from Europe, while analysis of non-European Jewish migration and identity remains absent.

Examining Moshe Cahana and Meir Kahane richly adds to several historiographies within American, Israeli, and Jewish histories. By placing Zionism at the center of American racial politics, the Kahanas challenge the ways scholars understand the transnationality of American civil rights efforts, the linkages between American liberalism and conservatism, particularly within the Jewish community, and the role Zionism plays in forming Jewish colonial identity in the 20th century. As a result, the historical and historiographic importance of these two men cannot be understated.

The Kahana Story, in Brief

This dissertation addresses the civil rights activism of Moshe and Meir Kahane and argues that while their familial attachments and similar grounding in Orthodox Judaism and Revisionist Zionism drew their political identities together, their different experiences with, and interpretations of, Jewish colonial identity ultimately thrust the two men into opposing positions on the American political spectrum. Moshe Cahana grew up under the yoke of British imperialism and developed his political identity as a colonial subject fighting for equal rights and recognition, which he applied to civil rights politics upon arriving in the American South in 1959. Meir Kahane, on the other hand, developed his political identity in postwar Brooklyn where perceived threats of anti-Semitism as an imperial force Jews needed to free themselves from

through militant self-defense. Despite this, the politics of both men continuously intertwined with one another and never existed as truly distinct ideologies.

The first chapter, "The Origins of the Kahana Family, from Nowy Sącz to Safed," focuses on the experiences of the Kahana family in Palestine. Spanning from the Kahana family's arrival in Safed in the mid-19th century to the breakup of the family in the 1930s, the opening chapter examines several important changes that faced the family. This chapter looks at the violence of the British Mandate in Palestine and discusses the formation of Jewish colonial identity in the early-20th century. It examines how the Kahana family transformed from being a religiously anti-Zionist Hasidic family in the late-19th century to a militant Zionist family by the 1940s.

Focusing on family's responses to ethnic violence, this chapter places the ideological struggles of Hasidic orthodoxy at the center of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict during the British Mandate. Instead of looking at Hasidic Jews as subjects that existed outside of the nationalist conflicts in Palestine, this chapter demonstrates that Hasidic Jews, through anti-Zionist rejection, were active participants in colonial politics. This religious anti-Zionism in the Kahana family, however, gradually declined as the violence and competing nationalisms of the British Mandate thrust unwillingly into the center of anti-colonial struggles in Palestine.

Concurrent with the family's eventual embrace of political Zionism, Moshe and Meir Kahane's respective Jewish worlds informed how both saw the anti-colonial conflict in Palestine. Moshe Cahana came of age in the heart of nationalist violence, experiencing personal loss in the Arab Revolts of 1929 and 1936. These experiences

informed Cahana's colonial identity and affected the way in which he approached

Revisionist Zionism. Growing up in the safety of Brooklyn, New York, Meir Kahane

only experienced the violence of Palestine secondhand, being taught about it through

the filter of his father and uncle, Cahana's father, who fled Palestine to escape the

violence of the Mandate. As a result, Kahane's colonial identity and interpretation of

Revisionist Zionism developed differently from his cousin.

The second chapter, "Revisionism and the Kahanas" examines the Zionist

activism of the Kahana cousins and highlights the complexity and ever-changing

nature of Revisionist Zionism. Instead of looking at Zionism as a static movement

that held the same political goals throughout, this chapter treats Zionism as a political

ideology that evolved to fit the time and physical space in which it existed. While the

central feature of Jewish nationalism prevailed through every incarnation, how Jews

interacted with the enterprise of state-building and what form an eventual Jewish

homeland took varied depending on each individual's interpretation and application of

Zionism.

Reacting to the failings of early Zionist cooperation with Great Britain, Moshe

Cahana believed Revisionist Zionism's primary goal was the decolonization of

Palestine and the wresting of political control away from British Imperial authorities.

To this end, Cahana joined the Revisionist underground movement Etzel in 1940,

where he served as an intelligence officer before working his way into a command

position in the organization. As an officer in Etzel, Cahana participated in many of the

group's high-profile actions, including the bombing of the King David Hotel in 1946,

and the Siege of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1947.

Meir Kahane, on the other hand, entered the Zionist movement as a child, a participant in the Revisionist youth organization, Betar. Ten years younger than his cousin, and living in the United States, the bulk of Kahane's activism occurred after the British evacuated Palestine in 1947. Kahane was active in Betar, took part in protests around New York City, and he helped smuggle weapons to Jewish militant groups in Palestine.

Chapter three, "Moshe Cahana, Ethical Zionism, and Civil Rights Struggles in the American South," addresses the political activism of Moshe Cahana and his application of colonial Jewish identity and Revisionist Zionism to the African American civil rights struggle in the 1960s. This examination of Moshe Cahana's political activism highlights the ways in which Zionist and Israeli politics influenced Jewish activism in Southern civil rights struggles. Being compelled to assist beleaguered African Americans in the South, Cahana drew upon his ideology of ethical Zionism, which built upon the Musar Movement's central premise that Jewish law was not an immutable and unchanging set of laws and restrictions.[44] Instead, Musar doctrine argued that Torah laws were to serve as an ethical framework for how Jews were to live their lives. This allowed the laws of the Torah to be applicable and relevant in the modern world in a way that traditional orthodoxy did not always permit. Cahana applied this ideology to Zionism, arguing that Zionist attachment should not solely be a call for Jewish statehood. Rather, Cahana argued, Zionism

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[44] I use the term "ethical Zionism" to describe Cahana's treatment of political Zionism as an ethical framework and distinguish it from other forms of political Zionism.

should be the philosophy that inspired Jews to fight for political and social equality for all citizens.

This philosophy of ethical Zionism served as Cahana's motivation to become a prominent civil rights activist in the United States. Cahana became a civil rights leader in Houston, heading the Houston Bi-racial Committee on Religion and Race and organizing the Houston Conference on Race and Religion in 1963. Cahana also participated in civil rights efforts across the American South. He joined Martin Luther King, Jr. in Albany, Georgia in 1961, led a delegation from the Rabbinical Assembly to Birmingham, Alabama, to march in the Birmingham Campaign in 1963, and joined a Houston clerical delegation to march in Selma, Alabama, in 1965.

The final chapter, "Meir Kahane, Maimonidean Zionism, and the Fight for Jewish Survival," examines the political activism of Meir Kahane in both the United States and his later life in Israel. Meir Kahane blended religious orthodoxy with colonial grief and militant nationalism to craft an aggressive interpretation of Zionism. Kahane blended his religious rigidity with Revisionist Zionism to craft an ideology of Maimonidean Zionism, which argued that Jews and Israel should interact with non-Jews following Maimonides's Law of the Kings, which privileged Jewish power and political supremacy.

The Law of the Kings argued that a Jewish nation should rule based on Torah and any non-Jews must acquiesce to Jewish dominion or face expulsion from the land. Meir Kahane adapted this to Jewish experiences in a demographically shifting Brooklyn, arguing that decentralization and civil rights efforts in the borough

threatened Jewish social position and should be fought against as if a Jewish nation was being usurped.

Building from his ideology of Maimonidean Zionism, Kahane spent the majority of the 1960s engaged in political activism. From a position at Brooklyn's *Jewish Press* newspaper, Kahane launched a crusade against school decentralization in New York public schools and the attempts by civil rights activists to ensure community control and empower black and Latino residents in Brooklyn. To further counter civil rights efforts in New York, Kahane founded the Jewish Defense League (JDL) in 1968, which championed an aggressive and often violent approach to countering minority activists. Kahane's JDL partook in militant protests that sought to protect New York Jews from perceived anti-Semitic threats from local left-leaning activists in the late-1960s and early-1970s.

Finally, the epilogue examines the ways in which both Kahanas used their respective Zionist ideologies to champion the decolonization of Jewish communities around the world in the 1970s. While the majority of this dissertation addresses the ways in which Moshe Cahana and Meir Kahana diverged from one another, the epilogue brings them back together as they similarly pushed for Jewish rights in the Soviet Union and Syria, and championed Israeli sovereignty during the Arab-Israeli wars in the 1960s and 1970s. Despite their various ideological differences, the epilogue examines the ways in which their divergent ideologies reached the similar positions in Israeli foreign policy and Jewish diaspora politics.

1 – The Origins of the Kahana Family, from Nowy Sącz to Safed

In 1940, Mordechai Kahana sat at the Shabbat dinner table in Howard Beach, Brooklyn with his brother Charles and recounted stories about "continuing Arab cruelty" and "Jewish heroism" to his eight-year-old nephew Meir. Mordechai solely blamed the Arab population of Palestine for what he saw as a concerted effort to destroy the Jewish presence in the region. By the 1940s, still reeling from the loss of his wife, daughter, and mother-in-law in a 1938 attack on a taxicab along the Acre-Safed highway, Mordechai was transfixed by continuing interethnic violence and increasingly argued that the only way to counter Arab violence was through equally aggressive "counter-terror." Though Mordechai was a native Palestinian, by the end of the 1930s, he permanently left the region, marking signaling a drastic shift in Kahana politics, and the largest disruption in the family since they arrived in Palestine in the late-19th century.

The Kahana family came to Palestine as part of a pre-Zionist Hasidic religious migration in the 1870s. As members of the Sanz Hasidic Dynasty, the family migrated to Safed not because of an attachment to Jewish nationalism or as an escape from European anti-Semitism, but rather because of the city's importance to Jewish mysticism and Talmudic literature. While in Palestine, the family actively eschewed Zionist politics and instead placed ideological emphasis on Torah study and religious practice. As Jewish communities around them grew in size and Safed became a center of Zionist immigration, the Sanz Hasidic community became increasingly entrenched in religious rejectionism, and older members of the Kahana family barred political activism in their family.

Interethnic violence in the British Mandate for Palestine quickly eroded the Kahanas' rejection of Zionism and within a generation the Kahanas would be a prominent family within the Zionist struggle for statehood. The deaths within the extended Kahana family in 1938 served as a flashpoint for the family and the city of Safed. Though it was a small part of a wider wave of violence between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, previous incidents lacked the direct impact on Safed's Hasidic community. The attack on the taxicab on the Acre-Safed highway not only killed eight Kahana family members, it ripped the family apart. It created political divisions, prompted migration to Europe and the United States, and thrust younger generations into the throes of anti-colonial struggles in the British Mandate.

The Kahana's experiences under the British Mandate are representative of the struggles of Haredi Jews in early-20th century Palestine. Haredim, or ultra-Orthodox Jews characterized by a strict adherence to Jewish law and practice, were not immune from the interethnic violence, despite their wishes to abstain from it. This forced Jews to adopt ways to combat or avoid rising violence, which in the case of the Kahana family, resulted in the adoption of militant Zionism. Hasidism's contribution to the growth of Zionism in Palestine under the British mandate is often overlooked. Previous works primarily address Orthodox embrace of Zionism in static terms, best exemplified by Yosef Salmon's dichotomous view of Haredim and neo-Haredim. Haredim, he argues, rejected Zionism in every sense and eventually became its bitterest opponents. Neo-Haredim, however, fully embraced Zionism and eventually became Religious Zionism's strongest proponents. Salmon argues that this split came from a disagreement over who had the right to rebuild a Jewish state, as neo-Haredim

believed Jews should build a state to prepare for the coming of a Messiah, and

Haredim believed only the Messiah could build a Jewish state.[1] According to

Salmon's interpretation, the split only diminished later, after the destruction of the

Holocaust, the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and the territorial gains in 1967

that spurred a sharp rise in Religious Zionism.[2] Absent from these interpretations,

however, are the Haredi Jews in Mandate Palestine who, caught in the middle of the

political struggles in the region, had to navigate a life between political Zionism and

rejectionist religious Judaism, and ultimately decide between the two. Because of this

dichotomous approach, scholars have placed Haredi Jews outside the analytical frame

examining the development of Israel.

The struggles of the Kahana family in Palestine challenge Salmon's dichotomy

and exemplifies the ways in which Haredi Jews confronted Zionism in the twentieth

century. The Kahanas demonstrate that the ideological line between Haredim and

neo-Haredim was not firm and the distinctions between the two were seldom static.

As an anti-Zionist Hasidic family, the Kahanas rejected all aspects of statecraft,

despite a Jewish colony and state developing around them. Despite the family's

rejectionist politics, the violent ethno-political conflict that accompanied the

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[1] Yosef Salmon, "Zionism and Anti-Zionism in Traditional Judaism in Eastern Europe," in Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, ed. *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), p. 26-27; See also, Motti Inbari, *Jewish Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy Confront Modernity, Zionism, and Women's Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Tzvi Rabinowicz, *Hasidism in Israel* (Jerusalem: Jason Aronson Inc., 2000); Aviezer Ravitsky, "Munkacs and Jerusalem: Ultra-Orthodox Opposition to Zionism and Agudaism" in Almog, Shmuel, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, ed. *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), p. 67-92; Raphael Mahler, *Hasidism and the Jewish Enlightenment: Their Confrontation in Galicia and Poland in the First half of the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985); and Yakov Rabkin, *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism* (London: Fernwood Publishing, 2006).
[2] Religious Zionists believed that the ease of victory by Israel signified God's providence over the state.

development of Palestine eventually thrust them into the center Zionist politics. As their entanglement within the conflict became too deep for family members to successfully navigate both Haredi rejectionism and everyday life in the British Mandate of Palestine, members of the Kahana family were eventually forced to choose between the two, with members deciding to either join the Zionist struggle or leave Palestine.

Examining the Kahana family in this way demonstrates how Haredi Jews in early-20th century Palestine were political actors. Instead of treating Haredim as passive figures in the development of Palestine and Israel, the Kahanas show that Haredi Jews often directly affected the course of Jewish history in Palestine through their political choices. Even in their religious rejection of secular politics, the Kahana family actively engaged in Zionist politics of the early-20th century, as their rejection was in itself, a political stance. Focusing on the Kahana family therefore reconceptualizes how Haredi Jews engaged with Jewish statecraft in Palestine, placing them in the center of Zionist politics instead of on the periphery.

Understanding the Kahana family's struggles under the British mandate is important as it is these struggles that informed the way Moshe Cahana and Meir Kahane addressed interethnic politics throughout their lives. The violence of the Mandate deeply affected both of them and both would draw upon the trauma of the violence to justify their approaches to increasing racial tensions in the United States during the 1960s, with Moshe Cahana seeking to avoid anti-colonial violence in the United States and Meir Kahane believing violence to be the Jew's only means of survival.

Origins in Nowy Sącz

Long before their arrival in Palestine in the late-19th century, the Kahanas emerged as

a large Orthodox family in Eastern Europe. The family's story begins in the Galician

city of Nowy Sącz, which originated as a town in 1292, and saw initial Jewish

settlement beginning in the mid-17th century. Throughout its history, the Jews of

Nowy Sącz experienced Cossack rioting, pogroms, and blood libels aimed at the

Jewish community, as Austrians, Hungarians, Poles, and Russians all vied for

territorial control of Galicia. Despite these struggles, a Jewish community flourished

in Nowy Sącz, eventually constituting nearly 50 percent of the city's population.[3]

Jewish life in Nowy Sącz centered around the Hasidic rabbi Chaim

Halberstam, who arrived in Nowy Sącz in 1830 when he was taken on as a *moreh*

tzedek dayan, an auxiliary rabbi whose job was to assist the town's Rav, or chief rabbi.

By Halberstam's arrival in 1830, Nowy Sącz's Rav was in his 57th year as the town's

rabbi. Within the year, Halberstam became the Rav, a position he held until his death

in 1876. During Halberstam's tenure, Nowy Sącz became a vibrant center of

Hasidism, attracting tens of thousands of followers.[4]

Hasidic Judaism arose in eighteenth century Ukraine, simultaneous to

revivalist movements across the world, including the First Great Awakening in British

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[3] Blood libels are an anti-Semitic canard that argues that Jews require Christian blood in religious sacraments and therefore pose an existential risk to the larger society of which they are a part. Traditionally, this canard has led to routine attacks on European Jewish communities, particularly around Christian holidays such as Christmas or Easter; Shlomo Zalman Lehrer and Leizer Strassman, *The Vanished City of Tsanz* (Jerusalem: Targum Press, 1994), 43-44.
[4] Lehrer and Strassman, *The Vanished City of Tsanz*, 21-30.

America and Wahhabism in Arabia, as a response to a religious establishment that early Hasidic leaders decried as stale and archaic. This, they argued, caused Jews in the eighteenth century to gravitate toward secularist movements and assimilation. Hasidism was a means for spiritual revival stressing continual devotion to religious practice and a rejection of and seclusion from secular society. Following the popularization of Kabbalah mysticism in late-17th century Europe, Orthodox rabbis began adopting Kabbalistic ideologies into everyday Judaic practice.[5] Chief amongst these rabbis was Israel ben Eliezer, also known as the Baal Shem Tov, who emphasized the need for Kabbalistic rituals. Ben Eliezer emphasized the omnipresence of God in the material world, making even routine physical acts, such as eating, of religious significance. Because of this, he promoted continual communion with the divine world through prayer and study and stressed a rigorous religious life to achieve this end.[6] The Baal Shem Tov quickly became a well-recognized and popular rabbi in the Podolia region of Ukraine.

As his followers grew in number, Israel ben Eliezer adopted the term Hasidim, or pious, to describe the movement. Ben Eliezer's followers eventually spread across Europe establishing numerous institutional centers of Hasidism, each having unique interpretations of ben Eliezer's teachings. These new institutions, also referred to as courts or dynasties, served as branches off ben Eliezer's organizational core,

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[5]Kabbalah is a school of thought in Judaism that seeks to explain the relationship between God, the unchanging, eternal, and mysterious infinite universe ("Ein Sof"), and the mortal and finite universe.
[6] Immanuel Etkes, *The Besht: Magician, Mystic and Leader* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004).

eventually bringing hundreds of thousands of European Jews under the banner of Hasidism by the dawn of the twentieth century.

The Kahana family joined the Hasidic movement when David Magid Hakohen, the chief rabbi of Radomyśl Wielki in southeast Poland and patriarch of the Kahana family, studied under Jacob Isaac Horowitz, the Seer of Lublin, who was the most influential Hasidic leader in Poland at the dawn of the nineteenth century. This Hasidic tradition carried on with Magin Hakohen's son, Levy Itzchak, who adopted the surname Kahana and became chief rabbi of Nowy Wiśnicz. Levy's eldest son, Baruch David, moved to Nowy Saçz and joined Chaim Halberstam's Hasidic dynasty. It was Baruch David Kahana's devotion to Halberstam that would eventually bring the Kahana family to Palestine.[7]

Hasidism was often antithetical to mainstream Jewish movements in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries. When the Haskalah, or Jewish enlightenment, spread across Europe in the 19th century, Hasidic leaders perceived it as a dire threat to the future of Hasidism. As a Jewish offshoot of the larger Enlightenment, the Haskalah stressed rationalism, liberalism, and freedom of thought and inquiry. Proponents of the Haskalah sought communal, educational, and cultural reforms in both religious and secular institutions. This modernization of the Jewish community allowed Jews an opportunity to embrace a secular political identity for the first time and eventually gave rise to secular Jewish political movements such as Zionism.

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[7] "Kahana Genealogy and Family History," Geni.com, November 20, 2018 [https://www.geni.com/family-tree/index/6000000003683488088] accessed February 24, 2020; The Kahana family tree was compiled by Nachman Kahane, Meir's brother, and is based primarily off of familial records rather than government documents. However, many details align with limited government documents, denoting the credibility of the genealogical findings.

Zionism arose in Europe as a response to continued anti-Semitism in Europe. Theodor Herzl, considered the father of modern Zionism, argued that high-profile anti-Semitic incidents like the Dreyfus affair, in which a French Jew was falsely convicted of espionage, stemmed from Europeans' suspicions of Jewish statelessness. Many Europeans considered Jews to be a distinct and separate national group residing their borders, which manifested in fears of Jewish espionage or subterfuge, as it had in the Dreyfus affair. Herzl argued that the only means of combatting this impulse of non-Jewish Europeans was the creation of a national home for the Jewish people. While Jews possessed a distinct religious tradition, Herzl and most early Zionist leaders did not conceive of their enterprise as a religious endeavor. Instead, they saw it as a secular state-building project modeled after previous European colonizations.[8]

Since political Zionism arose in Europe as a secular movement, Orthodox leaders voiced strong objection to the movement. Leaders feared that the secular nationalism of Zionism would replace the Jewish faith and the observance of religion. They also viewed Jews reconstituting Jewish rule in *Eretz Israel* before the arrival of the Messiah as forbidden.[9] While these early rabbis often supported Jewish settlement in Palestine, they did so with no intention of conquering Palestine from the Ottoman Turks, and many leaders argued that only strictly observant Jews should migrate.

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[8] See Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State [Der Judenstaat]* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988).

[9] Eretz Israel is the traditional Jewish name for the region in the Southern Levant that encompassed the Davidic Kingdom of Israel, which Jewish religious belief and tradition holds as a God-given inheritance of the Jewish people. Definitions of the geographical range of Eretz Israel vary throughout the Hebrew Bible, and often did not match historical borders of ancient Jewish kingdoms. Nonetheless, the concept of Eretz Israel plays a central role in Jewish religion as a symbol for Messianic redemption.

The Hasidim were particularly vociferous in their opposition to Zionism and often protested the Zionists. They even went as far as banning the Star of David, originally a religious symbol appearing only in synagogues, but had now become "defiled" by the Zionists. In 1889, Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveichik had proclaimed early Zionist initiatives as resembling a false messianic sect. His son Rabbi Hayyim Soloveichik further warned: "The people of Israel should take care not to join a venture that threatens their souls, to destroy religion, and is a stumbling block to the House of Israel."[10] When the Zionists in Brisk claimed that Zionism would stem the tide of Jewish assimilation, Soloveichik felt that what mattered most for Judaism was the quality, not the quantity.[11]

Orthodox condemnations of political Zionism continued into the twentieth century. In 1903, Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn published *Kuntres Uma'ayan*, which contained a strong polemic against Zionism.[12] He opposed the Religious Zionist movement, and was deeply concerned that secular nationalism would replace Judaism as the foundation of Jewish identity.[13]

Within Palestine itself, the Orthodox Jews were alarmed by the influx of non-religious Jews who wished to establish a secular state.[14] Rabbi Joseph Hayyim Sonnenfeld, the chief rabbi of the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem, often referred

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[10] Adam Z. Newton, *The Fence and the Neighbor: Emmanuel Levinas, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and Israel Among the Nations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 233.
[11] Yosef Salmon, *Religion and Zionism – First Encounters* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2002), 349.
[12] Sholom Dovber Schneersohn was a prominent rabbi within the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, one of the world's largest Hasidic groups.
[13] Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 272–73.
[14] Yakov M. Rabkin, *A Threat from Within: A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism* (Chicago, IL: Zed Books, 2006), 39.

to the Zionists as "evil men and ruffians" and claimed that "Hell had entered the Land of Israel with Herzl." Sonnenfeld did not want the Orthodox Jewish community to become subject to secular Zionist authority.[15] The spokesman for the anti-Zionist Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem, Dr Jacob Israël de Haan, endeavored to form an alliance with the Arab nationalist leadership and hoped to reach an agreement that would allow unrestricted Jewish settlement in Arab lands in return for the relinquishment of Jewish political aspirations. In June 1924, the Haganah paramilitary organization assassinated de Haan after he conveyed his proposals to Hashemite leader Emir Hussein bin Ali and his sons, Faisal and Abdullah.[16]

Throughout the Sanz Hasidic movement's development in the early centuries, Chaim Halberstam and his followers remained committed to political anti-Zionism. For Sanz Hasids, the secularism of Zionism represented a heresy and an affront to messianic prophecies. As devoted Sanzer Hasids, the Kahana family rejected the secularism of political Zionism for generations, instead placing a premium on religious devotion and study.[17] Despite these qualms with growing political Zionism, in the late-19th century, a number of Sanzer migrants left Europe for Palestine, seeking further religious revival in lands representing great biblical significance. Among these would be the earliest members of the Kahana family to arrive in northern Palestine.

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[15] Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2003), 410.

[16] Marshall Berger and Ora Ahimeir, *Jerusalem: A City and Its Future* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 238.

[17] While 'Sanz' is the name of the Hasidic dynasty, 'Sanzer' is the adjective for things relating to the Sanz dynasty such as rabbis, institutions, and members of the community.

Sanz Migration to Safed

Hasidic anti-Zionism did not preclude various groups from migrating to Palestine.

Between the 18th and 19th centuries, several Orthodox groups left Europe for Palestine,

each seeking a closer communion with religious texts and devotion. Chaim

Halberstam's son, Yechezkel, brought the possibility of migration to Palestine to his

followers in the Sanz Hasidic Dynasty. Yechezkel Halberstam became inspired to

travel to Palestine after spending ten years living in the household of Moshe

Teitelbaum in Ujhely, Hungary. Teitelbaum believed the coming of the Jewish

messiah was imminent, and before the end of his lifetime, Jews would reclaim Eretz

Israel. So great was this belief that Teitelbaum refused to buy a house, arguing "Why

should I have a new house here in *Chutz L'Aretz*? For our righteous Messiah is

coming quickly and there I shall have a house to live in. Why then should I waste

Jewish money here?"[18] Teitelbaum spent the bulk of his time, money, and efforts

supporting Jewish settlement in Palestine. Halberstam learned a great deal from his

time living in Teitelbaum's household. Foremost amongst this was the need to

support Jewish pilgrimage and settlement in Palestine.

Safed, a Talmudic-era city in northern Palestine, experienced a series of

plagues and earthquakes in the 18th century, which leveled the population, compelling

many to emigrate to Damascus and Jerusalem. Despite Safed barely maintaining a

Jewish population by the 18th century, with only seven Jewish families living in the

city in 1770, city demographics changed during the late-18th and 19th centuries as

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[18] *Chutz L'Aretz* is a Hebrew term for the diaspora, literally: 'outside the land'; Yitzchak Bromberg, *HaAdmurim leBais Sanz* (Jerusalem: Mesorah Publications, 1986), 264.

Russian Jews, fleeing persecution, arrived beginning in the 1780s. Rabbis Lob

Santower and Uriah of Vilna brought large numbers of Jews from Volhynia, Podolia,

and Ukraine. Safed struggled to keep a stable population as an 1812 plague killed

four-fifths of the Jewish population, an earthquake in 1837 killed 2,158 Jews, over

half the existing population, and another plague in 1848 again ravaged the population.

These natural disasters brought the overall population under 3,000 and the Jewish

population to roughly 1,000.[19] In response to these tragedies, Teitelbaum left to assist

in rebuilding efforts and Halberstam took up his work in charity.

Safed experienced rebirth in the late-19th century as migrants from Persia,

Morocco, and Algeria flocked to the city. This period also saw an unprecedented

number of Hasidic pilgrims arrive in the city to study the Kabbalist mysticism

associated with Safed. A census in 1887 placed the city's population at 24,615

residents, of which 13,250 were Jews.[20] The newly immigrating Hasidic Jews

consistently flirted with starvation, however, as only a small minority attempted to

pursue a skilled craft in Palestine. These immigrant Jews instead devoted their time to

pious exercises, living on subventions sent to them by their families in Europe and on

funds known as halukah. The halukah was collected from Jews remaining in Europe

and distributed to those households whose head devoted his time to full-time study

and prayer. Regional corporate bodies, *kollelim* (plural of *kollel*), distributed funds

based on Jews' geographic place of origin, granting them a large amount of power

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[19] Arnold Blumberg, *Zion Before Zionism, 1838-1880* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 8.

[20] G. Schumacher, "Population list of the Liwa of Akka," *Quarterly statement - Palestine Exploration Fund* 20 (1888): 188.

over Safed's Jewish community and causing the emergence of a strong Ashkenazi

rabbinate in a city that had previously been distinctly Sephardic.[21]

Yechezkel Halberstam first visited Safed in 1869. He fell in love with the

region, believing Jewish migration and religious development in Palestine to be the

premier mitzvah, or good deed, of his era. To this end, Halberstam took control of the

Galician Kollel in Safed. As a Kollel head, Halberstam worked hard to ensure Jews in

Palestine would not be destitute and could successfully devote their lives to religious

study. Unlike many kollelim at the time, Halberstam refused to privilege some Jews

in Safed over others and refused to use his power for his own benefit, causing the

Galician Jews to largely be economic equals and preventing any family from being

uniquely destitute, which he hoped would attract more immigrants to Palestine.[22]

Over the next few decades, Halberstam led several groups of Hasidic migrants to

Safed and founded the Sanzer Kloyz, a Hasidic center for advanced religious

scholarship.[23] Halberstam spent the rest of his life traversing between Safed and

Lithuania, before eventually passing in 1898, from where Halberstam's son Moishe

continued his work.

The Kahana family arrived in Palestine in 1873, following Yechezkel

Halberstam's establishment of a Sanzer community in Safed. Baruch David Kahana

was the earliest member of the family to migrate to the region, arriving with his wife

Rivka and their four-year-old son Nachman. Kahana was a leader in the new Sanz

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[21] Blumberg, *Zion Before Zionism*, 30-31.
[22] Bromberg, *HaAdmurim leBais Sanz,* 268-269.
[23] The Yiddish term *kloyz* (pl., *kloyzn*) derives from the Latin claustrum or clausum, which refers to a building or closed complex of structures connected to a monastery and first appeared in Ashkenazic culture in the 16th century.

community in Safed, helping build the Sanz community's synagogue and dining hall shortly after arriving. He spent most of his life travelling back and forth between Nowy Saçz and Safed collecting money for halukah and helping Jews migrate to the Palestinian city. Kahana also wrote two books concerning the laws, customs, and holiness of Eretz Israel, *Chibat Ha'aretz* and *Birkat Ha'aretz*.[24] In *Chibat Ha'aretz*, Kahana expressed the importance of observant Jews returning to Eretz Israel. By returning, Kahana believed, Jews could end the European diaspora and bring about the messianic redemption promised in the Hebrew bible, putting an end to Jewish life outside of the Land of Israel.[25] Though he called for widespread migration to Palestine, Kahana's motives were apolitical, as he mentioned nothing of state-building or the existing Arab population.[26]

While there had been Jews migrating in and out of Safed over the city's 800-year history, the arrival of large numbers of European immigrants marked a change in relations between Arabs and Jews in northern Palestine. Previous immigrants to the city were either Sephardic, Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal in the 15th century that settled in the Middle East and North Africa, or Mizrahi, Jews who remained in the Middle East in the wake of ancient expulsions.[27] The culture of early migrants varied little from that of their Arab neighbors and thus precipitated relatively little social

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[24] *Chibat Ha'aretz* translates to *Love of the Land* and *Birkat Ha'aretz* translates to *Blessing of the Land.*
[25] Though Kahana does not overtly emphasize a solely European migration, the Hasidic life and struggles he discusses are unique to European Jewry at the time.
[26] Baruch David Kahana, *Chibat Ha'aretz* (Jerusalem: Goldenberg Brothers, 1897).
[27] Mizrahi or *Edot HaMizrach*, translated as 'Communities of the East,' is a term that only came into use since the 1950s as Jews from the Middle East and North Africa arrived in Israel in large numbers. It is a Hebraization to replace the previous demonym *'Yahud'*, which is the Arabic term for Jew. While many scholars, such as Yehouda Shenhav, argue that it represents an othering of Jews from Arab countries, the Hebraization also marks a decolonization and assertion of a shared Jewish linguistic identity.

change or potential for conflict. However, as Jewish immigrants from Europe arrived in Palestine and strengthened bonds between local communities and European institutions, local Arab populations became increasingly distasteful of new immigrants. As a result, ethnic tensions arose in northern Palestine, even before the rise of competing nationalisms in the 20th century.[28]

Hoping to build new institutions in the region and develop a Jewish imprint on the region, Baruch David's son Nachman attempted several businesses in northern Palestine. The first of these was a prayer shawl factory in Safed, which sought to build upon the long history of textiles in the city. This business, however, encountered several financial setbacks. The largest of these was Nachman's hiring of a traveler to purchase wool for Nachman from Damascus that resulted in the traveler fleeing with the entire investment, which forced Kahana to shut down the factory shortly thereafter. Following the factory closure, Kahana leased an orchard in Kfar Hittim, near Tiberias in the North. The orchard grew etrogim, a Levantine citrus, which Kahana then brought to the port at Jaffa to ship to Poland and Russia.[29]

Following the purchase of land in Kfar Hittim by the Jewish National Fund, the area became a point of contention between Jews and Arabs who both claimed ownership of the citrus groves. This dispute put Kahana's business in a precarious position and resulted in frequent theft of fruit by Arab residents. Tensions came to a

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[28] There is debate over when Arab nationalism arose in Palestine. Traditionally, it was seen as arising in response to the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the rise of Zionism. However, recent scholars have suggested that nationalism arose as early as the late-Ottoman period and Young Turk reforms in the late-19th and early-20th centuries; Menachem Klein, *Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Hebron* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[29] The etrog is an ancient citron used by Jews during the week-long holiday of Sukkot and harvested continuously since at least the Second Temple period (516 BCE to 70 CE).

head in 1893, when one of the orchard's watchmen killed someone attempting to steal fruit. When the watchman discovered he had killed the head of a nearby Arab village, he panicked and dragged the body to where Kahana had fallen asleep in the grove. Kahana awoke to Arab villagers surrounding him, believing him to have killed their village head. They beat Kahana severely before handing him over to Turkish police for arrest, where he was beaten again. Kahana remained imprisoned until his family was finally able to compel the local Austrian Counsel to act on his behalf and convince Turkish authorities to release him.[30]

Though Kahana was not a political Zionist, this incident is indicative of rising ethnic tensions in the region. As Jewish populations increased in the mid- to late-19th century, competition over land and labor markets increased as well. Newly arriving Jewish immigrants typically acquired land through purchase by Jewish philanthropists and foundations and they switched agricultural ventures from a plantation form that depended on hired Arab labor to a self-employment form which privileged collective and cooperative systems of labor. This replaced Arab land tenancy with Jewish land ownership, displacing Arab residents who had worked the land for generations prior. This established a separate Jewish economy in Palestine that laid the groundwork for an eventual separate state. Nachman Kahana may not have been a political Zionist,

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[30] European countries often established consuls at major trading outposts such as Haifa and Jerusalem to act as ambassadors, exercising plenipotentiary powers. They spoke on behalf of the trading interests of the country they represented and represented the interests of their citizenry in the region. As an Austrian citizen, Baruch David Kahana pushed for the Austrian government to intercede on Nachman's behalf; Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, His Life and Thought Volume One: 1932-1975* (Jerusalem: Institute for the Publication of the Writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, 2008), 3-4.

but his purchase of the citrus grove in Kfar Hittim bolstered the Zionist project of colonization and state-building, putting him in conflict with local Arab populations.[31]

In 1884, Nachman Kahana married Pessia Faige, the daughter of Sanzer rabbi Moshe Yehuda Tzvi Yavetz-Miller. The two of them eventually had eight children, five of which were boys. The second oldest of the boys was Mordechai, Moshe Cahana's father, and the youngest was Yechezkel Shraga, Meir Kahane's father. Mordechai Kahana spent most of his life traveling Europe collecting halukah for the Sanz community in Safed. He was a pious and apolitical Sanzer rabbi who desired, above all else, a strong attachment to the Hasidic teachings of the Halberstams for himself and his family. He eventually married Tzipporah Barol and had six children.

Yechezkel Shraga, the youngest of Nachman Kahana's sons, was born in Safed in 1905. He lived here until the First World War broke out in the mid-1910s. As the British army advanced on retreating Ottoman forces, Turkish soldiers destroyed much of northern Palestine, including several prominent Jewish institutions and Talmudic academies. This strife prompted Nachman Kahana to leave Palestine with his younger children, including Yechezkel Shraga who was 13 years of age, and migrate to Oświęcim, Poland, where they could continue religious studies at a Polish yeshiva.[32] Following his studies, Yechezkel Shraga moved to the United States, where his older brothers Chaim and Levi Yitzchak moved years earlier. Upon arriving in New York in 1925, Kahana adopted the name Charles and became the rabbi of Congregation

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[31] For more on late-19th century conflicts over land and labor, see Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
[32] The town of Oświęcim became more famous in subsequent decades under its German name, Auschwitz.

Anshe Sholom in Brooklyn.[33] While in the United States, Charles Kahane diverted

from the rest of the Kahana family. He abandoned Hasidism and became a rabbi in

what eventually became Modern Orthodoxy; he was active in American politics,

leading protests against American inaction during the Holocaust; and he was a staunch

and active Zionist.[34]

By the end of World War I, the Kahana family was increasingly split between

Palestine and the United States. Nachman and three of his children left Palestine as

nationalist politics arose, choosing instead to remain in the Diaspora rather than

navigate increasing nationalism in Palestine. The Kahana family members who

remained in Palestine increasingly became embroiled in the nationalist politics of the

region and found themselves thrust into the center of interwar ethnic conflict resulting

from the state-building occurring around them.

Moshe Cahana's Early Life

Moshe Cahana's early life in Palestine shaped his eventual embrace of Jewish

nationalism and political Zionism. He grew up in the chaos of British Palestine and

simultaneous decolonization movements arising in the wake of the fall of the Ottoman

Empire. The ethnic violence that accompanied this conflict shaped Cahana's colonial,

religious, and political identities, resulting in a sharp ideological contrast from the

generations that came before him and the embrace of political nationalism.

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[33] When he adopted the name Charles, he also began spelling his last name "Kahane" the first in his family to do so.

[34] Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane, His Life and Thought*, 4-8.

Moshe Cahana was born to Mordechai and Tzipporah Kahana in 1922 in Safed. Recognized as a bright child, Cahana began religious study at a young age. He attended a religious school and additionally studied Torah additionally with his father after classes. By the age of eleven, Cahana paced out of his classes and needed advanced study. Though he was quite young, Cahana began yeshiva study in 1933. Given his advanced study, Safed offered few options for Cahana to continue his studies and he had to enroll in a non-Hasidic yeshiva. His parents initially opposed this, as they feared this could cause him to drift away from Hasidism however, they also wanted to ensure he continued Torah studies. This time proved important in Cahana's life as the school devoted an hour each day to the study of the Musar Movement.[35]

The Musar Movement arose in the 19th century as an alternative means for interpreting Jewish law and texts. The term 'musar' came from the biblical book of Proverbs and meant moral conduct, instruction, or discipline. The movement arose during the height of the Haskalah and attempted to correct what was seen as the vital flaw in the practice of traditional Jews that allowed Haskalah reforms to flourish: the notion that religious practice was predominantly habit and convention rather than spiritual attachment. That religious devotion had become mundane, or unspiritual, caused secular maskalim, adherents to Haskalah reform ideologies, to question the necessity of religion in modern Jewish life, and many religious maskalim abandoned strict adherence to Jewish law.[36]

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[35] Moshe Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories*, interview by Michael Cahana, 2000.
[36] Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar movement: Seeking the Torah of Truth* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2010) .

Musar offered an alternative way of addressing Jewish law in the hopes of reigniting Jewish spiritual attachment to religious practice. Instead of focusing solely on Torahic and Talmudic law, Musar sought to offer a more philosophical approach to Judaism and understand the raison d'etre of creation, why life was brief and full of problems. Through this, the Musar Movement's founder Israel Salanter sought a transformation of human nature, urging an all-out war against the yetzer ha'ra, or evil inclination, that resided in human hearts. As a result, Musar focused less on the text of Jewish law and more on the meaning and reasoning behind the law. This allowed Musar proponents to apply ethical standards and practices to a myriad of situations a strict textual interpretation would otherwise disallow.[37]

Musar conflicted with the approach of the Haredi leaders of Lithuania who stressed that the intellectual study of Talmud was paramount in Judaism. Salanter believed that the rigidity with which they approached Torahic and Talmudic law caused them to lack moral virtue and that even the greatest Torah scholars were guilty of grave moral transgressions. This caused Salanter and the Musar Movement to fall out of favor with Hasidic leaders who believed it to be degrading Judaism in the same way as they believed Haskalim reformers threatened Judaism.[38]

Moshe Cahana's study of Musar worried his parents. Salanter's movement was one born from the Mitnaggedim, Haredi Orthodox Jews who mounted the

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[37] Geoffrey Claussen, *Sharing the Burden: Rabbi Simhah Zissel Ziv and the Path of Musar* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013), 4-5; for more on the Musar Movement, see Dov Katz, *The Musar Movement: Its History, Leading Personalities and Doctrines* (Tel Aviv: Orly Press, 1975), Hillel Goldberg, *The Fire Within: The Living Heritage of the Musar Movement* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1987), Ira Stone, *A Responsible Life: The Spiritual Path of Mussar* (New York: Aviv Press, 2006), Chaim Zaichyk, *Sparks of Mussar: A Treasury of the Words and Deeds of the Mussar Greats* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 2014).
[38] Claussen, *Sharing the Burden*, 5-6.

strongest opposition to Hasidism. In the view of the Mitnaggedim, Hasidism was a

deviant and heretical sect, which was to be uprooted by any means available.

Twentieth-century Mitnaggedim believed Hasidism to be a false messianic sect akin to

those prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Salanter's teacher, Yosef

Zundel of Salant, was one of the leading Mitnaggedic voices in the 19th century, and

Salanter himself became a prominent opponent to Hasidism in his lifetime. This was

not lost on Cahana's parents who feared that Cahana's growing attachment to Musar

could cause him to turn his back on his Hasidic upbringing.[39]

Within two years, Cahana again outpaced his studies at the yeshiva in Safed

and was in search of a yeshiva that offered him an academic challenge. Since such a

yeshiva did not exist in Safed, Cahana enrolled in a yeshiva in Petah Tikvah. This

decision also worried his parents, who initially refused his request to enroll. In the

1930s, Petah Tikvah was one of the larger Jewish settlements in Palestine, boasting a

population of over 7,000, nearly five percent of the pre-state Jewish population.[40]

Situated 10 kilometers from the Zionist capitols of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, Petah Tikvah's

character was far more political than religious. Petah Tikvah was a predominantly

secular society by the time Cahana arrived at the age of 14. The city had only a slight

Haredi presence, and lacked a Hasidic community altogether. This worried Cahana's

parents, who initially refused his request to begin study in Petah Tikvah. To offset

their concerns, Cahana agreed that he would travel to his uncle's house in Tel Aviv

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[39] Menachem Glen, *Israel Salanter, Religious-Ethical Thinker: The Story of a Religious-Ethical Current in Nineteenth Century Judaism*, (Brooklyn, NY: Yashar Books, 2005).
[40] E. Mills, *Census of Palestine 1931, Population of Villages, Towns, and Administrative Areas* (Jerusalem: Goldberg Press, 1932).

before each Shabbat retain a connection to Hasidism. Cahana obliged and every week

he traveled to Tel Aviv, ensuring at least a slight connection to his Hasidic

upbringing.[41]

As he had prior, Cahana outperformed the pace of his studies at his new

yeshiva. Due to his accelerated learning curve, Cahana's teachers urged him to

embark on added one-on-one religious study with the local Rosh Yeshiva Avraham

Yeshaya Karelitz.[42] Often referred to by the name of his magnum opus *Chazon Ish*,

was a well-known Haredi scholar from Belorussia. Though he held no official

position beyond Rosh Yeshiva, Karelitz was a leading authority on many issues

relating to Talmudic law and Jewish life. Karelitz spent most of his early life in

solitary study in Europe before being convinced by Abraham Kook, the Chief Rabbi

for the Ashkenazi community in Palestine, to move to Bnei Brak in 1933. Upon

moving to Palestine, Karelitz saw thousands of visitors seeking his counsel on all

matters related to religious life.[43]

Despite moving to Palestine at the urging of Abraham Kook, one of the fathers

of religious Zionism, Avraham Karelitz was staunchly anti-Zionist. Throughout his

life he decried Jewish nationalism and went as far as suggesting that the Holocaust

occurred as divine retribution for the rise of secular nationalism in Eretz Israel.[44]

Before arriving in Palestine, Karelitz routinely clashed with Mizrachi, one of the

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[41] Cahana, *Saba Moshe.*

[42] Rosh Yeshiva is the term given to the leader of a yeshiva and is typically the most learned scholar in a city or region.

[43] Shimon Finkelman, *The Chazon Ish: The Life and Ideals of Rabbi Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz* (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 2002).

[44] Amnon Rubinstein, *From Herzl to Rabin: The Changing Image of Zionism* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000), 184.

world's largest religious Zionist organizations. These clashes came to a head in 1929 when Karelitz lobbied to have Mizrachi members barred from serving on the Council of Torah Sages, one of Haredi Judaism's governing bodies. As religious Zionism gained a foothold after the creation of Israel, Karelitz declined participation in all religious and political movements related to Jewish nationalism. Though it was Abraham Kook who convinced Karelitz to migrate to Palestine, Karelitz chastised Kook's assertion that Zionism was a way to spur on Messianic redemption.[45]

Avraham Karelitz saw great promise in a young Cahana, believing him to be a religious prodigy. He insisted the two of them meet at least once a week, and when Karelitz's health began to fail and his wife barred visitors from their house, Karelitz even went as far as having Cahana climb through a back window so they could still study. Cahana continued this for several months, despite numerous objections from Karelitz's wife. By March 1938, Karelitz recognized that Cahana again outpaced what his yeshiva in Petah Tikvah could offer. To remedy this, Karelitz suggested that Cahana needed to embark on more advanced study and urged him to enroll in the prestigious Novardok Yeshiva in Bialystok, Poland. One of Israel Salanter's senior pupils, Yosef Yozel Horwitz, established the Novardok Yeshiva in 1896 and it quickly became the center for Musar study in Europe in the early-20th century. By the interwar period, the yeshiva was so prestigious that it drew in students from across the Jewish world, with students attending from as far as the Caucuses and Iran.[46] Cahana

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[45] Monty Noam Penkower, *Twentieth Century Jews: Forging Identity in the Land of Promise and in the Promised Land* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 237.

[46] Mordechai Ginsberg, "The Musar Movement" in Judy Montel and Oskar Deletycki, ed., *Pinkas Navaredok* (Tel Aviv: Alexander Harkavy Navaredker Relief Committee in the USA and Israel, 1963), p. 33.

leapt at the opportunity to continue his studies at such a prestigious yeshiva. His

parents, however, were unwilling to let him continue such advanced study in a non-

Hasidic discipline and objected to the cost of sending a child to study in Poland.[47]

Feeling that he could change his parents' mind on the issue, Cahana intended

to discuss the issue at length during their visit to Tel Aviv for a family wedding at the

end of March 1938. Moshe Cahana's early life was dominated by religious anti-

Zionism. Despite growing up in this fervently anti-Zionist atmosphere, Cahana could

not remain detached from Jewish nationalism. The closer he got to the interethnic

strife and competing nationalisms brought on by British imperialism, the more Moshe

Cahana began engaging political Zionism on a deep level. As competing nationalisms

gave way to violence in the 1930s, Moshe Cahana found Jewish national politics too

engrossing to continue religious abstention.

Ethnic Tensions after Balfour

As Moshe Cahana grew up, life in Palestine changed immensely as interethnic

violence between Jewish and Arab Palestinians reached a boiling point, thrusting the

region into a bitter conflict. Regional violence dominated Cahana's childhood and

escalating tensions made it increasingly more difficult for him to abstain from

nationalist politics. Hasidic political anti-Zionism did not preclude a young Cahana

from the violence. Instead, Cahana's attachment to overtly Jewish neighborhoods and

institutions, such as yeshivas, brought him closer to the violence, as they became

frequent targets of nationalist violence.

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[47] Cahana, *Saba Moshe.*

The turning point in the shared history of Jews and Arabs in Palestine was 1917. At the height of the First World War, Ottoman control weakened substantially from an ongoing revolt by Arab nationalists throughout the Empire. Emboldened by British and French promises of postwar autonomy, Arab fighters fought Ottoman forces from within, eventually forcing Ottoman withdrawal from the war and eventual dissolution of the Empire after the armistice in 1918. This emerging nationalism in Palestine suffered a blow in 1917, when British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour drafted a statement which promised "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" and that Britain would "use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object."[48] This declaration marked the culmination of years of lobbying the British government by Jewish organizations. These efforts increased with the outbreak of the first World War in 1914, as Britain devised plans for dividing the Ottoman Empire after the war.[49] The Balfour Declaration became the philosophical mandate upon which Zionists rallied Jews around their cause during the interwar years, allowing for the Jewish population to rise from 12 percent of Palestine in 1922 to over 31 percent in 1939. The League of Nations codified the Balfour declaration in 1922 by passing a mandate to "secure the establishment of the Jewish national home ... and the development of self-governing institutions, and also

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[48] Arthur J. Balfour, "Letter to Lord Rothschild, 2 November 1917," in Isaiah Friedman, ed, *The Rise of Israel: Britain Enters into a Compact with Zionism, 1917* (New York, Garland Publishing, 1987).

[49] Since the Ottoman Empire declared war on Britain in 1914, both Labor and Conservative politicians used the breakup of Ottoman territory as a means for garnering support for each party's postwar agenda; see Paul Kelemen, "The Labour Party and the Zionist Project" in *The British Left and Zionism: History of a Divorce* (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 2012), 11-43.

safeguard the civil and religious rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine, irrespective of race and religion."[50]

Beginning in 1920, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Mohammad Ain al-Husayni used his position to become a leader in the Arab nationalist movement in Palestine. He influenced nationalistic passions and incited religious protests and violence against Jews in Palestine by claiming that Jews sought to rebuild a Jewish Temple on the site of Al-Aqsa Mosque. There were no less than 15 major incidents between 1920 and 1938 that resulted in over 800 deaths. The largest of these was in Jaffa in May 1921. The violence resulted in the death of 47 Jews, the injury of another 146, and the displacement of thousands of Jewish residents of Jaffa to neighboring Tel Aviv.[51]

Throughout the bulk of the 1920s, violence between Jewish and Arab Palestinians primarily occurred in dense population centers in central Palestine where large Jewish and Arab populations existed alongside one another. This changed in the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, as Jewish populations in northern Palestine increased from 19,672 in 1922 to 40,928 in 1931, which would affect the city of Safed. Arab Palestinians felt increasingly dispossessed and responded to this Jewish population increase with nationalist fervor. By the end of the 1920s, Safed was home to the third-largest Jewish population in northern Palestine, behind Haifa and Tiberias,

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[50] "League of Nations Palestine Mandate" in Aaron S. Klieman, *The Rise of Israel: Giving Substance to the Jewish National Home, 1920 and Beyond* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987).
[51] In the 1920 Jerusalem riots, five Jews died and another 216 were injured; in the 1929 Jerusalem riots 133 Jews died and another 241 were injured; and in the 1929 Hebron riots 67 Jews died and another 58 were injured; Hillel Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1929* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2015).

accounting for 27 percent of the city's population. Local Arab officials proved

unwilling to accept incoming Zionist Jews into Safed society and the disconnect

between Jews and Arabs in the 1920s grew more pronounced. The growing divide

accelerated as Revisionist Zionists arrived in the city in large numbers.[52]

Tensions finally came to a head in 1929 with the Meora'ot Tarpat, a series of

what Jewish Palestinians viewed as pogroms in August 1929 where 133 Jews died and

another 241 were injured. The violence initially stemmed from a dispute over access

to the Western Wall. Alarmed by the increasing presence of Jewish national symbols

among visitors, local religious authorities restricted Jewish access to the Wall. Zionist

leader Menachem Ussishkin delivered a fiery speech demanding "a Jewish state

without compromises and without concessions, from Dan to Be'er Sheva, from the

great sea to the desert, including Transjordan."[53] This speech rallied local Jews to step

up nationalist demonstrations at the Wall and the neighboring Al-Aqsa Mosque.

When Arab demonstrators responded to Jewish protests, Zionist leaders made

increasingly louder demands for control over the Wall, with the Revisionist newspaper

going as far as calling for "insubordination and violence" as a means for gaining

access.

When a Jewish teen was stabbed on a Jerusalem soccer field in August 1929, a

Jewish crowd attacked and burned neighboring Arab tents. The funeral of the Jewish

teen became a tinderbox of anti-Arab sentiment, and over the next four days,

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[52] Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 191.
[53] Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999), 304.

Jerusalem police reported twelve separate attacks on Arabs by Jews and seven separate attacks on Jews by Arabs.[54]

In response to rising tensions, the Grand Mufti called for a large crowd of Arabs to pray at Al-Aqsa as a demonstration, and thousands of Arab villagers convened in Jerusalem's Old City. Reacting to rumors that local Jews killed a group of Arab protesters, violence quickly broke out as demonstrators began attacking Jewish residents in the Old City. Over the next week, violence erupted across Palestine as both Arab and Jewish populations feared violent reprisals. In Hebron, Arab mobs converged on Jewish neighborhoods raping men, women, and children. Arab demonstrators torched the Hadassah hospital in Hebron, Jewish vandals desecrated the Nebi Akasha Mosque in Jerusalem, and at the local branch of the famed Slabodka Yeshiva, Arab rioters killed over seventy students with staves and axes.[55]

Despite the high death toll in Jerusalem and Hebron being deadlier, the violence in Safed proved to have a far greater impact on the Kahanas and their fellow Sanzer Jews. A week after the initial violence in Jerusalem, tensions in Safed remained high. Despite local leaders urging calm and restraint, tempers boiled over when British authorities mistook a murdered Sephardic Jew for an Arab, sending rumors of iminent Jewish reprisal into overdrive. In response, several Arab bands stormed into Safed's Jewish neighborhoods, and over the course of an hour, these bands went from house to house with knives and axes, killing and maiming, dousing

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[54] Shaw Commission, Cmd. 3530, Report of the Commission on the disturbances of August 1929, UK National Archives.

[55] Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, 295-313; Jerold S. Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: Memory and Conflict in the Land of Israel* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

the houses with combustibles and setting them on fire. Thirteen Jews died in Safed in the first hour, two were killed on the road into town, and another three burned alive in Ein Zeitim, a kibbutz two kilometers north of Safed.[56]

When violence broke out, the children of the Kahana family all gathered in one house and the adults were in various parts of the city. After the violence began, adults in the family ran home and they all gathered and hid in the cellar while their house was attacked by a group of Arab Palestinians. Rachel Kahana, 16 years old at the time, recalled the general feeling of fear and despair present in the cellar and how many family members trembled with fear and alarm. The Arabs moved on after being chased away from the Kahana house. Following the flight of the perpetrators, the Kahana family emerged to find a scene of chaos. As Rachel Kahana described it, "We went up to the roof and there it was, wow, the city was in flames and Hebrew boys were running and shouting….each of us put a child on our shoulders and we are running, running in the crowd with our knees buckling, our hearts pounding, pounding like a hammer." In her description, Kahana described police inaction during the violence. She noted that "The Arab policemen, amusement showing on their faces, urged it on…those Arab policemen, they are to blame for it all, for all the horrible destruction."[57]

Rachel carried Moshe Cahana's younger brother Budik across the city as the family searched for some form of refuge. Once the rioting began dying down, community leaders led affected Jews into the courtyard of a government building

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[56] Cohen, *Year Zero of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 188-194.
[57] Rachel Kahana, "1929 riots," Beit Hameiri Museum and Archive, Safed, Israel.

hoping to protect surviving Jews from further violence. Nearly 3,000 Jews crowded into a courtyard typically reserved for housing horses, straw, and garbage.

Despite the Kahana family's political anti-Zionism, the violence brought on by competing nationalist movements in 1929 was unavoidable. It enveloped both secular Zionists and religious objectors, drawing no distinction between the two. Orthodox Jews could not avoid the state-building occurring around them and were often reluctantly thrown into the center of the conflict. The Kahana family abstained from the Zionist activism that spurred violent disputes between Jewish and Arab Palestinians, yet they still found themselves directly affected by the violence and forced to seek refuge. As the interethnic conflict picked up in the 1930s, the Kahana family found themselves in the throes of violence, claiming the lives of several family members.

<u>Arab Revolt of 1936</u>

The 1930s proved to be a defining decade for the Kahana family, as it marked the point at which they could no longer idly weather the region's conflict. As tensions between Jews and Arabs again reached a tipping point during the Arab Revolt of 1936, the violence directly claimed the lives of several members of the Kahana family in 1938. The Arab Revolt thrust several Kahanas active roles in Jewish nationalist politics, and eroded the last remaining impulses toward Hasidic anti-Zionism.

Violence between Jews and Arabs in Palestine continued throughout the 1930s, escalating even further in the second half of the decade as Arab Palestinians launched a nationalistic uprising in response to increasing Jewish immigration and land

purchases. Between 1922 and 1931, the Jewish population of Palestine more than

doubled, and by the late 1930s, an average of 20,000 Jews immigrated every year,

fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe. These demographic changes increasingly

displaced Arab workers, and by 1935, not only did Arab possessed land have to

accommodate ten times the amount of farmers as Jewish owned land, leading to

smaller plots for each person, but only five percent of the Arab workforce worked in

Jewish industries.[58] More immediately, Arab Palestinians reacted to the killing of

nationalist leader Izz ad-Din al-Qassam at the hands of British military officials in

1935. What began as a general strike from April until October 1936 morphed into a

violent revolt by 1937 as a peasant-led resistance movement arose to counter British

responses to the general strike. Over the next two years, Arab protestors clashed with

the British Army and Palestine Police force resulting in the death of over 2,000 Arabs

in the clashes, another 108 hanged, and 961 killed in "gang and terrorist activities."[59]

Caught in the middle between Arab protestors and British authorities, Jewish

leaders attempted to weather the violence as best they could, while still focusing on

migration away from an increasingly hostile European continent. Given the

concurrent violence in Germany and Palestinian leadership's sympathy towards

Nazism, many Jewish leaders viewed the 1936 Revolt as immoral, terroristic, and an

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[58] Deborah Bernstein, *Constructing Boundaries: Jewish and Arab Workers in Mandatory Palestine (*Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 2000*)*, pp. 20-21; In 1931, 106,000 dunums of farmland supported 590,000 Arab farmers and 102,000 dunums of farmland supported only 50,000 Jewish farmers; Mahmoud Yazbak, "From Poverty to Revolt: Economic Factors in the Outbreak of the 1936 Rebellion in Palestine," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 36 (July 2000), 93–113.

[59] Haim Levenberg, *Military Preparations of the Arab Community in Palestine: 1945–1948* (London: Routledge, 1993), 74-76; These numbers come from official British sources. Palestinian-British historian Walid Khalidi believes there to have been 19,792 casualties in total for the Arabs, with 5,032 dead: 3,832 killed by the British and 1,200 dead because of "terrorism", and 14,760 wounded

offshoot of the Nazi campaign against European Jews.[60] Between 1936 and 1939, roughly 300 Jewish civilians died as a result of the fighting. While not as damaging to the Jewish population as *Meora'ot Tarpat*, the Arab Revolt of 1936 caused a radicalization and militarization of the Jewish populace. Across the region, Jewish involvement in paramilitary organizations such as Haganah, Etzel, and Lehi rose, and Jewish leaders started a metalworking industry to begin crafting armaments.[61]

Perhaps the most notable event in Safed during the early months of the 1936 Revolt was the murder of the Unger family in August 1936. On the night of August 13, two Arabs entered the Unger family house and opened fire on the family, wounding several members, before detonating a bomb inside the house as they left. The attack killed Alter Ungar and his three children Abraham, Haws, and Shneidel.[62] British authorities arrested numerous suspects in relation to the murder, however, none were convicted by the British Court of Criminal Assize.[63]

The Jewish community in Safed reeled after the acquittals, feeling that the British government failed to protect the Jewish community. Jewish residents in Safed not only directed their anger at the High Commissioner and British government, they also expressed outrage at the Arab mayor of Safed. In the wake of the murders, the mayor wrote British authorities pleading for restraint while refraining from condemnation the murders. Jewish residents believed this letter condoned the murder

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[60] Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1999* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 136.

[61] Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 160.

[62] "Arabs Kill 4 Jews in Safed Bombing; U.S. Citizens Ask Protection," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin*, August 16, 1936; and "Justice Palestinienne," *Israël*, November 13, 1936, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

[63] "2 Arabs Acquitted in Ungar Murder Case," *The Palestine Post*, November 10, 1936, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

of the Unger family and argued that the mayor actively refused to protect the city's

Jewish residents, further fueling outrage and despair over the loss of the Unger

family.[64]

Over the next few years, Safed was a center for violence between Jews and

Arabs as nationalist movements promoted increasingly hostile actions to garner

publicity and support for their plight. Arab Palestinians bombed Jewish houses in and

around Safed, injuring multiple people each time. During the regional boycott of

Jewish businesses in the fall of 1936, a crowd gathered and stoned Arabs who

continued to work with Jews. Revisionist activists detonated bombs in Arab-occupied

public spaces, and buses traveling the highway between Acre and Safed were routinely

attacked by both Jewish and Arab militants. And Arab bands regularly fought the

British military in towns surrounding Safed.[65] In the wake of these events, British

authorities increased their control over the city, establishing curfews, military details,

and making several arrests. Despite an increasing British presence, violence in Safed

never dampened. The opposite, in many cases, occurred. The more the British

cracked down on local populations, the more violent the revolts became.

The violence of the 1936 Revolt reached the Kahana family in 1938, as it

claimed the lives of four members of the extended Kahana family, and two close

family friends. Several members of the Kahana family had been in Tel Aviv in March

1938 for a family wedding. While much of the family returned to Safed directly from

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[64] "Jewish Delegation Sees the High Commissioner," *The Palestine Post*, August 25, 1936, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.
[65] Various Articles, *The Palestine Post,* Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

the wedding, Tzipporah Kahana, her brother-in-law Zvi Segal, Kahana's daughter Rivka, and Segal's son David, traveled north to Acre to pick up Kahana's mother Bashe Baharah and bring her to Safed to visit the family. As their taxi traveled the recently opened Acre-Safed road, they were stopped by a band of about 20 Arabs outside the village of Sajur, between Majd el Kurum and Rama. Once the taxi stopped, they opened fire on the vehicle killing everyone except the one-year-old Rivka Kahana. She survived the attack because she was shielded from bullets by Baharah's slumped body, and when the shooters approached the car, she was thus hidden from view. The taxi driver, Behor Shachrour, and a fifth passenger traveling to Safed for her wedding, Allegra Mosseri, managed to escape the initial attack. Police found Shachrour and Mosseri days later, however, murdered about 150 meters from the scene of the original attack.[66] British authorities arrived on the scene of the murders a short time after the violence and engaged in a fire fight with the group of attackers, killing three. The remaining few eluded capture. In the days after the attack, British military authorities devoted resources, including aircraft, to searching for Shachrour and Mosseri hoping to find them alive. The local police headed up the search for the escaped attackers but yielded little to no results for their efforts.[67] For their part in the grisly murders in the Kahana family, no one was arrested nor faced any form of justice.

[66] "Funeral of Safad's Road Sacrifices," *The Palestine Post*, March 30, 1938, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.
[67] "Police Find Bodies of Driver and Girl," *The Palestine Post*, March 31, 1938, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

The funerals for the slain members of the Kahana family occurred a few days later, and the entirety of Jewish Safed attended. Schools suspended classes, Jewish shops closed, there was a general cessation of work throughout the day, and the entire city sat Shiva in mourning.[68] The funerals for the Kahana family attracted thousands of visitors from across Mandate Palestine's Northern District and saw eulogies from high-ranking officials in Va'ad Leumi, the Jewish National Council, and the Jewish Agency.[69] The grief of funeral attendees was prevalent. One police officer, who was a police escort for the bodies arriving in Safed, was so distressed by the scene of grief that greeted him in the city that he lost control of his vehicle, seriously injuring himself and another police officer.

The deaths in the Kahana family sparked outrage from numerous Jews in Safed and many actively sought ways to exact revenge on the local Arab population. During the Kahana funeral procession in Safed, an Arab garbage collector continued his normal route, despite the cession of work throughout the city. As the procession came upon his route, his presence and insistence on working provoked anger and a large group of mourning Jews attempted to attack him, seeking revenge for the murders. These efforts, however, were thwarted at the last minute by Moshe Cahana, who stepped between the mob and the Arab man, believing the group's anger was misplaced. When members of the procession saw that, despite his immense grief,

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[68] Shiva is a week-long period of mourning in Judaism that embraces a time when individuals discuss their loss and accept the comfort of others; *The Palestine Post*, March 30, 1938, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

[69] These two groups served as the primary governing institutions for Jewish settlements under the British Mandate with Va'ad Leumi handling internal issues and acting as a legislature and the Jewish Agency focusing on external relations and assisting migration.

Cahana was willing to defend this man, they went back to the funeral proceedings, saving the garbageman's life.[70]

Following the deaths in the Kahana family, British authorities placed Safed under a strict curfew and closed roads into town. Included in this was the Acre-Safed Road where the Kahana murders occurred. This road, however, was the main passageway between Safed and large Jewish settlements on the coast. Shutting down the road proved detrimental to Jewish merchants in Safed who could not ship goods in and out of the city. This move inspired anger among Jewish residents of Safed, feeling that they were being unduly punished for the actions of Arab Palestinians.[71]

Random minor acts of violence occurred over the next few weeks causing many Jewish residents to feel that Britain was failing to protect their interests. As this sentiment grew, three young men from Safed opted for a measure of revenge on the Safed's Arab community. Shlomo Ben-Yosef, Abraham Shein, and Shalom Zurabin, all of whom were ardent Revisionist Zionists and were armed with hand grenades, rifles, and revolvers, ambushed a bus carrying 24 Arab Palestinians on the Safed-Rosh Pina road about a half kilometer outside the Safed city limits. The men fired eight shots at the bus and hurled a grenade, which failed to detonate. The bus was able to drive away with no one inside suffering an injury. The three were arrested a short time later, found in possession with two pistols, 85 rounds of ammunition, and five bombs.[72] They surrendered without resistance and made a voluntary statement to the

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[70] Cahana, *Saba Moshe*.

[71] "Troops Carry Out Highway Searches," *The Palestine Post*, April 26, 1938, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

[72] "Trial of 3 Rosh Pina Youths," *The Palestine Post*, May 26, 1938, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

police before being sent to Acre Prison and standing before a military court consisting of three British military officers serving as judges. The court charged the trio under the Emergency (Defense) Regulations for discharging a firearm and illegally possessing firearms. The trio were the first Jews to stand before a British military court in Palestine.[73]

The arrest and trial of the three men caused great commotion within the Jewish community of Palestine, particularly in the Northern District. Palestinian Jews felt that the rushed trial and harsh sentences did not match the severity of the crime, one in which there were no casualties. The Laborite newspaper *Davar* argued that "Hundreds of murderers have gone unpunished. Hundreds of Jews have been killed and wounded because of the government's impotence. A faulty system, therefore, is no justification for carrying out the verdict adding to the blood of innocents that of Ben Yosef." Political parties called for general strikes and protests across Palestine, the Jewish National Council urged restraint and calm, Jewish businesses across Palestine closed in protest, Jews carried black flags of mourning in the streets and shuttered businesses raised black flags in protest.[74]

The trial of the three lasted roughly two weeks, and, in the end, two of the three men received death sentences, with Zurabin being found not guilty by way of insanity. When the judges announced the verdicts, Shein and Zurabin stood up and shouted, "Long live the Kingdom of Israel on both banks of the Jordan," a rallying cry

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[73] "Three Jews on Trial Under Emergency Regulations," *The Palestine Post*, May 25, 1938, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.
[74] "Jewish Population of Palestine Stirred by First Execution of Jew in Century," *The Sentinel*, July 7, 1938, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

for Revisionist Zionists who believed that Jewish territory should encompass the entire British Mandate. Shein ultimately had his death sentence commuted when his Polish birth certificate proved him to be under 18 years of age.[75] Shlomo ben Yosef went to the gallows on June 30, wearing the blue-trimmed brown uniform of B'rith Trumpeldor, or Betar, the Revisionist youth organization. As he stepped up to the gallows, Ben Yosef said "I'll die like a man and a Betar. I'm proud to be the first victim for the Jewish nation and the Jewish people." He then began singing the Betar anthem "Shir Betar" before the floor released and he dropped to his death.[76] In response to the hanging of ben Yosef, Zionist groups became more militant. Believing that Jewish self-defense was their paramount duty, Jewish groups in Palestine began arming themselves in greater numbers and prepared for the eventuality of increased violence.

The Arab Revolt claimed the lives of several members of the Kahana family and left the remaining members at an impasse. Despite weathering previous breakouts of violence from the periphery, the events of 1938 thrust the Kahanas into the center of anti-colonial struggles in Palestine and forced family members to reckon with growing national movements on a deep level for the first time. In the wake of the 1938 murders, the family divided on their reactions, with many joining Zionist movements and just as many fleeing Palestine to avoid the pain of growing violence.

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[75] "Two Condemned to Death in Rosh Pinah Bus Case," *The Palestine Post*, June 6, 1938, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.
[76] "Jewish Population of Palestine Stirred by First Execution of Jew in Century," *The Sentinel*, July 7, 1938, Historical Jewish Press Archive, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem.

Through both choices, the fortunes of the Kahana family in Palestine changed irrevocably.

Burgeoning Zionism

The death of his mother caused Moshe Cahana a great amount of grief. He returned to yeshiva in Petah Tikvah after her funeral but struggled to return to his studies. This time in Petah Tikvah in 1937 and 1938 proved transformative for him. Petah Tikvah's flourishing political character, combined with his separation from his family, allowed Cahana to interact with Zionist politics for the first time and introduced him to a political and nationalist Jewish identity that he previously eschewed. As a city in central Palestine near the Mediterranean coast, Petah Tikvah was a center for Zionist activity and development, and quickly became known as the "Mother of Moshavot," owing to its position as one of the first modern Jewish agricultural settlements in Palestine. While in Petah Tikvah, Cahana immersed himself in Zionist and anti-colonial literature, attended political meetings, and began making connections that would ultimately thrust him deep into the Zionist movement.

Cahana's burgeoning Zionism made attending anti-Zionist Orthodox schools increasingly difficult. His political beliefs sharply contrasted those of his teachers and brought him in sharp political contrast with Avraham Karelitz. Following the death of his mother, Cahana's Zionist attachments increased tenfold and he soon found it exceedingly difficult to abstain from political activism. Cahana's father, Mordechai, worried about his son's politicization and forbade him from joining a Zionist organization while he was still in school. When the reconciliation of Cahana's

Zionism with his Orthodox education became too hard to continue, Cahana dropped out of yeshiva and joined secular Jewish society. Much to the chagrin of his father, Cahana left Petah Tikvah and moved in with his sister in Givat Shaul, on the edge of Jerusalem. There he enrolled in a secular school and largely left religious study altogether.

By his eighteenth birthday in January 1940, Moshe Cahana was deadset on joining the push for statehood and had become an avid Revisionist Zionist like many in his family, including his brother Budik and cousin Nachshon. Immediately after he graduated from school in 1940, Moshe Cahana joined his first political organization and over the next decade, he became a prominent militant in the Jewish struggle for statehood.

Moshe Cahana's politicization was a firm break from the religious anti-Zionism that dominated his childhood. His grief over the loss of his mother and his colonial identity forged by the violence of the British Mandate drove him away from Hasidism, a religious identity to which he never returned.

The Kahanes in Brooklyn

Whereas Moshe Cahana dove into political activism following the death of his mother, Tzipporah, his father Mordechai Kahana struggled to maintain the Hasidic life he enjoyed before. Kahana returned to his job collecting halukah, but his ongoing grief made this difficult and within a few months, he decided to make a large change in his life. In 1939, Kahana left Palestine to live with his brother Charles in New York, where he would live for the rest of his life. Kahana's two eldest brothers, Chaim and

Levi Yitzhak migrated years before, so the adjustment to the United States proved light.

Mordechai's brother, Charles Kahane, came to New York in 1925. As a young man, he was ordained at the famed Pressburg Yeshiva in Austria. Upon completing his studies in Europe, Charles Kahane returned to Palestine briefly in 1924, but found the economic conditions too poor to make a proper living. In the years following World War I, Safed suffered from food shortages and disease, and local Jews struggled to rebuild the community after Turkish forces destroyed local institutions in 1918. As a result, Kahane did not stay in Palestine. Instead, he chose to move to Brooklyn to be near his older brothers, who, by 1925, were well-established and served as rabbis for large congregations in Brooklyn, New York.[77]

The population of Brooklyn, ballooned after World War I. A 1921 municipal code in New York essentially exempted "all new buildings planned for dwelling purposes" from real estate taxes for ten years. This spurred a massive amount of building, particularly in sparser populated areas outside of Manhattan. In Brooklyn, builders filed plans for 6,303 new buildings, with 22,338 apartments, in the first nine months of 1921 alone. The emergence of an expanded subway system in the early 1920s made living in the outer boroughs easier than ever before. On top of this increased ease of travel, Jews at the end of the first World War achieved a level of upward economic mobility, melding easier with well-established populations in increasingly-mixed neighborhoods. This economic prosperity allowed New York Jews to leave poor, densely-populated neighborhoods for newly constructed

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[77] Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought*, 5.

neighborhoods in the outer boroughs. In 1917, there were 300,000 Jews living in the heavily populated Lower East Side neighborhood in Manhattan, the center of Jewish New York. Within the next year, nearly 200,000 of these Jews moved to other boroughs. By 1930, there were 800,000 Jews living in Brooklyn's neighborhoods, which accounted for over one-third of the borough's population, with the most populous neighborhoods being Borough Park, Flatbush, and Bensonhurst. With this outmigration, Jewish institutions shifted to the boroughs as well. Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union, the largest predominantly Jewish labor group of the 1920s, the Yiddish-language newspaper *Jewish Daily Forward*, and Amalgamated Bank all established offices in these growing Jewish neighborhoods. By the breakout of World War II, a vibrant Jewish life flourished in the outer boroughs.[78]

The growing Jewish community in Brooklyn offered better job prospects for Charles Kahane and he soon served as an assistant rabbi under his brother Levi Yitzhak at Congregation Ahavas Torah in Williamsburg, before taking the pulpit at Congregation Anshe Sholom in Mill Basin, Brooklyn. In 1931, Kahane married Sonia Trainin, an immigrant from Dvinsk (Daugavpils), Latvia, with whom he had several children.

Meir David was the first child born to Charles and Sonia Kahane, in 1932. Meir Kahane grew up in the Bensonhurst neighborhood of Brooklyn, a heavily Jewish and Italian neighborhood in the early 20th century. Despite growing up during the Great Depression, Kahane's family did not suffer the same economic struggles as

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[78] Jeffrey S. Gurock. *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p. 10-15.

other Americans at the time. Charles Kahane's steady employment at Anshe Sholom allowed the family to maintain a privileged lifestyle at the height of economic depression, even having a live-in maid until the onset of World War II. This allowed the family to focus on Meir's upbringing and studies, resulting in Meir learning to read English and Hebrew early and engaging with Jewish nationalism at a young age.[79]

Unlike his cousin Moshe Cahana, Meir Kahane's childhood was distinctly Zionist. Pressburg was where Kahane first encountered political Zionism, as many rabbis at the yeshiva encouraged mass migration and agricultural colonization. His time at Pressburg also allowed a young Charles Kahane to leave Hasidism for other branches of Orthodox Judaism. By the time he left Europe in the mid-1920s, Kahane was an active political Zionist, an identity that he passed along to his children.

Meir's childhood home centered around his father's Zionist activism. Charles Kahane was an active member of the Zionist Misrachi Organization of America, serving on its executive committee, and was a member Peter Bergson's Committee for a Jewish Army, which campaigned for the ability of Palestinian Jews to form their own independent army during World War II.[80] Kahane also invited Revisionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky into their home on multiple occasions.

Meir Kahane attended the Yeshiva of Flatbush elementary school as a child, an Orthodox religious school devoted to the establishment of a religiously Jewish state in Palestine. To this end, a bulk of the Jewish curriculum focused on teaching Hebrew and Zionism instead of pure Talmudic study. So pronounced was this focus that the

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[79] Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought,* 10.
[80] "Jews Fight for the Right to Fight," *New York Times*, January 5, 1942, p. 13.

Rosh Yeshiva, Joel Braverman, would go from class to class during Hebrew study to ensure that students use only Sephardic pronunciations of words, rather than traditional Ashkenazic pronunciations. This was an attempt to try and break Jewish traditions away from European roots and mark local Jews as a Middle Eastern population. Braverman also brought in teachers from Palestine, such as Moshe Nathanson, David Alster-Yardeni, and Shlomo Shulsinger, to further ensure a uniquely Hebrew character in the school.[81]

The most impactful element of Meir's childhood was the arrival of Mordechai Kahana in 1939. Kahana's grief and anger, however, colored much of his life in Brooklyn and his presence in the Kahane household impacted Meir's early life by imbuing with strong anti-Arab ideas. Charles and Mordechai discussed the murders regularly during Shabbat dinners, and Charles regaled Meir with stories of Jewish heroism and Arab cruelty in Palestine each night. Prominent in these discussions was the hanging of Shlomo ben Yosef, which Charles often described as a turning point in modern Jewish history. Meir absorbed the actions of Ben-Yosef as martyrdom and heroism, and he became a symbol of Jewish strength and power for a young Kahane. Moshe Cahana recalled years later that "[these discussions] imbued Meir with a sense of Jewish pride in every aspect…[Charles] taught his son about the spiritual strength as well as their physical prowess with stories from the bible," a message that gained extra veracity when coupled with the biblical notion of "an eye for an eye."[82]

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[81] Kahane, *Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought*, 10-11.

[82] Robert I. Friedman, *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane, From FBI Informant to Knesset Member* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990), 23-24.

<u>Conclusion</u>

By 1940, the younger generations of the Kahana family fully embraced political Zionism and actively participated in the state-building project. They eschewed the religious anti-Zionism of their forebearers and embraced increasingly militant Jewish nationalism. This thrusted several younger family members into paramilitary organizations during the 1940s, with Moshe Cahana rising high in the Revisionist Zionist organization Etzel.

This new politicism marked a seismic shift in the way the Kahana family approached Zionism. Early generations of the family devoted all their time to religious study and rejected all forms of Zionism, believing it to be heretical. Their beliefs aligned with the dominant political stance of Hasidic Orthodoxy in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, which argued that migration to Palestine should be reserved only for religious pilgrims. Any migration beyond this, for Hasidism, constituted false messianism and was an affront to Judaism.

The rising nationalisms, and accompanying violence, in the 1920s and 1930s chipped away at the Kahanas' Hasidic anti-Zionism. Under the yoke of British imperialism, Arab and Jewish nationalisms boiled over into outright violence. During the Meora'ot Tarpat in 1929, the Kahana family had their home burned to the ground and during the Arab Revolt in 1938, Arab Palestinians killed a large contingent of the Kahana family, including Moshe Cahana's mother and grandmother. These events, and the perceived lack of British response to them, proved to be the tipping point for anti-Zionist Kahanas, who increasingly believed that the only recourse to this violence was an independent Jewish state. By the time Moshe and Meir Kahane's generation

matured, the Kahana family was a monumentally important family in the evolution of

Revisionist Zionism.

2 – Revisionism and the Kahanas

In 2001, sixty years after Moshe Cahana joined Irgun Zvai Leumi (Etzel), he sat down with his sons with a video camera rolling to capture his recollections of his time as a Jewish militant. "A legitimate underground, or to say it differently, an underground is legitimate if it came into existence to accomplish fair political things; otherwise, it is just a terrorist group," Moshe Cahana recounted. Here, Cahana made an important distinction. In his view, Jewish independence from Great Britain in the 1940s was a necessity due to their neglect of Jewish Palestinians and refusal to fulfill the promises of the Balfour Declaration which set British goals to develop a Jewish state in Palestine. These actions delegitimized British colonial rule and necessitated a violent revolt. Accordingly, Moshe Cahana joined the Revisionist militant underground, Etzel, and took part in numerous anti-British, anti-colonial operations in Palestine. He helped smuggle in Jewish refugees from Europe, spied on Communist and anti-Zionist organizations, planned attacks against British colonial targets, and was instrumental in forwarding the deadly King David Hotel bombing in 1946 that killed 91 people.[1]

Ten years Cahana's junior, Meir Kahane harbored the same sentiments about the need for Jewish independence in the Middle East. While too young to join the Jewish underground, Kahane was active in the Revisionist youth organization Betar. As a Betari, Kahane participated in protests, helped smuggle weapons to Palestine, and trained in preparation to join the Jewish warfront in Palestine. Protests often focused

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[1] Moshe Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories*, interview by Michael Cahana, VHS, 2000, in possession of family.

on British diplomats and cultural institutions and sought to highlight the believed

repression of Jewish interests in Mandate Palestine. While many of these

demonstrations were nonviolent political activities, others, such as the hurling of

foreign objects at British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, were acts of aggressive,

direct confrontation.

Moshe and Meir Kahane's differing, yet similar, Zionist framings and

attachments offer insight into the changing nature of Zionism and Jewish identity, for

the cousins adapted Revisionism to fit their individual lives and circumstances. Both

Cahana and Kahane were ideological successors of Revisionist Zionist leader

Vladimir Jabotinsky. However, the cousins' different generational experiences and

allegiances set them apart ideologically. Despite adhering to many of the same

principles set out by Jabotinsky, Cahana and Kahane operated in different stages of the

Zionist struggle for statehood, which affected the ways in which they interpreted

Revisionist ideas of Jewish power, Arab and Western relations, and the necessity of

violence.

Moshe Cahana was part of a generation in Palestine which came of age before

World War II and for whom the violence of the Mandate shaped their early lives,

causing high degrees of political activism and militancy. For Cahana and his

contemporaries, relinquishment of British control was an issue of political identity,

autonomy, and national liberation. Because of this, their activism often focused on

fighting the British in direct militaristic conflicts.[2]

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[2] See J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion: Irgun Zvai Leumi, LEHI, and the Palestine Underground, 1929-1949* (Dublin: Academy Press, 1979), Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror, 1940-1949* (London: Routledge, 1995), Yehudit Tidor Baumel, *The "Bergson Boys" and the*

In contrast, Meir Kahane came of age during World War II among a diasporic generation when Jewish life was at its most desperate point. Their fight against the British in Palestine focused primarily on migration and Jewish safe haven rather than national liberation. As a result, Kahane's generation relied on political demonstrations seeking to illuminate the plight of the European Jew, fundraising to assist in migration, and protests against British restrictions on Jewish movement.[3]

These generational differences between the Kahanas highlight the ever-evolving nature of Zionism as a political ideology. Rather than being a static and uniform political ideology, Zionism and Jewish nationalism conformed depending on the political space in which it existed. Moshe and Meir Kahane were separated by generation, location, and global political trends at the time, all factors informing how both approached Revisionist Zionism in the mid-20th century. This shifts how historians should approach Zionism. Zionism evolves to the political world around it and understanding it as a political ideology requires a full examination of these outside forces. For Moshe and Meir Kahane, one cannot understand how their anti-colonial

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Origins of Contemporary Zionist Militancy (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005), Colin Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism: Nationalism and the Origins of the Israeli Right* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2006), Motti Golani, *Palestine Between Politics & Terror, 1945-1947* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2013), Zev Golan, *Stern: The Man and His Gang* (Tel Aviv: Yair Publishing, 2011), Bruce Hoffman, *Anonymous Soldiers: The Struggle for Israel, 1917-1947* (New York: Vintage Books, 2016), Thomas Suarez, *State of Terror: How Terrorism Created Modern Israel* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2017).

[3] See Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991), Zeev Hadari, *Second Exodus: The Full Story of Jewish Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945-1948* (Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 1991), Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), Aviva Halamish, *The Exodus Affair: Holocaust Survivors and the Struggle for Palestine* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), Fritz Liebreich, *Britain's Naval and Political Reaction to the Illegal Immigration of Jews to Palestine, 1945-1948* (London: Routledge, 2005), Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (London: Saqi Books, 2011).

Zionisms developed without fully examining the different worlds in which they existed.

Moshe Cahana and Third-Generation Zionism

Moshe Cahana joined the Zionist movement as part of a third generation of activists that arose in the late-1930s and early-1940s. Moshe Cahana belonged to this third generation of Zionists. Radicalized by what he perceived as the failings of the British mandate, Cahana joined the Revisionist movement in the spring of 1940. Revisionism's policy of flouting British restrictions particularly attracted Cahana to the movement. In his estimation, Revisionism's central focus was "to free [Palestine] completely from the British." While he agreed that Britain had, at one point, been valuable to Jewish interests in the region, Cahana argued that they long-since overstayed their welcome. By the 1940s, Cahana believed, the British served more as an impediment to Jewish sovereignty than the means to statehood that was initially intended. In arguing this, Moshe Cahana placed himself firmly in this third generation of Zionist thought.[4]

The third generation of Zionism arose as a response to British changes to imperial policy in Palestine. During the 1910s and 1920s Zionists worked with British authorities to advance the goals of Zionism, increasingly violent anti-Semitism in Germany and rising Palestinian nationalism in the Arab Revolt caused a large ideological shift, resulting in greater emphasis on unfettered immigration and the immediate creation of a Jewish State. During the 1930s, British authorities responded

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[4] Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories.*

to mounting ethnic violence in Palestine by attempting to limit the amount of Jewish immigration into the region. To this end, the Royal Navy sent eight ships to Palestine to patrol the coast and used additional ships in the Mediterranean to track suspicious vessels heading for Palestine. British authorities also established internment camps in Palestine, Cyprus, and Mauritius to house migrants they captured at sea. The British sent more than 50,000 Jewish migrants to these camps, with the majority being held at one of 12 camps in Cyprus.[5]

Despite increased British patrols, Zionist activists still tried smuggling in migrants. Vladimir Jabotinsky made the absorption of Jewish migrants paramount to Revisionist ideology as part of his 1936 "Evacuation Plan." Jabotinsky's evacuation plan called not only for an abolition of limits on immigration, but also the evacuation of the entire Jewish populations of Poland, Hungary, and Romania to Palestine. These three countries were the heart of what he termed the "Zone of Jewish Distress," the area in Eastern and Southeastern Europe he believed was most at-risk for cataclysmic anti-Semitic events.[6]

To achieve this plan, Jabotinsky toured Eastern Europe and met with leaders in all three countries throughout 1936 to discuss the efficacy of such a plan.[7] All three governments agreed to the large scale evacuation, but it was controversial within the Polish Jewish community, with opponents believing that this plan gave increasingly-

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[5] Dalia Ofer, "Holocaust survivors as immigrants - the case of Israel and the Cyprus detainees," *Modern Judaism* 16 (February 1996), 1–23.

[6] Joseph Schechtman, *The Jabotinsky Story: Fighter & Prophet, The Last Years* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), 334-335.

[7] He met with the Polish Foreign Minister Jozef Beck; the Regent of Hungary Miklos Horthy, and Romanian Prime Minister Gheorghe Tatarescu.

violent anti-Semites exactly what they desired. The plan also met dismissal and derision from Chaim Weizmann and the World Zionist Organization (WZO) board. Beyond Jewish communities, the British government vetoed every attempt at implementing this mass migration, believing it would upset the balance of peace in the region. In response to this, and rising violence in Europe, Zionists across the political spectrum ramped up illegal immigration efforts, establishing the Mossad l'Aliyah Bet in 1938, which handled all matters related to immigration.

The following year, the British government passed the White Paper of 1939, which ushered in a third generation of Zionist activism in its wake. The White Paper acted as the formal policy of the British government in Palestine and called for a binational Palestinian state, limited Jewish immigration to 75,000 over the course of five years, ruled that immigration beyond the five years was to be determined by the Arab majority population, and placed heavy restrictions on the rights of Jews to purchase land from Arabs. Feeling betrayed by the British for seemingly reversing the Balfour Declaration, Zionist groups in Palestine immediately rejected the White Paper and embarked on a campaign of attacks against government property.

The resulting third generation of Zionist ideology focused primarily on creating a Jewish state in Palestine and achieving political independence from the British Empire. Revisionist organizations were particularly vociferous in their rejection of the White Paper, leading to a further split from centrist Zionist organizations. The Revisionist paramilitary group Etzel coordinated a bombing campaign across Palestine that killed 38 people and wounded another 44, and Jabotinsky proposed a plan of revolt to begin in October 1939. In Jabotinsky's plan,

exiled Jewish leaders would mount a return to Palestine and lead a raid on, and

occupation of, the Government House and other centers of British power, declaring an

independent Jewish state with the WZO operating as a government-in-exile. Etzel

leader Avraham Stern planned for 40,000 armed Jewish fighters from Poland to sail to

Palestine and join the rebellion, which gained the support and assistance of the Polish

government. However, the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 and

Jabotinsky's death the following year waylaid these plans.[8]

Zionists' move toward attacking British rule over Palestine places the ideology

within the context of 20th-century decolonization movements.[9] Ruled by a British

Empire that, at its peak, controlled 23 percent of the global population and 24 percent

of global land area, residents of Palestine possessed neither political autonomy,

economic authority, nor governmental representation.[10] Like all lands in the British

Empire, the Crown and Parliament controlled all matters of political authority and

economic dominance. With the rise of various nationalisms in the decades

surrounding the two World Wars, Britain found it increasingly difficult to maintain

political control over all of their imperial territories and began offering independence

to several countries across Africa and Asia, including Middle Eastern nations such as

Egypt and Iraq. The success of these independence movements further fueled

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[8] Monty Noam Penkower, *Decision on Palestine Deferred: America, Britain and Wartime Diplomacy, 1939-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[9] For extensive debate on Zionism's place in 20th century decolonization movements, see Part III, "Zionism and Colonialism," of Ethan Katz and Lisa Moses Leff, *Colonialism and the Jews* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017).

[10] Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2004) 230-233.

nationalist sentiments among neighboring peoples inspired by the possibility of political autonomy.

These successes were not lost on Moshe Cahana who spent much of his adolescence reading the works of anti-colonial leaders, particularly those of Mohandas Gandhi and anti-colonial leaders in India. India pushed for independence from the British Crown simultaneously with the Zionist push for statehood, with both achieving independence in 1948. Thus, the similarity in struggles against British imperialism resonated with Cahana who believed them to be brothers-in-arms.[11]

Moshe Cahana believed the British to be "foreign occupiers" in Palestine. He argued that their presence threatened any possibility for an independent Jewish state. Jews under the British Mandate, Cahana argued, lived "[in fear] and hunted by the foreign occupants, their days were days of terror and agony; their nights were nights of danger." For Cahana, British imperialism destroyed Jewish life in Palestine, "[soaking] the ground with the blood of the innocent and pure."[12]

Besides being foreign occupiers, Cahana believed that by not giving Jews an independent state and placing immigration restrictions on Jews escaping Nazi persecution, the British doomed European Jewry to "the ditches and valleys filled with human ashes."[13] Because of this disregard for Jewish life, Cahana believed in the Revisionist policy of non-cooperation with the British during and after World War II. This ideology contrasted the goals of Synthetic and Labour Zionists, who dominated

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[11] Moshe Cahana, *Saba Moshe: MLK and Gandhi*, Interview by Michael Cahana, VHS, 2000, in possession of family.
[12] Moshe Cahana, "Four Human Gifts to Heaven" in *Ethics for the 21st Century* (Houston, TX: Self-published, 2000), 120-122.
[13] Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century*, 120.

global Zionist organizations in the 1940s. Given the atrocities Germans were committing against European Jews, Zionist leaders believed that an Allied victory in World War II was the best means for Jewish independence. Synthetic and Labor Zionists hoped that their support of Great Britain in World War II would force Britain to uphold promises of independence after the war, resulting in the creation of a Jewish state. To this end, David Ben-Gurion called for Jews to "support the British as if there is no White Paper." Over the course of the war, roughly 30,000 Palestinian Jews served in the British Army, most of them fighting in the North African Campaign between 1940 and 1943.[14]

To counter British colonialism in Palestine, Cahana argued for the necessity of a violent revolt. He did not come to this belief easily. Cahana argued that "life is sacred – every human life. The fighters' lives, the bystanders' lives, and even the lives of the enemies, the ones who bear the repellent uniform of the foreign occupant." He argued, however, that despite moral objections to killing, the price of inaction was their own lives. Cahana believed that the weight and perpetuity of British imperialism negated the ability for Jews in Palestine to stand idly by and await decolonization. Instead, it was their duty as Jews to uphold the Abrahamic covenant and fight for independence in Palestine.[15]

The Early Generations of Zionism

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[14] Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs: From Peace to War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 200.
[15] Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century*, 118-130.

The anti-British rejectionism of Moshe Cahana and Revisionists in the third generation of Zionists developed as a reaction to previous ideological generations. Zionism, as a political ideology, emerged in response to rising anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe and the Russian Empire. After violent pogroms aimed at Jewish communities and businesses swept across the Russian Empire in the 1880s, many Jewish leaders expressed concern about the viability of future Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Jewish Europeans endured numerous persecutions during their near 2000 years on the continent, but few had been quite as violent and severe as this new wave of Russian anti-Semitism. While many Jews began migrating to countries in the Western Hemisphere, most notably the United States and Canada, some Jewish leaders like Leo Pinsker and Theodor Herzl felt this migration could not solve the issue of continuing anti-Semitism. They further argued that anti-Semitism would similarly rise in the new countries of residence, as the central problem of statelessness would remain the same. Leaders proposed several solutions, including the creation of a Jewish state in the Pale of Settlement in Europe, Uganda, or Argentina. However, these solutions, leaders feared, lacked strong cultural attachments and would not attract large-scale migration.[16]

The solution Jewish leaders deemed would compel the largest amount of migration away from Europe was the creation of a Jewish cultural center and national homeland in Palestine. The Southern Levant long held a prominent position in religious Judaism as Eretz Israel. Jewish religious belief defines Eretz Israel as the

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[16] Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to the Establishment of the State of Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003).

land where Torahic law prevailed and was the God-given inheritance of the Jewish

people. According to Jewish religious tradition, Eretz Israel was the land promised to

the Jews escaping oppression and slavery in Egypt and has since represented freedom

and redemption from oppression. As anti-Semitism prevailed in Europe during the

late-19th century, the concept of Eretz Israel took on new life as potential asylum for

Jews suffering in Europe.[17]

Over the second half of the 19th century, Jewish spiritual and ideological

leaders crafted succinct ideologies regarding the future of Jewish life and potential

migration patterns to Palestine. During the First Zionist Congress in 1897, delegates

agreed on the Basel Program, which set out the initial goals of the movement. These

included attaining a right to immigrate under Ottoman law; the promotion of

settlement in Palestine by Jewish farmers, artisans, and manufacturers; the creation of

Jewish organizations designed to unite global Jewry; the creation of a consistent

Jewish national consciousness, and preparatory steps toward obtaining the consents of

governments to achieve these goals. The first generation of Zionists was primarily

concerned with migration and acquisition of land. As Zionism started as a means of

escape from European violence, the population transfer took top billing. This

accompanied the understanding that potential statehood could not come about without

a substantial and independent Jewish population in the region.[18]

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[17] Rachel Havrelock, *River Jordan: The Mythology of a Dividing Line,* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[18] Arthur Hertzberg, "Headlong into the World Arena – Theodor Herzl Appears," in *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 199-246.

As the early decades in the 20th century passed, however, this migration-focused perception of Zionism changed. Instead of being a primarily migratory movement, a second generation of Zionists began envisioning Jewish statehood in Palestine. The outbreak of World War I hastened these aspirations as control and autonomy in Palestine became a strategic focus for warring nations. Understanding that populations under Ottoman control could be used to foment strife and revolution within the Ottoman Empire, allied forces during the war offered promises of independence and statehood in exchange for taking up arms against the Ottomans.[19] For Jewish Zionists, the British government codified such promises in the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which declared it the official policy of the British Crown to establish a national home for Jews in Palestine. Britain hoped that working with the World Zionist Organization to develop Palestine according to the liberal capitalist model of Labour Zionists would result in a peacefully developed and economically and political stable British colony in the Middle East. With a stable Palestine, Britain could expand their imperial influence in the Middle East and eventually gain political control of the region. The following year, the League of Nations endorsed the full text of the Balfour Declaration and decided that a Jewish organization would be recognized as a public body for the purpose of advising and cooperating with the Administration of Palestine.[20]

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[19] Salim Tamari, *The Great War and the Remaking of Palestine* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

[20] Paul Kelemen, *The British Left and Zionism: History of a Divorce* (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 2012).

This shifted Zionism's focus from encouraging Jewish settlement in Palestine to building the institutional foundations of a Jewish state and raising funds for these purposes. This second generation of Zionists built upon these successes by working with the British, who gained control of Palestine after World War I. Led by new World Zionist Organization President Chaim Weizmann, this new generation worked within the parameters of British imperialism in the hopes of creating a new Jewish state. Revisionist leader Vladimir Jabotinsky rose as part of this second generation and was an ardent fighter for Jewish statehood throughout his life. Though he had ideological conflicts with Weizmann throughout his life, their baseline goals of colonization, immigration, and eventual statehood remained the same.[21]

The Rise of Jabotinskyism

Great Britain's interest in creating liberal capitalistic Jewish territory resulted from their goals of increasing political influence in the Middle East. Despite belonging to the second generation of Zionists with Chaim Weizmann, Vladimir Jabotinsky believed that British and Zionist goals for Palestine were antithetical. Believing that Great Britain would never allow for a fully independent Jewish state in Palestine, Jabotinsky crafted the ideology of Revisionist Zionism to counter imperial influence over the development of a Jewish State. Revisionism's growth in Palestine inspired younger Kahana generations into Zionist politics, as they grew increasingly impatient with delayed British promises of sovereignty. This impatience materialized in the

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[21] Sahar Huneidi, *A Broken Trust: Sir Herbert Samuel, Zionism and the Palestinians*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001); Geoffrey Lewis, *Balfour and Weizmann: The Zionist, the Zealot and the Emergence of Israel* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009).

form of militancy and growing paramilitary organizations such as Etzel, of which Moshe Cahana and his brother Budik would become members.

Vladimir Jabotinsky was born to a middle-class, Russian-Jewish family in Odessa in 1880. His childhood lacked a strong Jewish character and was divorced from Jewish faith and traditions. Instead, his family was fully assimilated into secular Russian society. This allowed Jabotinsky to attain a level of economic security absent from many Russian Jewish communities. Jabotinsky dropped out of school at the age of 17 to become a correspondent for the local newspaper, *Odesskiy Listok*, a job which took him to both Bern and Rome at different points in his career. His writings, many written under the penname "Altalena," which means 'old Italian' in Yiddish, brought him the reputation of an accomplished writer, which he would later use to grant literary heft to his political writings.[22]

Jabotinsky's time as a foreign correspondent exposed him to an emerging Zionist movement for the first time. While in Bern, he encountered a large colony of Jewish students barred from entry to Russian universities. This encounter convinced Jabotinsky of the failings of the Diaspora, as Jews routinely faced exclusion from social institutions in their countries of residence. In a speech before the crowd of exiled students, Jabotinsky declared that Jews in the Diaspora headed toward their own St. Bartholomew's Day and the only means of avoidance would be mass emigration to Palestine.[23] Jabotinsky followed this speech with the first of his Zionist

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[22] I. Benari, "The Story of Vladimir Jabotinsky: A Biographical Note." In I. Benari, ed, *From the Pen of Jabotinsky* (Cape Town, WC, South Africa: Unie-Volkspers, 1941), 10-11.

[23] This was a reference to France's St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572 in which interreligious rioting broke out between Catholics and Huguenots, resulting in the death of 30,000 Huguenots at the hands of Catholic mobs; for more, see Arlette Jouanna and Joseph Bergin, *The Saint Bartholomew's*

writings, "Gorod Mira," a poem in which he described a Jewish paradise away from European violence. Published in the notably anti-Zionist journal *Volskhod*, Jabotinsky shied away from explicit calls for a Jewish state in Palestine, but his idyllic lyrics became the ideological forebearer to his later Zionist writings.[24]

Though his Zionist ideology was coalescing by the time he returned to Odessa in 1901, three issues in Europe colored the way in which Jabotinsky later approached Zionism. The outburst of anti-Semitism in his native town of Odessa; the Kishinev Pogrom in 1903, in which Russian raiders killed 49 Jews and destroyed 1500 homes in modern-day Moldova; and the assimilationist movement among Russian Jews compelled Jabotinsky to political activism and the belief that persecuted Jews needed some form of defense against increasingly violent pogroms. In Odessa, Jabotinsky created a Jewish self-defense unit that attempted to protect local Jews and Jewish property during riots and racial violence. These units served as an example for Jabotinsky's later creation of the Jewish Legion, Betar, and, ultimately, Etzel.[25]

Jabotinsky joined the Zionist movement in an official capacity in 1903 when he served as an Odessan delegate at the Sixth Zionist Conference in Basle, Switzerland. Five years later, the Zionist Executive appointed Jabotinsky as the head of a mission to Turkey. In this position, Jabotinsky worked directly with Zionist contacts in the Yishuv and had his first opportunity to visit Palestine in 1909. During his visit to Palestine, Jabotinsky discovered the necessity for reigniting study in

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Day Massacre: The Mysteries of a Crime of State (Manchester Eng.: Manchester University Press, 2015).
[24] Benari, *From the Pen of Jabotinsky*, 11.
[25] Benari, *From the Pen of Jabotinsky*, 13.

Hebrew and began his first campaign for the "Hebraisation of the Diaspora," in which

he attempted to prepare Diaspora Jews for life in the Yishuv.[26] This became a central

focus in his activism after he left Turkey, even going so far as to adopt a Hebrew name

in Ze'ev, meaning "wolf," and he spent the years immediately before World War I

traveling across Eastern Europe establishing Hebrew curricula in Jewish schools and

universities across the region. Jabotinsky even went so far as petitioning Russian Jews

to adopt Hebrew as the medium of instruction in all subjects in Jewish schools. This,

he hoped, would curb the rise of assimilation and ignite latent nationalism in Russian

Jews. Ironically, the radicalism of this endeavor brought him into conflict with many

of the Russian Zionists he sought to inspire.[27]

For Jabotinsky, conflict with Russian Zionists highlighted the growing split

between his Zionist ideology and those of his colleagues. This split became more

pronounced in the years following World War I when Britain established separate

mandates in Palestine and Transjordan. Jabotinsky envisioned a Jewish Palestine that

encompassed all of Eretz Israel, which, in Jabotinsky's estimation, accounted to the

territory that fell under the biblical United Monarchy under Saul, David, and

Solomon.[28] In 1919, the World Zionist Organization submitted a proposal to the

delegates at the Paris Peace Conference signaling their desire to control this territory

as a Jewish state. Arguing before the Conference, WZO Chair Chaim Weizmann

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[26] Yishuv is the term for the Jewish community living in Palestine under the Ottoman Empire and British Mandate; Yehuda Benari, *Ze'ev Vladimir Jabotinsky: A Biographical Sketch* (Tel Aviv: Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, 1977), 12.

[27] Benari, *From the Pen of Jabotinsky*, 19.

[28] This territory stretched from Sidon, Lebanon in the north, beyond Wadi Gaza in the south, to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, and to Amman, Jordan and Daara, Syria in the east

asserted that the extended borders and "control of its rivers and their headwaters" were "essential for the necessary economic foundation of the country."[29]

However, in 1921, the British government established Transjordan as a separate territory from Palestine, utilizing the land situated east of the Jordan River. This move by the British Colonial Office sought to fulfill promises made to the Sherif of Mecca in 1915 to grant an independent Arab state in British controlled portions of the Syrian Vilayet.[30] The British made the promise of an independent Arab state to counteract the Ottoman declaration of jihad against the Allied forces during World War I. The Ottomans hoped to unite the global Muslim population against Britain, 70 million of which lived in British India. Given the importance of the Indian Army to the British war effort, Britain needed the promise of Arab independence to ensure their continued support.[31] This marked a significant setback for Zionists who believed the Balfour Declaration promised them the entirety of Palestine.

The Zionist enterprise suffered a further setback the following year when the Colonial Office released the White Paper of 1922. Attempting to curry favor with Ottoman subjects during World War I, Great Britain made competing promises of independence to Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine. After British forces captured the region during the Sinai and Palestine Campaign in 1918, they established colonial administrations across the Middle East. Once the war ended, several Arab

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[29] Chaim Weizmann, "Proposals Presented to the Peace Conference," in Isaiah Friedman, ed. *The Rise of Israel: Tension in Palestine, peacemaking in Paris, 1919* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987).
[30] "Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem," in Aaron Klieman, ed. *The Rise of Israel: Great Britain and Palestine, 1920-1925* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987)
[31] Timothy Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites and Arab Rule: The Sherifian Solution* (London: Routledge, 2003), 19-26

populations declared independence, which went unrecognized by the British Crown.

Instead, Britain took colonial control in 1920 under the League of Nations' Mandate

for Palestine, disregarding previous promises for independence. After large-scale

protests broke out across Palestine between 1919 and 1921, Britain reaffirmed their

plans for Palestine by stating that it was never the intent of the British government to

create a Jewish state in Palestine. Instead, they argued that Palestine was suitable to

Jewish immigration and would serve as a national home for both Jews and Arabs,

where neither would be subordinated to the other. They also reaffirmed that Palestine

would remain under British control and Jewish immigration would be subject to the

concept of "economic absorptive capacity."[32] This reinterpretation marked a huge

blow to the WZO, which reluctantly agreed to the new interpretation of the Balfour

Declaration.

Weizmann's acceptance of this new interpretation of Balfour caused friction

between Jabotinsky and other members of the WZO leadership. Jabotinsky believed

that Weizmann had not forcefully lobbied against the Colonial Secretary and argued

that at the very least the WZO should offer a qualified assent that offered caveats and

reiterated WZO aspirations for Palestine. Jabotinsky further reiterated his objections

the following January at the Actions Committee meeting in Berlin. He presented the

committee with three resolutions: The government was to be summarily informed that

tepid support was not enough, that uncertainty over the extent of British backing was

causing investors and donors to hold back, thus bringing the Yishuv to ultimate

bankruptcy; all anti-Zionists and anti-Semites were to be removed from the Colonial

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[32] Huneidi, *A Broken Trust,* 58.

administration; and the WZO was to publicly reaffirm their original aspirations for a Jewish State. These proposals were all summarily rejected, causing Jabotinsky to ultimately quit his position on the Executive Council of the WZO.[33]

Following his departure, Jabotinsky established a new organization to promote his political vision: Brit HaTzionim HaRevizionistim, or Hatzohar.[34] This organization, he hoped, would offer a political alternative to the rank and file leadership of the WZO and refocus Zionism on the creation of a Jewish state encompassing the entire Palestinian Mandate. Though some of Jabotinsky's confidants joined him in his new party, most veteran Zionists eschewed invites to the party, believing it unnecessarily divided Zionists and antagonized the British authorities who controlled Palestine. Instead, the initial growth of the party came from Jewish students at Central European universities. Younger Jews flocked to Revisionism because it offered what they saw as a rebuffing of the perceived failures of the first generation of Zionists.[35]

This anti-British rejectionism in particular drew Moshe Cahana into Revisionist Zionism. Cahana believed that despite the British being beneficial to Jews in Palestine initially, by the 1940s, they caused did more harm than good. Broken promises of independence, the continued colonization of Palestine, increased restrictions on Jewish immigration, and failures to quash regional violence all

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[33] Lenni Brenner, *The Iron Wall: Zionist Revisionism from Jabotinsky to Shamir* (London: Zed Books, 1984), 46.

[34] Brit HaTzionim HaRevizionistim translates to Union (or League) of Revisionist Zionists.

[35] Brenner, *The Iron Wall*, 52.

underscored Cahana's central belief that Zionism's focus should be forcing the British out of Palestine.

Moshe Cahana and Etzel

Moshe Cahana's rejection of British imperialism informed his Zionist activism in the 1940s. As part of the third generation of Zionist activists, Cahana believed in immediate independence for Jews in Palestine. He argued that Zionist policy should not be to negotiate or compromise with British authorities, as they could not be trusted. Instead, Cahana believed that the purpose of Revisionist activists by 1940 was, through militancy, to make British life "so miserable in Eretz Israel, that they should realize that they have to leave."[36]

When he turned eighteen in 1940, Moshe Cahana shunned the potential of military service with the British Army and instead joined a formal Zionist organization for the first time. By 1940, some of Cahana's cousins were members of the mainstream paramilitary organization in the Yishuv, Haganah. Being a steadfast follower of Jabotinsky, however, Cahana joined a local Revisionist group in Petah Tikvah that prepared recruits for service in Etzel. A friend of Cahana's from school preceded him in the organization and served as his contact within the group. This group served as Cahana's formal introduction to Revisionist activism. He participated in meetings, attended lectures, and introduced himself to many ranking officials within the Revisionist movement.[37]

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[36] Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories.*
[37] Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories.*

The early 1940s marked a period of transition for the Revisionist movement. With the death of Jabotinsky in August 1940 and the formal cession of violence against the British empire, the future direction of Revisionism was in doubt. Jabotinsky's death created a power vacuum within revisionism as activists squabbled over the ideological future of the movement. As a result, several streams of thought opened within Revisionism allowing activists to mold the central tenets of Zionism to fit what they believed to be the best political trajectory. Within Revisionism's nebulous state, equal space grew for anti-Arab hardliners, reluctant militants, and anti-British revolutionaries.

This nebulous state endured its first test when the British continued enforcing the provisions of the White Paper. Many Revisionist activists questioned and protested organizational leadership, believing them to have acquiesced to British colonialism and betrayed the foundations of Zionism. Chief among those questioning the direction of Revisionism was Avraham Stern. Stern had been a member of Etzel high command under Jabotinsky and one of his close advisors. However, Stern strongly objected to ending operations against the British arguing that there was no difference between German Chancellor Adolph Hitler and British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain or between Germany sending Jews to extermination camps and Britain sealing off their means of escape from Europe to Palestine.[38] Stern's chief concern was the evacuation of European Jews to Palestine, flouting British policy. As a result, Stern concluded that Palestinian Jews should be fighting the British rather

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[38] Colin Shindler, *The Land Beyond Promise: Israel, Likud and the Zionist Dream* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 22.

than supporting the war effort, believing that dying for a foreign occupier that was ultimately harming European Jews and their efforts at escaping, and obstructing the creation of a Jewish Palestine was fruitless. Thus, in the fall of 1940, Stern and his followers broke off from Etzel and founded the National Military Organization in Israel, or Lehi.[39]

After Lehi split off from Etzel, many smaller organizations began breaking off their attachments to Etzel and traditional Revisionism in favor of the new more militant stream of Revisionism. This choice faced Cahana in 1941 as his organization voted to break off and join Lehi. Cahana was the only member to vote in favor of remaining attached to Etzel, so after the vote he resigned his membership. Cahana's objection to Lehi was in the disunity in their founding. While he agreed with the stance of Lehi and believed that Jews in the Yishuv should not cease fighting the British during World War II, Cahana felt that Jewish solidarity across Palestine was paramount to Zionism's success in securing a Jewish state. By branching off into separate groups and fighting between each other, he believed that Zionist militants weakened their ability to counter British actions in the Middle East.[40]

Following Cahana's departure, he reached out to contacts he made in Etzel, who assisted him in joining the organization in 1942. After his initial training in weapons use and combat, officials within Etzel realized the potential of Cahana's relatively unknown political profile within Zionist organizations. Etzel officials drafted Cahana into their intelligence wing, Delek. Formed when Etzel Commander

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[39] Lehi was an acronym for Lohamei Herut Israel, or Fighters for the Freedom of Israel.
[40] Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories.*

Menachem Begin divided the paramilitary organization into different corps with specialized focuses, Delek was primarily responsible for gathering and translating intelligence during World War II and its aftermath, as well as maintaining contact with local and foreign journalists and organizations.[41] His political anonymity allowed Cahana to interact with Jews from various wings of the political spectrum and gather information on their various activities for Etzel. Thus, officials tasked Cahana with infiltrating, spying, and reporting on the staunchly anti-Zionist Palestine Communist Party.[42] Cahana attended party meetings and rallies, and gathered intelligence on party ideologies, plans, and members. Cahana also engaged in political and military maneuvers aimed against British colonialism on behalf of the Communist Party. This involvement ingratiated him to movement leaders, allowing Cahana deep access to the inner workings of the party. Once a month, Cahana met with a handler in Delek to relay information gathered. After the first three or four meetings, Cahana's information proved so valuable that he began meeting with officials two or three times each week, many of which were attended by Etzel leader Menachem Begin himself. This early work within Etzel served Cahana well as he caught the eye of leaders within the organization, which allowed him to quickly rise through the ranks during his tenure with the group. Cahana also forged a strong relationship with Begin during this period, causing him to become a close confidant and one of Begin's trusted advisors throughout the 1940s, and a close friend of Begin's throughout their lives.[43]

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[41] J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror Out of Zion: The Fight for Israeli Independence* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2010).

[42] In Yiddish, פאלעסטינישע קומוניסטישע פארטיי, or Palestinische Komunistische Partei.

[43] Michael Cahana, interview by author, November 10, 2015.

The Palestine Communist Party was the chosen target by Cahana because of their anti-Zionist internationalism. The party began in 1923 after a merger between multiple smaller Communist parties in Palestine and adopted a position supporting the Arab national movement and denouncing Zionism as a movement of the Jewish bourgeoisie allied with British imperialism. Though Jewish Communists started the party, by the late-1920s, the party recruited Arab members in large numbers as it started a relationship with the Palestine Arab Workers Party.[44] The party's adherence to a foreign, non-Jewish institution troubled Cahana. Like Jabotinsky, Cahana distrusted the Soviet Union for two primary reasons. First, Cahana understood the history of the Russian persecution of Jews. As an avid follower of Vladimir Jabotinsky's, Cahana read countless stories of Russian pogroms and blood libels. Against this backdrop, the Palestinian Communists' political attachment to Russia, at least amongst Jews in Palestine, ignored this history of oppression and would only lead to further oppression of Jews in the future, this time extending beyond Russian territorial borders. The second critique of Jewish Communists in Palestine was Cahana's belief that these Jews forsook their own national identity. For Cahana, Jewish national identity was synonymous with the creation of a Jewish Palestine. By being anti-Zionist, Jewish communists usurped this identity in favor of a national identity to which they were traditionally excluded. Thus, their presence in Palestine put the Zionist enterprise at risk and made attaining a Jewish state more difficult.[45]

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[44] See Musa Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party, 1919-1948: Arab and Jew in the Struggle for Internationalism* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 1979), and Zachary Lockman *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

[45] Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories.*

Cahana remained in this Delek position for over a year before Etzel leadership decided that he would be of more use at Etzel headquarters. Cahana's time at Etzel headquarters proved to be beneficial to his career as a militant. He became a trusted advisor to Menachem Begin, which allowed him to sit in on leadership meetings and exert an amount of influence over Etzel policy decisions. In this role, Cahana attempted to force cooperation between the various Jewish paramilitary groups in Palestine, believing their unity to be essential if they were to defeat the British. When Haganah members kidnapped several members of Etzel in 1944 and 1945, Cahana pushed for restraint and urged against retaliatory measures. He argued that the division of paramilitary units assisted the British colonial effort and that with Jews "degraded into fighting each other…. The British [would] be able to destroy and overrun [them]."[46]

By 1946, Cahana rose high enough in Etzel to assist in high-level planning and operations for Etzel. This granted him an intimate role in orchestrating one of Etzel's most prominent actions in the Mandate Era, the deadly King David Hotel Bombing in July 1946. The King David Hotel was an outward symbol for British colonialism in Palestine as the southern wing of the hotel housed the British central administrative quarters for the Mandate Government, notably the Secretariat of the Government of Palestine and the Headquarters of the British Armed Forces in Palestine and Transjordan. After British authorities conducted a series of raids in June 1946 in which 10,000 to 20,000 British soldiers ransacked locations related to Jewish militias

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[46] Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories.*

in search of weapons and arrested nearly 3,000 Jewish militants, Jewish groups in

Palestine, reeling from the crackdown, devised ways to retaliate.[47]

Etzel leadership decided the best possible plan of action was to attack the

British at King David. Disguised as hotel waiters and maintenance staff, several Etzel

members planted a bomb in the basement of the main building of the hotel. The

ensuing blast collapsed the western half of the hotel and killed 91 people. Cahana

pushed for this level of violence against the British, believing that an action this severe

would cripple the Mandate Government and shorten the push for independence. He

also believed that devising one large attack on British headquarters could minimize

casualties. To this end, Etzel members sent various warnings of an imminent attack

by telephone, including one to the hotel's central switchboard. However, earlier that

morning the hotel received a hoax call, prompting a bomb search that yielded no

results. As a result, hotel staff ignored the call by Etzel members. Journalists at the

Palestine Post also received warning calls, which they forwarded on to British

authorities at the hotel, but no evacuation was ordered. This fact, Cahana believed,

absolved Etzel of blame for the large death toll, as they offered multiple efforts to

decrease the damage, but British hubris caused these efforts to fail.[48]

Following the attack on the King David Hotel, Etzel leadership scattered

across Palestine and went into hiding. Moshe Cahana, having recently been promoted

to the rank of Rav Samal, stayed in Jerusalem as Etzel District Commander for the

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[47] Thurston Clarke, *By Blood and Fire: The Attack on the King David Hotel* (New York: G.P. Puttnam's Sons, 1981).

[48] Clarke, *By Blood and Fire*, and Nicholas Bethell, *The Palestine Triangle: The struggle for the Holy Land, 1935-48* (London: Futura, 1980).

Jerusalem District. Cahana avoided detection by splitting his time between an apartment he rented above the Mahane Yehuda police station and hiding at the sanitarium his sister ran in Givat Shaul. By constantly switching between the two, Cahana avoided capture by British authorities.[49] Just before Rosh Hashanah in 1946, however, Haganah, the dominant Jewish military group in Palestine, kidnapped Cahana with the intent of turning him into British authorities. They brought him to Ramat Gan, tied him to a bed, and interrogated him for a week. When Etzel officials threatened the forceful liberation of Cahana, Haganah officials brought him to Ramot HaShavim for a prisoner transfer. Following his release, Etzel leaders feared Cahana's high profile in Jerusalem would make him a continued target for Haganah and local British authorities and transferred him to Haifa, where he was Commander of the Northern District.[50]

Facing bankruptcy after World War II and no longer interested in maintaining colonial interests in the region, the British resolved to abandon their imperial claim to Palestine in 1947. In their place, the United Nations resolved that there should be two independent states created, one for Palestine's Jewish population centers, and one for Palestine's Arab population centers. Palestine's Jews received 56 percent of the territory, an area that contained 499,000 Jews and 438,000 Arabs; and Palestine's Arab population received 42 percent of the land, which held a population of 818,000 Arabs and 10,000 Jews. Deferring to religious significance, Jerusalem and the surrounding area in central Palestine was to become an independent territory

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[49] Moshe Cahana, Miscellaneous Documents, 5159/14-מ, National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, Israel.
[50] Moshe Cahana National Service Card, Etzel Service Card Applications, Letters Kaf, K4h-11, Archive of Revisionist Zionism, Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, Tel Aviv, Israel.

administered by the United Nations and residents were given the right to choose to be citizens of either of the two new states.[51]

Jewish leadership in Palestine accepted the partition plan as "the indispensable minimum" and praised their newfound international recognition, despite many leaders seeking more for an independent Jewish state, namely the control of Jerusalem. The Arab population of Palestine did not share the Jewish optimism toward the partition. During the resolution debates, representatives of the Palestinian Arabs and the Arab League staunchly criticized UN action and rejected its authority in all matters related to Arab Palestinian independence. Arab leaders argued that because Arabs possessed a demographic majority in the region, despite Jews holding the majority in the territory that would become Israel, only Arabs held a proper claim to the land.[52]

The UN General Assembly voted in favor of the Partition Plan for Palestine on November 29, 1947 and British authorities began an organized withdrawal over the next six months, finalizing their withdrawal from Palestine on May 14, 1948. Following British withdrawal, the Jews in Palestine declared independence under the banner of Israel. Between November 1947 and May 1948, violence between Jews and Arabs in Palestine increased exponentially, with the Jewish population suffering nearly 3,000 casualties in the first six months of fighting. Following the Jewish declaration of independence, neighboring Arab nations invaded Israel and Palestine,

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[51] Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 47.

[52] Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 190; and Morris, *A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, 67.

ushering in a new wave of increasingly militarized violence.[53] The 1948 War lasted

about a year and resulted in a combined death toll of about 14,000, with Israeli deaths

being slightly under 7,000 and Arab deaths being slightly over 7,000.[54] Aside from

the death toll, an estimated 750,000 Arab Palestinians fled or were expelled from their

homes. These refugees accounted for half of Palestine's prewar Arab population,

drastically changing the postwar demographics of Israel.[55] Following independence,

the Israeli government barred these Arab refugees from returning to the newly-created

state, ensuring a Jewish-majority population in the newly independent state. An

armistice between Israel and its Arab neighbors began in 1949, with firm,

internationally recognized, borders being drawn. Under these new boundaries, Israel

constituted about 78 percent of the original British Mandate[56]

When the war broke out in 1947, Cahana returned to Jerusalem to fight. The

bulk of Cahana's service in the war came in the Mamilla district of Jerusalem. When

the United Nations passed partition resolutions in November 1947, Arab groups

burned and looted Jewish-owned shops in Mamilla and killing Jewish residents. In

response, Etzel and Lehi sent squadrons to the city to protect local Jews. Etzel

militants conducted numerous attacks against Arab rioters over the next few weeks

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[53] Yoav Gelber, *Palestine, 1948: War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), 85.

[54] These death figures remain disputed between different sources with some placing the Arab death toll as low as 3,700 and some placing it as high as 13,000. The middling, and most widely accepted, numbers are used here.

[55] Like death toll figures, the number of refugees is a matter of historiographic controversy. On the low end, Israeli historian Efraim Karsh suggests there were only 550,000-600,000 refugees; on the high end, Palestinian historian Salman Abu Sitta argues that there were as many as 935,000 refugees. For the sake of neutrality, I use the middling, and most widely accepted, figure of 750,000 as suggested by historian Ilan Pappé. See Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford, Eng.: OneWorld Publications, 2006).

[56] Adam M. Garfinkle, *Politics and Society in Modern Israel: Myths and Realities* (London: Routledge, 2015), 61.

and on December 12, placed a bomb at the Damascus Gate that killed 20 people.[57]

After the bombing, fighting between Etzel, Lehi, and local Arabs intensified, with

several large attacks on civilian populations occurring over the next five months,

including the assassination of American Consul Thomas C. Wasson in May 1948.

Following the creation of Israel and Jordanian invasion of Palestine, Mamilla became

a combat zone between Israeli and Jordanian forces, with both trying to control the

whole of Jerusalem. Cahana participated in much of the violence in Mamilla, even

being wounded by Arab fire in late-1948. This fighting continued until the 1949

Armistice Agreements stopped hostilities and the district fell under Jewish control.[58]

During his service in Etzel, Moshe Cahana constantly struggled reconciling his

military service with his previous religious teachings. He approached his service as a

last-resort measure against British imperialism, and something only acceptable after

compromise and negotiations were unattainable. Following Israeli independence,

Menachem Begin offered Cahana a Knesset legislative seat as part of his new political

party Herut. Cahana turned him down, believing that his service ended with

decolonization and Israel's independence.[59]

Meir Kahane and Fourth-Generation Zionism

Following the 1948 War and Israel's independence, Zionism again entered a nebulous

period, as leaders grappled with how to form the new state. Within Revisionist

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[57] Uri Milstein, *History of Israel's War of Independence, Vol II*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 51 & 133.
[58] Moshe Cahana National Service Card.
[59] Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories.*

Zionism, the ideological diversity manifested in the formation of multiple Revisionist political parties, including Hatzohar, originally started by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Herut, founded by Begin, and Lehi's political party Reshimat HaLohmim. This ideological diversification and the questions that arose after attaining statehood gave rise to a fourth wave of Zionist politics in the late-1940s and 1950s.

Meir Kahane rose to prominence as part of this fourth wave of Zionist politics. Moshe Cahana's father, Mordechai, through his grief, introduced a young Meir to a new way to frame Zionist politics in a post-independence era. Mordechai's arrival in the Kahane household in 1939 left an indelible mark on the way Meir Kahane formed his person attachment to Zionism. Reeling from the loss of his wife the year before, Mordechai developed a distain for "Arab cruelty" that he passed along to Meir through stories of life in Palestine. This conversation dominated dinners at the Kahane house and Meir's father Charles spoke at length about "Jewish heroism" in the face of increasing violence. Moshe Cahana recalled years later that "Charles taught his sons about the spiritual strength of the Jews, as well as about their physical prowess with stories from the Bible." With each of these tales, Charles left Meir with the sense that the only way to counter Arab hostility was through Jewish power, violence, and militancy. It was during this point in his childhood that Meir Kahane first developed the hatred of Arabs that informed his Zionism throughout his adult life.[60]

Meir Kahane's growing conception of Zionism as a protective movement against Arab hostilities was emblematic of the new generation of Zionist activism that

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[60] Robert I. Friedman, *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane, From FBI Informant t Knesset Member* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990), 23-24.

arose in the years following Israeli independence. The 1948 War and the creation of Israel ushered in a new era of Zionism which no longer focused on British imperialism and the decolonization of Palestine. Israeli independence from Great Britain fulfilled the goals of the second and third generations of activists and as a fourth generation arose, Zionist goals changed. Following British withdrawal from Palestine, Arab anti-Zionism became the new largest threat to Israeli political goals. As a result, the chief aim of Zionism in the 1950s became maintaining and growing the Jewish state through militarization and population increases.

Israeli President David Ben-Gurion announced the One Million Plan, a strategic plan for the immigration and absorption of at least one million Jews from Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa into Israel within the first year of statehood. This plan became increasingly prudent as conditions for Jews in the Middle East and North Africa deteriorated in the wake of the 1948 War. Jews from Iran to Morocco found themselves being dispossessed, disenfranchised, and the victims of increasing anti-Semitic violence as the nations at war with Israel penalized their Jewish population out of a belief that they presented a risk to internal security. As a result, roughly 900,000 Jews left these territories, or roughly 90 percent of the Jewish population, with a vast majority of them immigrating into Israel between 1945 and 1980.[61]

This fourth wave of Zionist politics also saw increasing violence between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Over the next several decades, Israel engaged in several

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[61] Devorah Hacohen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and Its Repercussions in the 1950s and After* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

wars with neighboring nations as well as incurred numerous attacks from Palestinian fedayeen militants throughout the 1950s and 1960s. This continual violence inspired the creation of compulsory conscription laws in Israel and fostered a culture of militancy amongst Israeli Jews. This was particularly true for Israel's political right-wing, who were the ideological successors to Jabotinsky. For right-wing Israelis, Jabotinsky's ideologies of Jewish strength and militancy seemed the only way to counter increasing Arab militarism. The Israeli government, thus, crafted the national strategy of allying with Western powers such as the United States, Britain, and France to build up their military and defense strength to strong-arm its Arab neighbors into lasting peace negotiations.[62]

Despite being more politically militant than his cousin, Meir Kahane was too young to join a militant organization during the Mandate era. Instead, Kahane was active in the Revisionist youth organization Betar.[63] Jabotinsky founded Betar in 1923 as the youth affiliate of the Revisionist movement and eventually served as a feeder system for young Jews who wanted to eventually join Etzel. Jabotinsky hoped that Betar could serve as a means for young Jews in Palestine and the diaspora to engage with Revisionism, become part of the national project, begin military training, and partake in a program of Jewish self-defense. By 1934, Betar boasted 70,000 members, 40,000 of which were in Poland.[64]

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[62] Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

[63] Betar (בית"ר) is an acronym for Brit Yosef Trumpeldor (ברית יוסף תרומפלדור); although Trumpeldor's name is purposely misspelled with a taf (ת) in order to produce the acronym.

[64] Jacob Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement: The Right in Zionism and in Israel, 1925–1985* (London: Routledge, 1988).

The Betar youth movement came to America in the summer of 1940 as Revisionist Zionists sought to expand their influence in American politics. A few months before the Nazi invasion of Poland outbreak of World War II in 1939, Ze'ev Jabotinsky believed there was a need for Revisionists to foster stronger political ties to the United States. Jabotinsky tasked two groups with gaining public support for the creation of a Jewish army and expanding Revisionist political influence in America. The first organization was The New Zionist Organization of America (NZOA), headed by Benzion Netanyahu. The NZOA highlighted the failings of British colonialism in Palestine and lobbied for Palestine's placement as a global problem in the U.S. State Department's agenda, rather than merely a regional issue. Hillel Kook (known by Peter Bergson in the United States) headed the second organization, the Irgun Delegation to the United States. The Irgun Delegation worked with American Jewish groups to heighten public awareness of Jewish struggles in Palestine.[65]

In the 1940s, Zionism was still a relatively small movement in the United States. Americans were largely excluded from leadership positions at international Zionist conferences and only a small percentage of American Jews participated in the Zionist movement. Mainstream American Zionism focused less on the creation of a state for all Jews and instead envisioned Zionism as a philanthropic effort on behalf of other Jews. Aside from state-building, American Zionists believed that Zionism

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[65] Joanna Maura Saidel, "Revisionist Zionism in America: The Campaign to Win American Public Support, 1939-1948" (PhD diss., University of New Hampshire, 1997); Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States, 1926-1948* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

should focus on promoting and consolidating Jewish culture, arts, and knowledge for all Jews.[66]

Revisionist Zionism broke away from this mold of American Zionism. By focusing on intimate political entanglements with Jewish nationalism, Revisionist activists hoped to foster the belief that Jewish citizenship solely belonged to a future Jewish state. The expansion of Betar in New York City stemmed from this Revisionist expansion in the United States. The first Betar chapter opened in Manhattan in October 1929, but large-scale expansion of the organization began in 1940 when Hillel Kook opened a paramilitary training camp in the Catskill Mountains near Hunter, New York. Following this increased emphasis on Revisionism in the United States, Betar's American membership grew quickly and within a few years the organization boasted several hundred members in the New York area alone. The American wing of the organization focused heavily on the smuggling of weapons from the United States to Palestine. Menachem Begin sent Eli Tavin, Etzel's overseas intelligence chief, to the United States to supervise these smuggling operations. Meir Kahane's father Charles heavily participated in this smuggling. He worked with Jewish GIs returning from World War II and Meir Lansky, a Jewish mob boss and impassioned Revisionist, to smuggle out New York and New Jersey with the help of the mob-controlled Longshoreman's Union. The Union also worked with local Revisionists to sabotage weapons shipments en route from American ports to Arab countries.[67]

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[66] Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 183-185.
[67] Friedman, *The False Prophet,* 35-37.

As a prominent member in the American branch of the Mizrachi movement in Zionism, Charles Kahane pushed his sons from the outset to be politically active and join Betar. Meir Kahane joined Betar in 1946 when an older member of the East New York Chapter in Brooklyn, Shmuel Kraushar, began bringing Meir to meetings at Charles' request. Meir quickly fell in love with the organization and attended meetings several times a week, despite having to change trains twice just to get to meeting locations. After a year of activity in the East New York Chapter, Kahane switched to the newly opened Bensonhurst chapter in 1947. This new chapter allowed Kahane to work with his neighborhood friends Joseph Churba, Ralph Bieber, and Allan and Victor Mallenbaum.[68]

The Bensonhurst chapter of Betar offered a mixture of fraternity and political activism for its members. They held weekly meetings on Sunday afternoons but also had numerous special events for members to attend and often held social activities on Saturday nights. In April 1949, they hosted a Passover event that included a dramatic presentation about Etzel, a movie on Israel, a performance by the New York choir, and Hebrew singing and dancing.[69] They also held dances where Jewish youth from around the city could learn folk dancing, Hebrew songs, and popular elements of a burgeoning Israeli culture. Members could also engage in Israeli culture through the Betar choir. The choir typically had 20 members and held concerts around the city. The choir was an aspect to Betar's social calendar with which Meir Kahane was particularly involved. He was a member of the choir throughout his time in Betar and

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[68] Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought, Volume One, 1932-1975* (Jerusalem: Institute for Publication of the Writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, 2008), 21.
[69] Ibid.

was often featured as a choral soloist. At the 1948 Betar Hanukkah party, Kahane

offered solo vocal renditions of Revisionist and nationalistic hymns "Shtei Gadot

Layarden" and "Alei Barikadot."[70] Meir Kahane's most high-profile performance,

however, came when the various New York-area Revisionist organizations held a

memorial service for Jabotinsky's widow in 1949. At the citywide service, Kahane

featured heavily in the program, even chanting the "El Malei Rachamim" prayer, a

Jewish prayer for the soul of a person who has died which is often recited at the

gravesite during the burial service.[71]

Another form of fraternity fostered by New York Betar chapters was sport and

athletic events. These not only fostered a sense of community among Revisionist

youth, but they also encouraged physical fitness and readiness for eventual national

service. Betar chapters hosted a basketball league that brought together chapters from

around the New York-area, at which Meir Kahane often participated, even leading

scoring with 17 points during a game in 1951.[72] The New York chapters also

sponsored annual boxing and martial arts tournaments that encouraged adeptness in

hand-to-hand combat, a skill directly applicable to future military service. Finally,

chapters often held marksmanship training and competitions. These events were

crucial to nation-building as they served as a supplement to the military training

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[70] "Shtei Gadot Layarden" translates to "The Jordan Has Two Banks" which espoused the Revisionist ideology that Israel should constitute the whole of the original British mandate, and "Alei Barikadot" translates to "On the Barricades" which refers to Jews standing on the walls of Acre awaiting their hanging at the hands of the British.

[71] *Tel Hai*, December 31, 1948 and December 29, 1949, Jabotinsky Institute, bet 16-8/4-5.

[72] *Tel Hai*, March 14, 1951, Jabotinsky Institute, bet 16-8/4-5.

offered at the camp in the Catskills and rewarded those who excelled in military preparation.

These fraternal activities promoted Jewish masculinity as a means for overcoming the failings of the diaspora. Traditionally, Zionism painted the diaspora as a place where Jews became weak, hunched over, and passive. Through the embrace of Zionism and nationalism, activists believed, Jews could be reborn through a reconnection with the land and the regeneration of Jewish masculinity. Sarah Imhoff, in her book *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*, argues that the American Zionist image of the ideal American Jewish man had two distinctive features: it transcended geographical boundaries and centered on nonphysical traits. While this held true for mainstream American Zionists, Revisionists proved exceptional to this interpretation. Instead of accepting the United States as a place outside of the traditional concept of exile, American Revisionists argued Jewish life in the United States was the prime example of Jews growing too comfortable with their exile, much in the way European Jews had before the late-19th century. Before independence, Revisionists in America focused on preparing members to either migrate and fight in the forthcoming war or to funnel money and weapons to Jewish military forces in Palestine. After independence, the focus of American Revisionists shifted to ending the American diaspora and preparing for mass-migration. As a result, many Revisionist activities, particularly in youth organizations such as Betar, including athletic competitions and military training, served this ultimate goal of

rebuilding the American Jewish male to prepare him for immediate migration and national service in Israel. [73]

On the political side of Betar's functions, chapters in New York focused heavily on protests in the United States in hopes of sparking American sympathies, particularly in the Jewish community, for the Jewish struggle for statehood in Palestine. In April 1947, Betarim stormed the British Consulate in New York to protest the hanging of four Jews in Palestine; in September 1947, Betarim took over the British Admiralty Office to denounce the capture of the famed refugee ship Exodus; also in September Betarim protested the New York Mayor's ball held in honor of a visit from a fleet of the British Royal Navy. These activities sought to highlight the struggles under British imperialism and push for international recognition an independent Jewish state in Palestine. Beyond protests and pushes for attention, Betar youth also helped facilitate the war effort in Palestine. In 1947, two of Kahane's comrades in the Bensonhurst chapter of Betar were arrested in a Manhattan fur loft with 144 machine guns, 203 rifles, and 268 pistols which they planned to smuggle into Palestine and distribute to Jewish militants. When they were arrested, the mood in the Kahane household darkened to despair, with Nachman Kahane comparing it to the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'av.[74]

While a youth in Betar, Meir Kahane began pursuing Zionist activism in earnest. He and his brother Nachman regularly rode up and down Brooklyn's Pitkin

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[73] Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism*, 180-198; Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America*.

[74] Tisha B'Av is a mournful holiday commemorating the destruction of the Second Jewish Temple and the multiple exiles and expulsions in the diaspora; Friedman, *The False Prophet,* 36.

Avenue in a Betar sound truck that blared Zionist hymns and speeches by Jabotinsky

to solicit donations for the Jewish underground in Palestine, Nachman Kahane

recalled "[We] would get out of the truck and put an Israeli flag down in the street

[and] people just pulled huge fistfuls of cash from their pockets and threw it on the

flag. They were fighting with each other to throw the money."[75]

Kahane began his confrontational Zionist activism in 1947 during a diplomatic

visit in New York by the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Ernest Bevin.

Building off previous Betar protests of British government officials, local Betar

chapters in New York organized a large-scale protest of Bevin's visit. In his role as

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Bevin oversaw the postwar handling of

Palestine by the British government and was the man Zionists believed responsible for

the postwar struggles of Jews in Palestine and refugees attempting to migrate. When

British officials captured the Exodus in early 1947, Bevin became the face for

immigration restriction in Palestine, making him a target for Jewish militancy. When

Bevin arrived in New York to speak before the United Nations General Assembly on

the British position in the Middle East, Kahane and a group of his fellow Betarim from

Bensonhurst met Bevin's car at the port and pelted it with rocks and rotten produce.

Police quickly descended on the protestors, hitting Kahane in the head before arresting

him. This was the first of many times police arrested Kahane during his lengthy

political career.[76]

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[75] Nachman Kahana is quoted in Friedman, *The False Prophet*, 37.
[76] Yair Kotler, *Heil Kahane* (New York: Adama Books, 1986), 21; Friedman, *The False Prophet*, 37.

Following Jewish statehood in 1948, the aims of Betar protests shifted from British officials and delegations to Arab diplomats and politicians. These protests often focused on Arab UN missions around Manhattan and were typically coordinated by Moshe Rivlin, then Israel's vice-consul in New York. These demonstrations are where Meir Kahane rose to prominence. In Betar, Kahane amassed a group of young followers from working-class homes inspired by his single-minded devotion to Israel, many of whom would later assist him in his founding of the Jewish Defense League. Though he was not officially the leader of his Betar chapter, Kahane's growing following allowed him to assume many of the responsibilities associated with chapter leader, such as running meetings and leading protests.

Meir Kahane's Revisionist Zionism gained a prominent stage in Betar when he took a seat in the Culture Department of Betar's New York City region in February 1949. As part of this position, Kahane became editor of the *Tel Hai* newsletter, which surveyed local Betar news as well as news relevant to Israeli and American Jews. As editor, Kahane mixed religious themes into the newsletter, blending his orthodox upbringing with right-wing Zionism. He used the newsletter to advocate for Israel to adopting a theocracy that would only serve the Jewish people. This rankled secular-minded Betarim and caused a rift between Kahane and several of his contemporaries.

Kahane also used this platform as an expression of postwar Jewish anger. The impact of Mordechai Kahana's grief during Meir's childhood imprinted a strong sense of victimization in a young Kahane. The atrocities of the Holocaust only deepened this grief and anger over Jewish loss. Following World War II, surviving Jews reacted to the trauma of genocide in several ways. For many, their survival caused an

overwhelming feeling of guilt. These Jews believed they were at fault by surviving when so many others perished. Other Jews, such as Richard L. Rubenstein, argued that the surviving the Holocaust shattered traditional conceptions of Judaism and required a reevaluation of what it meant to be a Jew. Meir Kahane belonged to the reactionary movement amongst Jews that responded to the horrors of the Holocaust with anger towards non-Jews. This reactionary belief argued that the horrors of the Holocaust were not exclusively-German nor exclusively in the past. Instead, as Italian-Jewish writer Primo Levi argued: if it happened, it can happen again; and if it happened there, it can happen anywhere.[77] Young, unassimilated, Orthodox Jews in postwar New York struggled with a sense of helplessness and rage when attempting to understand the Holocaust. Increasingly, these Jews turned to Betar and militancy, looking for a way to strike back against the horrors inflicted on European Jews. This garnered Meir Kahane a following in Betar, as these Orthodox Jews sought to blend their anger and religious attachments to the growing struggles in Palestine, and later Israel.

With his early successes in Betar, Meir Kahane sought an open leadership position in Betar's New York region. National leadership at the time believed Kahane was too young and the maturity necessary for such a position. They turned him down and, in the spring of 1950, Kahane left Betar to form his own organization and subvert Betar's control of American Revisionist Zionism. Kahane struggled to gain support for his new organization and local Betarim constantly fought all of Kahane's efforts.

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[77] Henry Maitles, "Surviving the Holocaust: The Anger and Guilt of Primo Levi," *Journal of Genocide Research* 4 (Summer, 2010), 237-251.

This dispute came to a head in 1950 when a group of Betarim from Kahane's former chapter in Bensonhurst kidnapped him and threatened Kahane while dangling him over the edge of the George Washington bridge in Manhattan.[78]

Following his departure from Betar, Kahane joined Bnei Akiva, a right-wing religious Zionist youth group. Bnei Akiva began in 1929 as the youth wing of the Mizrachi movement, which believed that Torah should be at the center of Zionism and believed that the goals of Jewish nationalism should focus on achieving a more religious society. To this end, they pushed for Jewish sovereignty over all lands believed to be part of biblical Israel as well as for Shabbat and Kashrut laws to be official state policy. Joining Bnei Akiva marked a change in Kahane's Zionism, as he increasingly believed that with the achievement of statehood, Betar's founding goals became obsolete. Instead, he believed, Zionism should focus on bringing about an Orthodox Jewish state with laws and a populace to match, even if at the expense of Arab and secular citizens of Israel.[79]

Conclusion

Though only separated by ten years in age, Moshe and Meir Kahane belonged to two distinct generations of Zionism. Moshe Cahana, as an adherent to the third generation of Zionism viewed the ideology as a decolonizing movement designed to counter British imperialism in the Middle East. He embraced militant Jewish nationalism and partook in some of the most violent anti-British campaigns of the

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[78] Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought*, 25; Friedman, *The False Prophet*, 41-44.
[79] Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought, 25*; Friedman, *The False Prophet*, 46.

1940s. Despite his acceptance of anti-British violence, Cahana arrived at this militancy hesitantly. For Cahana, militancy was a last resort, undertaken to save Jews from imminent destruction. Moshe Cahana spent eight years fighting in militant organizations and working to counter British imperialism in Palestine. Following the decolonization of Palestine and Israeli independence, Cahana left national service, believing that other struggles required his immediate attention.

Meir Kahane, on the other hand, approached Zionism through the postwar prism of Jewish loss. The grief of his uncle colored Kahane's early life and influenced his eventual embrace of a militant Zionism that privileged Jewish strength, heroism, and triumph over anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist violence. Too young to fight in the wars that created the Jewish state, Kahane heralded a Zionism that embraced strengthening the Jewish state through strengthening Israeli military forces and expanding Israel's population and territorial sovereignty.

Despite both men being ideological successors to Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the differences in their conceptions of Revisionist Zionism, drew the Moshe and Meir Kahane apart in later activism. As both brought Revisionism forward through the 20th century, they continued adapting the ideology to fit the world in which they lived. When Moshe Cahana left Israel and emigrated to the United States in 1957, he again adapted Revisionist Zionism to serve as a response to racial inequality in Houston and the American South. As Meir Kahane continued his activism, he faced a New York borough undergoing drastic population shifts through black migration and white flight. Kahane adapted Revisionist Zionism to serve working-class Jews who feared the drastic demographic and economic changes in postwar Brooklyn. These diverging

applications and the worlds in which they existed drew Moshe Cahana and Meir

Kahane apart during the 1960s and eventually informed their oppositional politics.

3 – Moshe Cahana, Ethical Zionism, and Civil Rights in the American South

"When I came to the convention, I came packed, and I made all necessary arrangements in the congregation for probably this Friday night I will be in jail in Alabama," noted Moshe Cahana in a speech before the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly in May 1963. As a prominent voice within this group, Cahana hoped to garner Assembly support for a delegation of rabbis traveling to Alabama to participate in Martin Luther King's Birmingham Campaign, which saw civil rights activists attacked by police and arrested while protesting racial inequality in the American South. The delegation Cahana led to Birmingham was a crowning achievement in his life and was emblematic of his many years as a civil rights activist in Houston and across the South.

Arriving in 1959, when Texas was in the throes of a bitter struggle over African American civil rights, Moshe Cahana's life in Houston saw him become one of the South's prominent Jewish activists. Equating African American struggles for political equality with his own struggles under the British Mandate, Cahana believed Revisionist Zionism mandated action in all rights movements, not just those that directly affected Jews. Around this idea, Cahana crafted a philosophy of ethical Zionism that blended the teachings of the Musar Movement in Jewish ethics with anti-British Revisionist Zionism. What resulted was his philosophy of ethical Zionism, which treated Zionism as a core ethical framework applicable to both Jews and non-Jews seeking political freedom. This ethical grounding framed his political activism throughout his life in the United States.

Moshe Cahana's activism represents an often-overlooked facet to Jewish civil rights activism, the impact of Jewish nationalism. The intersection between race, nationalism, and colonialism for black activists in American civil rights struggles has long been discussed in historical literature. Early scholars on the issue, such as Gerald Horne, John Dower, and Reginald Kearney, examined the ways in which black activists viewed American wars overseas, arguing that black activists often either rejected American imperial efforts or sympathized with enemy combatants, believing them to be people of color fighting against white imperialism.[1] These works primarily addressed the ways in which black activists viewed American foreign policy, particularly when dealing with countries deemed non-white, such as Japan, Vietnam, and the decolonizing world, through the lens of their own subjugation at the hands of the American racial hierarchy. Conversely, scholars such as Mary Dudziak and Thomas Borstelmann explore how anxieties over foreign policy decisions during the Cold War informed how Americans approached complex questions around race and civil rights.[2] Like earlier scholars, these new works focused on how African American activists engaged with top-down foreign policy decisions.

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[1] See John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986); and Reginald Kearney, *African American views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition?* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

[2] See Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and US Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 20001); Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922-1963* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); and Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Most recently, however, scholars have increasingly explored the ways in which civil rights activists engaged with decolonial struggles around the world that often did not factor into official US foreign policy.[3] While these studies often addressed decolonization struggles in the Middle East, with Keith Feldman's book *A Shadow Over Palestine* directly addressing postcolonial struggles in Israel and Palestine, they do so solely through the examination of Arab struggles for autonomy. Jewish pushes for statehood are either ignored or treated as an extension of European colonialism. When Zionism and Jewish nationalism are discussed as motivations for political activism, scholars often approach them from an Ashke-normative perspective of European Jews using nationalism as a defense against persecution in Eastern Europe.[4] The experiences of non-European Jews in the United States is absent from these narratives and Jewish struggles over national identity are left unexamined.

Cahana's activism bucks against these scholarly trends by demonstrating the ways in which many Jewish activists harbored a national identity divorced from Europeanness and instead often conflicted with European colonialism. Non-European Jewish activists often navigated their own identity as colonial subjects, both in relation to anti-Semitic violence and European imperial control over the region, to respond to American political issues. Moshe Cahana responded to African American second-class citizenship with the same anti-colonial outrage that inspired his Zionism as a British subject in Mandate Palestine. Like many American Jews in the 1960s, Moshe

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[3] Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Keith P. Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
[4] See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

Cahana's colonial identity caused him to embrace political movements focused on racial minorities outside the Jewish community, equating their struggles for representation and autonomy with his own. As such, Cahana's deep involvement in African American civil rights struggles in the American South adds complexity to our understanding of the movement and the Jewish activists who participated in it.

Ethical Zionism

At the core of Cahana's activism was his belief that Zionism was not merely a Jewish political ideology. Despite Zionism's original intent being the creation of a Jewish State in Palestine and the resurgence of a cultural Jewish identity in the face of increasing assimilation, Cahana felt that the ideology could expand its focus in the wake of the creation of Israel in 1948. If Zionism solely had the goal of state building, it became obsolete in 1948. Instead, Cahana argued for a Zionism that "recognizes Jewish peoplehood and the centrality of Eretz Israel in [Jewish] life" and served as an outward inspiration "for the Jewish people and for all nations" in equal measure.[5] Thus, instead of being solely a statecraft project for Jews, Cahana saw Zionism as a core ethical framework that should apply to all peoples, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

Cahana argued that Jews needed to act against discrimination, disenfranchisement, and oppression across the world, whether it was "Birmingham or Bombay, Jackson or Jerusalem, Oxford, Miss. or Odessa."[6] He felt that the values of anti-colonialism, political autonomy, and cultural freedom he saw as the core of

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[5] Moshe Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century* (Houston, TX: Self-published, 2000), 7.
[6] Moshe Cahana, "Civil Rights and Human Rights are the Same," *Jewish Herald Voice*, April 25, 1963, Jewish Herald Voice Archive, Houston, TX.

Revisionist Zionism could serve as an example for broad-spectrum political activism

and spiritual refinement. In this interpretation, Zionism became a universalist ideology

that not only pushed for Israeli statehood, but demanded decolonization in India,

Palestine, Vietnam, and across Africa and Asia. Cahana used this ideology in his own

activism and made it the focal point for all religious education at Congregation Brith

Shalom where it became central to the Houston synagogue's identity.

Cahana applied ethical Zionism to African American struggles in the South,

framing civil rights protest as a fight against colonialism, both political and cultural.[7]

In Mandate Palestine, Cahana witnessed the struggles that befell Jews because of their

statelessness and lack of political control. Growing up in Safed, in the 1920s and

1930s, northern Palestine's immense interethnic violence arising in response to British

imperialism in the region colored Cahana's childhood and formative years. He

witnessed the violence of the 1929 Palestine riots firsthand when his family home was

set on fire by Arab rioters, causing him and several of his young cousins to run

through the street seeking any form of safe haven. Cahana further suffered personal

loss during the Arab Revolt of 1936, when eight members of his family died at the

hands of a band of protesters, including his mother, grandmother, and sister. Cahana

tied this violence to a natural outcropping of British imperialism and blamed imperial

authorities for a policy of inaction that resulted in thousands of deaths of Jews and

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[7] African American and Latino activists regularly framed their struggles under the guise of fighting white imperialism and in concert with anti-colonial movies across the developing world. See Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956-1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Keith P. Feldman, *A Shadow Over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

Arabs in Palestine. Without adequate political power of their own, Jews and Arabs in Palestine were forced to fight one another for what little political favor he thought they could curry from the British.[8] Believing there to be no other way to counter this political desperation, Cahana joined the nationalist paramilitary organization Etzel in 1940 and became a prominent figure in the Jewish push for statehood that culminated in the 1948 War and Israeli national independence.

Cahana saw similar oppression in the American South. He argued that "every sovereign nation [had] the right to live by the political structure of its choice and under its system of law."[9] However, in the South, African Americans did not possess political autonomy, nor could they live under a system of law that in no way benefited them. Instead, he believed, southern governments treated black citizens as colonial subjects, denying them any influence in the government they lived under and any political reproach. The risk of this, he argued, was that "the [southern] struggle could become fiery and bloody," just as the struggle in Palestine had been years earlier.[10] African Americans would grow more desperate the longer they were denied political rights. When this desperation coupled with a feeling of personal empowerment, violence was an inevitability if oppressive systems were not abolished.[11] Ultimately, this was because "long-lasting vulnerability [invited] devastating aggression." For Cahana, violence always accompanied discrimination and bigotry while "[social]

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[8] Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century*, 46.
[9] Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century*, 43.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

brotherhood inevitably followed justice, reason, [and] good will."[12] Thus, the only

way to solve the issues in the South was to strive for racial justice and equality.

By the time Moshe Cahana began his civil rights activism in the early 1960s,

the roots of black militancy were present across the South. In 1957, Robert F.

Williams applied for a charter with the National Rifle Association in hopes of arming

the black citizens of Monroe, North Carolina, who faced numerous violent attacks

from the large Ku Klux Klan population in the city. Williams named Monroe's new

NRA chapter the Black Armed Guard, and it consisted of about 50-60 black men who

were determined to defend the local black community, by violent means if necessary.

This came to a head in the summer of 1957 when the Black Armed Guard helped

fortify and defend the house of Dr. Albert Perry. When numerous KKK members

appeared, the two sides exchanged fire before the KKK ultimately fled. In his book,

Negroes with Guns, Williams advocated for responding to violence with violence,

arguing: "It has always been an accepted right of Americans, as the history of our

Western states proves, that where the law is unable, or unwilling, to enforce order, the

citizens can, and must act in self-defense against lawless violence." He went on to say,

"racists consider themselves superior beings and are not willing to exchange their

superior lives for our inferior ones. They are most vicious and violent when they can

practice violence with impunity."[13]

Robert Williams's brand of violent activism worried Cahana. As a proponent

of nonviolence, Cahana felt that resorting to violence would only harm the movement

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[12] Cahana, "Civil Rights and Human Rights…"
[13] Robert F. Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, (New York: Marzani & Munsell, Inc., 1962), 4.

and undermine what civil rights activists wanted to achieve. Scarred by the violence he endured in Mandate Palestine, Cahana was determined not to see the same violence occur in the United States, even though he understood subordinated communities' need to defend themselves against state-sanctioned violence and aggression. He also used a religious window to frame activism. His views on violence drew him towards nonviolent activists such as Martin Luther King Jr. and ensured his participation in nonviolent marches and protests.

Cahana decried the violence that accompanied white southerners' oppression of African Americans. Speaking on his disgust toward this violent oppression, Cahana spoke out against the violent killings of black civil rights activists across the South. He urged that "[his] prime concern [was] not about who pulled the trigger." Instead, Cahana focused on "the poisoned climate that could produce a murderer." The murder of civil rights activists in the South did not arise in a vacuum. Instead, Cahana argued, these murders were emblematic of a larger culture of hostility and torture. He believed that southern societies, as a whole, were responsible for the killing of activists. Even "the church and the synagogue [could] not wash their hands and say they did not shed this blood" because they were complicit through continued silence. By not actively working to prevent the violence and change the culture around racial prejudices, southerners, even those who opposed such discrimination, condemned black activists to continued violence.[14]

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[14] Moshe Cahana's Speech at the Houston Conference on Race and Religion. Metropolitan Houston Conference on Religion and Race papers, 1963, SC-2850, American Jewish Archive, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH.

The next goal of Cahana's ethical Zionism was to ensure the political equality and autonomy of African Americans, particularly how blacks related to the American government and how the government related to them. Peace and safety, he argued, could only be advanced by economic and political justice. This, he argued, was the goal of Revisionist Zionism. While under British control, neither Jews nor Arabs in Palestine had political power or civil rights. Cahana argued that without autonomy or rights the ethnic conflict between the two disempowered groups would continue. It was only through the capitulation of political control on the part of the British that peace would come, for, with political control, ultimately both sides would be in a position of power enough to deal with each other and come to a peaceful solution to their conflict.[15]

Though he did not argue for African Americans in the South to possess autonomous territory, as he had for Jews in Palestine, Cahana believed that Revisionism's demand for political power was translatable to southern society. He argued that the "highest level of democracy [was] based on a scrupulous respect for the rights, the welfare, the dignity of others, along with trust in every individual's ability to make right decisions."[16] Thus, it was the governments' duty to ensure equal political rights for African Americans. This meant an end to voting restrictions, the creation of open primaries, and the type of voting regulations ultimately present in the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

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[15] Moshe Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories*, interview by Michael Cahana, VHS, 2000, in possession of family.
[16] Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century*, 50.

The final aspect to ethical Zionism was the assurance of cultural and familial stability for African Americans living under the yoke of southern oppression. Cahana believed that building up Israel and rejuvenating Jewish culture were the paramount Mitzvot, or good deeds, of the modern era. This could be achieved by encouraging Jews to strive to live in Israel and help to develop the country economically, culturally, morally, and spiritually. Cahana's philosophy stemmed from his reading of Ahad Ha'am and Cultural Zionism. Ahad Ha'am was an early Russian Zionist who opposed traditional political Zionism. Ha'am believed that political Zionism failed to account for the *hitpardut*, or debilitating fragmentation, of Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Merely gathering Jewish communities in Palestine would not fix this fragmentation. Rather, the key to countering the fragmentation was creating a 'cultural domicile' within Palestine. This cultural center, built around a shared language and history, would serve as a unifier for all Jewish communities migrating to Palestine.

Cultural Zionism was crucial to Cahana's Zionist ideology. Though he believed in political Revisionism and advocated for the creation and strengthening of a Jewish State in Palestine, he believed that political freedom was only half of the final goal. Israel could not survive as an independent nation without the continued rejuvenation of the Jewish spirit through spiritual and ethical refinement. The main pursuit of Jewry, he argued, should be the "moral, spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth" that could ensure an "amicable, noble, and pure" Israel for future generations.[17]

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[17] Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century*, 7.

In this way, Israel could serve as an example for the whole of world civilization, including the American South.[18] He argued that "ethnic and cultural subgroups should be encouraged to preserve and foster their distinctive voices and colors, and to present their distinctiveness to the cultural rainbow of society."[19] Cahana believed that black life in the South must be allowed to flourish, something that was not happening under segregation. The way to achieve this, Cahana believed, was to build up black cultural institutions and end segregation in all areas of southern society. To this end, Cahana frequently worked with black spiritual leaders, spoke at churches, and participated in black civic enterprises around Houston. This participation, he believed, would strengthen black institutions and allow for continued activism.

Martin Luther King Jr. and the Albany Movement

Moshe Cahana's first foray into prominent civil rights activism came in Albany, Georgia. The campaign for desegregation in Albany began in November 1961 when activists from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) gathered multiple local civil rights organizations together to combat segregation in local travel facilities, such as bus terminals and train stations. After the Interstate Commerce Commission's ban on racial segregation at interstate bus terminals went into effect on November 1, 1961, activists saw an opportunity to test integration policies. Nine students from the local all-black Albany State College staged the initial

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[18] Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century*, 6.
[19] Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century*, 49.

sit-in at a segregated Albany bus terminal. Though none of them were arrested for violating local segregation ordinances, their actions inspired local civil rights leaders to become involved. Martin Luther King, Jr. arrived in the city on December 15 and was soon arrested on charges of parading without a permit and obstructing a sidewalk.[20] Following their arrest, Ralph Abernathy called for a nationwide pilgrimage of civil rights supporters to Albany in response. At the same time, local leader Marion Page, who issued a public statement saying that the Albany Movement was an effort "by and for local Negroes."[21] Nevertheless, Moshe Cahana heard of King's arrest in Albany and was compelled to act. Cahana, just two years into his tenure at Brith Shalom, boarded a plane to Albany, Georgia to take part in protests. He was one of only a handful of outside religious leaders who traveled to Albany to visit King in prison and offered his assistance in the protests. Given sparse attendance in Albany of outside religious leaders, Cahana's presence struck a chord with Dr. King and sparked a friendship between the two that would endure until King's assassination in 1968. Over the course of their friendship, Cahana attended numerous protests and marches led by King, helped facilitate King's trips to Houston, and had Dr. King speak before Congregation Brith Shalom on multiple occasions.[22]

Dr. King was a constant inspiration for Cahana, as the two had many things in common. Cahana believed King to be "a remarkable man [and] a pure soul."[23] For the

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[20] David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, (New York: Quill, 1999), 184.

[21] Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 185.

[22] Moshe Cahana, *Saba Moshe: MLK and Gandhi*, interview by Michael Cahana, VHS, 2000, in possession of the family.

[23] "Our Side of the Tracks," *Bellaire & Southwestern Texan*, March 31, 1965, Archive of Texas Newspapers, University of North Texas, Denton, TX.

black freedom movement to succeed, he argued that a man of King's caliber and temperament was essential. For Cahana, the "powers of justice take a long time to mobilize and speak as one voice," and critical to achieving this necessary unity, he felt the movement needed a strong, moral, and just leader. King, for Cahana, embodied all these qualities and was someone that could easily galvanize the people around him into action.[24]

The largest aspects that drew the Cahana and King together was their mutual commitment to nonviolent protest and their belief that religion should play an active role in civil rights activism. The two of them shared admiration for Mohandas Gandhi, a nonviolent activist and the public face of the Indian campaign against continued British imperialism in South Asia. Born to a merchant family and trained in law, Gandhi began organizing peasants, farmers, and industrial laborers to protest excessive land-tax and discrimination in 1915. By the early 1920s, Gandhi assumed a leadership role in the Indian National Congress and led nationwide campaigns against discrimination and for achieving Swaraj, or self-rule.[25]

King drew comparisons to Gandhi early in his activist career. Following the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1956, supporters likened the movement to Gandhi's Salt March noting the commitment to passive resistance in the face of discrimination that pervaded both. King's commitment to nonviolence was never a guarantee, however. King admitted that he came to nonviolence in response to the racial violence he

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Swaraj can mean generally self-governance or "self-rule." The term has been used synonymously with "home-rule" by Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati and Gandhi, but the word typically references Gandhi's concept for Indian independence from British imperialism; Simone Panter-Brick, *Gandhi and Nationalism: The Path to Indian Independence*, (London: IB Taurus, 2015).

experienced as a child. He routinely passed spots where African Americans had been lynched, watched the Ku Klux Klan ride through his neighborhood at night, and had seen the police beat innocent black citizens. He admitted that on multiple occasions this consistent threat of violence almost hardened his heart against white southerners.[26] However, while in college, King read Thoreau's *Resistance to Civil Government* and found himself deeply moved by the idea of refusing to cooperate with a societal system he believed was evil.[27] As he continued his studies at seminary, King learned of Gandhi's activism from Mordecai Johnson, then the president of Howard University, who had just returned from a trip to India. As he studied more, King found himself moved by Gandhi's Salt March to the Sea, numerous fasts, and the concept of Satyagraha which Gandhi employed.[28] King's discovery of Gandhi's philosophy inspired him to base his own movement around the principles of nonviolence and an ethic he conveyed as a "'turn the other cheek' philosophy."[29]

Cahana's journey to nonviolence echoed that of King. The struggle for Jewish autonomy in Palestine cost members of his family and friends he was close to their lives. It also pushed Cahana's commitment to his religious ideals. He came close to losing his religious ideals in the wake of his mother's murder and consistently struggled to reconcile his time in Etzel with his religious upbringing. In the wake of his mother's death, when he turned to Zionist and anti-colonial literature, Cahana read

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[26] Martin Luther King. "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," *Fellowship* (September 1958): 473.
[27] *Resistance to Civil Government*, or *Civil Disobedience*, was an essay written by Henry David Thoreau in 1849, in which he argues that individuals should not permit governments to overrule their consciences, and that they have a duty to avoid allowing such acquiescence to enable the government to make them the agents of injustice.
[28] Satyagraha, literally "truth-force", was a policy of passive political resistance, especially that advocated by Mohandas Gandhi against British rule in India.
[29] King, "My Pilgrimage to Nonviolence," 478.

Gandhi for the first time. As a fellow British subject, Gandhi's struggles in India resonated with Cahana on both a spiritual and political level. Gandhi offered an alternative to British imperialism and provided a contemporary inspiration for ethical resistance. Though he could not uphold strict nonviolence during his time in Etzel, Cahana still made Satyagraha the central ideology to which he strived.

Trip to Birmingham

Moshe Cahana used his friendship with Martin Luther King Jr. to remain active on the national stage throughout the 1960s. Two years after his trip to Albany, Cahana again had the opportunity to join King in protests as an emissary of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly. Since he joined the Rabbinical Assembly in 1958, Cahana was a stalwart at the annual meetings, led committees, and served as a prominent philosophical voice in the organization. He used this voice to advocate for civil rights, Zionism, feminism, and a strong ethical education.

In May 1963, Cahana attended the annual Rabbinical Assembly conference in Greenfield Park, New York with his wife Alice. Alice spoke before the group on behalf of supporting the creation of American center dedicated to researching the Righteous during the Holocaust.[30] She spoke passionately of the appreciation she had for those who risked everything to save European Jews. She also recalled the debt she owed to thirteen Italian men for helping her escape the death camps. They saved her and her family's lives and, she argued, restored her hope for and faith in humanity and

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[30] Righteous Among Nations is the award given to non-Jews who helped save persecuted European Jews during the Holocaust.

the base goodness of man.[31] Alice Cahana's speech sparked a resounding debate over the importance and impact of Righteous Europeans, and the best way to honor their legacy.

After lengthy discussion, the conference broke for lunch and during lunch, Moshe Cahana, Everett Gendler, and Andre Ungar turned their attention to a television broadcasting the news. The horrors facing African Americans in Alabama were the lead story. Birmingham was in the throes of the increasingly violent Birmingham Campaign and all three men found themselves mortified and outraged by the Birmingham police department's violent treatment of black protestors.

The Birmingham Campaign was a desegregation movement organized in early 1963 by Martin Luther King's organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), to bring attention to the integration efforts of African Americans in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1963, Birmingham was one of the most segregated cities in the United States. Despite 40 percent of the city's 350,000-person population being black, Birmingham had no black police officers, firefighters, salesclerks, bank tellers, bus drivers, or store cashiers. Jobs available to African Americans were limited to manual labor in Birmingham's steel mills, work in household service, and lawncare and maintenance. Racial segregation permeated all aspects of public life in the city and only 10 percent of the city's black population was registered to vote in 1960.[32]

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[31] The Rabbinical Assembly, "The 'Birmingham Resolution,'" *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly,* Volume 27 (Greenfield Park, NJ: 1963), 117.

[32] David Garrow, *Birmingham, Alabama, 1956–1963: The Black Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: Carlson Publishing, 1989), 166.

In Birmingham, Dr. King and the SCLC focused on desegregating downtown stores, pushing for fair-hiring practices in city employment, desegregation of public parks, and the creation of a biracial committee that would ensure the desegregation of Birmingham's public schools. Like previous efforts, the Birmingham Campaign relied on nonviolent protest methods and a march to the Jefferson County administration building as part of a voter-registration drive. Many protestors were arrested throughout the campaign, which was a key strategy for King. The goal was to fill jails with protesters and put a strain upon police resources, forcing the city government to negotiate as protests grew long. Ralph Abernathy, a leader in the SCLC and confidant to King, spoke at a mass meeting of Birmingham's black citizens arguing that "the eyes of the world are on Birmingham tonight. [United States Attorney General] Bobby Kennedy is looking here at Birmingham, the United States Congress is looking at Birmingham, the Department of Justice is looking at Birmingham…I am ready to go to jail, are you?" Abernathy and King were among 50 Birmingham residents arrested on April 12, 1963.[33]

As jails filled with protestors, Bull Connor changed police tactics to keeping protestors from congregating downtown. As protesters arrived at police barricades, they met high-pressure spray from fire hoses and attacking police dogs; and while protestors were increasingly brutalized by police, television cameras broadcast the unfolding scenes to the nation.[34]

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[33] Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90.

[34] "Fire Hoses and Police Dogs Quell Birmingham Segregation Protest," *The Washington Post,* May 4, 1963.

Seeing these events unfold offered an opportunity for Moshe Cahana. He came to the conference expecting that at some point he would leave for Alabama. Cahana said of the situation, "…When I came to the convention, I came packed, and I made all necessary arrangements in the congregation for probably this Friday night I will be in jail in Alabama."[35] As a friend of Martin Luther King Jr., Cahana was fully aware of the gravity of the situation in Birmingham and attended the Rabbinical Assembly in the hopes of gathering a larger group to join him in traveling to the South to protest. This was not the first time Cahana prepared to be jailed for forms of protest. While in British Palestine, Cahana spent much of his time as a militant wanted by British Authorities, even arresting and jailing him on occasion. In Cahana's estimation, protest could flout laws and ordinances so long as it was a vehicle for legitimate and ethical change. In Birmingham, he felt that black activists were seeking fair political change, and thus had the moral authority to do whatever was needed, within ethical boundaries, to achieve their goals.[36]

In the wake of this news coverage, Gendler and Cahana reached out to King and the SCLC to see if their presence would be helpful. King and his strategists believed the protests to be at a crucial stage in their development and a delegation of non-African Americans from the North could mark a tipping point in their publicity battle with the city government. Thus, King not only welcomed the idea of a group joining in the Birmingham protests, he encouraged it. Following their conversation with King, Gendler and Cahana brought their plan to the Assembly President,

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[35] The Rabbinical Assembly, "The Birmingham Resolution," 118.
[36] Cahana, *Saba Moshe: Memories.*

Theodore Friedman. Friedman set forth a motion not only to support a group of rabbis

traveling to Birmingham but endorse them and send them as an official delegation

representing the assembly.[37]

In Cahana's endorsement of the Birmingham Resolution, he harkened back to

his wife's speech from that morning. He argued "This morning we condemned the

non-Jewish people who were silent when our brothers in Germany were chased by

dogs. We will also be condemned for doing nothing." Cahana believed that Jews had a

responsibility to act on behalf of oppressed African Americans in the South, just as the

thirteen Italian gentlemen acted to save Alice Cahana's family just twenty years

earlier.[38]

Cahana also drew upon ethical Zionism in his push for a delegation to

Birmingham, invoking the Talmudic ideal of *kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh*, or all of

Israel is responsible for one another. Though an Aramaic phrase from the Talmud, the

phrase gained new life in the twentieth century as Zionist leaders invoked it as a

central tenet in how the Diaspora was to relate to Jews in Israel. They argued that Jews

in the Diaspora had a Talmudic responsibility to support and assist in the creation and

sustainment of a Jewish State. Cahana, in his speech before the Rabbinical Assembly,

argued that this mandate extended beyond a responsibility for other Jews. He argued

that Jews should instead see the ethic as *kol b'nai adam areivim zeh lazeh*, or a

responsibility to protect all peoples, just as it was their responsibility to protect the

Jews. Thus, if Jews would take to the streets to march and protest in support of Israel,

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[37] Irving Spiegel, "20 Rabbis Head for Birmingham," *New York Times*, May 8, 1963; Andre Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back," *Conservative Judaism* 18, no. 1 (Fall 1963), 1.
[38] The Rabbinical Assembly, "The Birmingham Resolution," 118.

they should likewise be willing to march and protest in support of African Americans in Birmingham.[39]

The Birmingham Resolution passed resoundingly, and the Assembly endorsed the nineteen rabbis who decided to travel to Alabama, even taking up a collection for $1500 to pay for the rabbis' travel.[40] The group made last-minute flight plans and arrived in Birmingham at 3:30 the next morning, where they were immediately met by representatives of King's SCLC and the local Jewish community. While King's delegation arrived at the airport to welcome the rabbis to Birmingham, the local Jewish leaders arrived in hopes of convincing the rabbis to return to the Rabbinical Assembly.

The traveling rabbis opted against contacting the local Jewish community before they began their trip. After a large debate at the conference, the Rabbinical Assembly felt that the local Jewish community would not only discourage them from making the trip to Alabama, but could also potentially be imperiled by white supremacist backlash as a result of the visiting rabbis. This debate was magnified by the fact that the Birmingham Conservative community did not have representation at the Assembly. Rabbi Abraham Mesch, the rabbi at Birmingham's Conservative

[39] The Rabbinical Assembly, "The 'Birmingham Resolution,'" 116.
[40] The 18 rabbis who travelled with Cahana were Arie Becker, Memphis, TN; Jacob H. Bloom, Fairfield, CT; Kenneth Bromberg, Pittsburgh, PA; Moshe Davidowitz, Greenwich, CT; Morris Fishman, Margate, NJ; Isaac Freeman, Newburgh, NY; Seymour Friedman, Spring Valley, NY; Everett Gendler, Princeton, NJ; Stanley Kessler, West Hartford, CT; Richard L. Rubinstein, Pittsburgh, PA; Moses B. Sachs, St. Louis Park, MN; Sidney D. Shanken, Cranford, NJ; Alexander Shapiro, Philadelphia, PA; Paul Teicher, Trenton, NJ; Andre Ungar, Westwood, NJ; Eugene Weiner, Hamilton, ON; Richard Winograd, Chicago, IL; and Harry Zwelling, New Britain, CT.

Temple Beth El, died in November 1962, and by May 1963, they had yet to fill his

position, leaving Birmingham unable to send a delegate to the Assembly.[41]

The rabbis' arrival in Birmingham angered the local Jewish community who

felt that their mere presence would be needlessly incendiary. The Jewish community

in Birmingham during the 1960s was small, accounting for one half of one percent of

the total city population. Though Jews held many prominent civic, cultural, and

business positions, they were often kept from leadership positions in Birmingham. As

a result, issues related to segregation were largely out of their control. Thus, most of

the Jewish community's leaders believed that Jews should stay out of the

desegregation debate, as it was a "Christian problem" between black and white

Alabamans that did not affect local Jews.[42]

Further, many local Jews worried that civil rights activism would cause the

Jewish community harm by allowing segregationists to draw connections between

Jews and the racial violence in the city. This manifested a few months prior to the

rabbis' trip when the Ku Klux Klan conducted a large mass meeting on the outskirts of

Birmingham to step up a campaign to distribute anti-Jewish and anti-black hate

literature by the National States Rights Party, including 50,000 copies of the racist and

anti-Semitic newspaper *The Thunderbolt*. The threats against the community became

so strong in the early-1960s that the Jewish Community Center and many of the local

synagogues were placed under 24-hour police surveillance.[43]

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[41] Mark Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 173.
[42] Ibid., 165.
[43] Ibid., 170.

The local community learned of the rabbis' travel plans at 10 on the evening of May 7th when *New York Times* reporter Irving Spiegel reached out to Alex Rittenbaum, then president of Birmingham's Jewish Community Council, for comment on the group's travel plans. Following this, Rittenbaum contacted each congregation's leaders, convincing a group to join him in meeting the arriving rabbis at the airport. However, when they arrived at the airport, the rabbis refused to meet with them, adhering to their desire not to involve the local community in their protest. A delegation of two of the rabbis eventually met with local Jewish officials who urged the group to leave for fear of upsetting the balance of a truce between black leaders and city officials that had been agreed upon the prior day. Following the rabbis' refusal to turn back, the local Jewish leaders urged them at least to refrain from any dramatic participation in the integrationist marches, or if they couldn't, then do so without any markers that would make them identifiable as Jews. This request, too, was rejected by the traveling rabbis.[44]

The rabbis arrived in Birmingham intent upon "employing a unique and highly imaginative way" to assist Birmingham's black community in protest.[45] To this end, the group insisted upon staying at the A.G. Gaston Motel, which was zoned as a segregated hotel for African Americans. Despite the rabbis staying there was an immediate violation of city ordinances, they chose this hotel because of its importance as a base of operations for the SCLC. This brought an abundance of reporters to the hotel, many of whom were stationed there for an extended stay, and would highlight

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[44] Ibid., 171.
[45] Ibid., 170.

the gravity of the image of a large group of Jewish men staying at a black hotel. Even when the hotel lacked the necessary amount of rooms to house everyone in their group, the rabbis shared rooms, brought in temporary beds, and found a way to ensure everyone in their party could stay at the hotel. If they could not, members in their group would have been forced to stay at a white, segregated hotel, which the rabbis understood would undercut what they hoped to achieve by traveling to Birmingham.[46]

A political truce between black activists and city officials greeted the rabbis when they arrived, causing Martin Luther King to temporarily call off public demonstrations. Though there was little visible action around Birmingham, tension remained throughout the city as black activists kept ready to resume protests at any stage at which their usefulness would be felt. Despite not taking part in protests, the rabbis' presence brought added attention to Birmingham and their deliberate visibility put added pressure on the city to negotiate with black leaders.[47]

With protests put on hiatus, the traveling rabbis were able to meet with local civil rights leaders and learn about the struggle and what their congregations could do to assist. The first morning, the rabbis said the Shema prayer with their SCLC escorts, prayers that Andre Ungar noted had increased relevancy. "Barkhu!" he said, "enjoined not mere verbal profession but a challenge that concretely and perilously surrounded here. 'Sim shalom' spelled out Vietnam … but above all Birmingham, Alabama." Ungar noted how many in the Birmingham delegation echoed Cahana and viewed their activism as part of wider postcolonial struggles. They were not merely fighting

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[46] Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back," 4.
[47] Ibid., 5.

for civil rights in Birmingham, rather they were fighting for positive political change that could serve as inspiration for wider political change, which was a central philosophy behind Cahana's ethical Zionism. [48]

The travelling rabbis attended each event donning outward symbols of their Jewish identity. During meetings and rallies at local churches, the entire contingent donned kippot and often wore tallit. This clearly identified them as Jews and colored all of their activism as part and parcel of their Jewish identity. It also clearly marked the traveling Jews as separate from the white power structures that subjugated blacks in the American South. By donning such overt ethnic markers, the rabbis positioned themselves as part of a nonwhite and often marginalized group, allowing for greater solidarity with black activists.[49]

With this wider view of Jewish activism, Israel loomed large in the minds of the rabbis who traveled to Birmingham. Richard Rubenstein argued that the rabbis' presence "[handed] down a kind of 'apostolic' succession" to the black community. Their presence said that "the flesh and blood children of Israel were behind them in their struggle, that [they] had gone from slavery to [political autonomy], and [they] knew [black Alabamans] would as well."[50] During their time in Birmingham, black church leaders echoed Rabbi Cahana and spoke of Israel as a great triumph for the Jewish people and the progress of democracy. During a church rally for teenage activists the rabbis attended, the preacher urged the teenagers to read Leon Uris's book, *Exodus*. Written five years earlier, *Exodus* focused on the struggles of numerous

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[48] Ibid., 4.
[49] Richard L. Rubenstein, "The Rabbis Visit Birmingham," *The Reconstructionist* (May 31, 1963), 6.
[50] Ibid., 7.

Jewish refugees escaping to Palestine and their experiences fighting for a burgeoning

Jewish state. The preacher encouraged the activists to read the book as an inspiration

for continued activism and as evidence of the successes possible.[51] These Zionist

elements to their trip allowed Moshe Cahana an outlet for both his civil rights and

Zionist activisms. He was able to speak to black activists about his experiences in

Israel as well as share the ways in which these experiences ultimately informed his

decision to become a civil rights activist. It was in situations such as these that Cahana

was able to pass along his ideology of ethical Zionism to other activists and impress

upon theme the interrelatedness of both struggles.

Throughout their trip to Birmingham, the rabbis were met with ovation by

Birmingham's black community. During their first day in Birmingham, the group

attended numerous rallies as guests of honor. Andre Ungar noted that when they

entered one church, the crowd sang "We Shall Overcome" but changed the chorus to

"With our rabbis, we shall overcome." At each rally, the rabbis held a near celebrity

status and people clamored to meet them and shake their hands. They spoke before

crowds, met with parishioners throughout the day, and led black activists in singing

Jewish songs such as "Hine Mah Tov" and "Hevenu Shalom Alekhem."

Birmingham's regaled them with choruses of clapping and shouts of "Amen",

"Halleluya", and "Yes, man!"[52]

The rabbis' interactions with Birmingham Jews were far more measured.

After community leaders Alex Rittenbaum, Abe Berkowitz, and E.M. Zeidman met

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back," 8.

the traveling rabbis at the Birmingham airport, they attempted to speak with them, in hopes of convincing them to head back, but were turned away. After pleading with them, the three were granted audience with two of the traveling rabbis, but their pleas fell on deaf ears.[53] The next day, in between various rallies the rabbis attended, community leaders again sought to meet with them and implore them to return home. This time 15 of the rabbis agreed to meet with community leaders, who argued that the rabbis' presence might only create incidents and hamper the negotiations between black leaders and city officials that were already in progress. The rabbis again refused to back down from their activist stance and return home. Andre Ungar noted their refusal stemmed from their being there to assist the black community rather than local Jews, and that was to remain their focus. The rabbis also felt that the purpose of their actions was specifically to be provocative. Their goal was, in part, to upend the comfortability of the local Jewish community which still shared the "evanescent advantages of an antebellum society" and keep them from merely acting out of reaction to racial injustice, but rather be proactive in the fight for racial equality. These actions angered local Jews who felt that the group was needlessly imperiling the Jewish community of Birmingham. The anger of Birmingham Jews, in turn, frustrated the rabbis, who felt that their reaction was a betrayal of their own Jewishness. They shouted tense words at one another across the conference table they met around. Birmingham's Jews accused, "Boychiks, we know you are right, but still, how could you do this to us, your brothers?" The rabbis followed with charges of "Jews, dear

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[53] Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 170.

scared little Yidden, how can you side with racism, with Hitler's heritage?"[54]

Eventually, both sides would part, having come no closer to agreement with one

another.

Following the rabbis' departure from Birmingham at the end of the week,

Temple Beth El, Birmingham's Conservative temple, sent an official letter of protest

to the Rabbinical Assembly. In the letter, Arnold Royal, president of Beth El,

chastised the Rabbinical Assembly and stated that it was "regrettable that the

Rabbinical Assembly convention did not see fit during its deliberations to seek the

advice and counsel of Birmingham Jewry and particularly the leaders of Temple Beth

El, the only Conservative Temple in Birmingham."[55] He continued on protest the

rabbis refusal to meet with community leaders and said they felt insulted by the

demeanor with which the rabbis greeted them. Royal argued that despite the goodwill

the rabbis garnered among the black community in Alabama, Alabama's Jews, and the

larger white community, harbored an "ill will and hostility" that would take a long

time to dissipate.[56]

As the rabbis returned home, many found themselves treated as returning

heroes. Some communities literally rose to their feet at the entrance of their rabbi and

several congregations passed formal votes of support or congratulations. During and

after the Birmingham trip, most of the rabbis' local newspapers carried articles about,

and subsequently interviews with, them. Rabbis returned with a new sense of urgency

and strength which added to local efforts towards the broadening of civil rights. They

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[54] Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back," 10-11.
[55] Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 172.
[56] Ibid., 174.

understood that if it was a rabbi's task to travel South to ensure civil rights protections, then they had an equal task to fight for integrated housing and job opportunities in northern cities and suburbs as well.[57]

Civil Rights Activism in Houston

Between his multiple trips across the American South to participate in movements led by Martin Luther King, Jr., Moshe Cahana led local civil rights efforts in Houston, Texas. Cahana's arrival in Houston in 1959 marked a change in how many Jews in the city, particularly Conservative Jews, approached civil rights activism in the city. Before Cahana arrived, the dominant voice on Jewish civil rights activism was William Malev, the rabbi at Temple Beth Yeshuran, one of the largest Conservative temples in the American South. In an article he wrote for *Conservative Judaism* in 1958, "The Jew of the South in the Conflict on Segregation," Malev argued for Jewish noninvolvement in local civil rights efforts. Though Malev believed that integration "morally and religiously [was] the only way of solving the problem [of racial inequality]," he felt that the issue of civil rights activism should not follow a uniform pattern, as the "conflict on the issue of segregation [was] different in each community."[58] Above all, Malev objected to large northern organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League acting on behalf of American Jews in issues related to racial equality in the country. These organizations, he argued, could not understand the intricacies of each community in the South and, thus, could not fully appreciate the

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[57] Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back," 15.

[58] William Malev, "The Jew of the South in the Conflict on Segregation," *Conservative Judaism* 13, no. 1 (Fall 1958): 35.

social and economic position each Jewish community occupied in their respective cities. As a result, the national pronouncements against segregation made by these larger organizations often had little regard for the effect they had on Southern communities.

Malev's view arose from the belief that prominent civil rights activism would "invite resentment and anti-Semitism, if not violence, towards the Jewish community."[59] He understood that Jews in the South achieved a favorable social position by being accepted as white and considered a faith with the same religious lineage as the dominant Christian community. By seeing Judaism as one of the "three great faiths," Malev argued, Southerners would view the Jewish community as an offshoot of the dominant white society. It was in this social position that Malev believed Southern Jews could exert the most political influence, citing his own experience in which he was one of three white clergymen who were asked to speak on the issue of desegregation before the Houston school board. Despite Jews constituting less than two percent of the population of Houston, he argued that he was able to exert influence as one-third of the religious population. However, national civil rights efforts from the Jewish community highlighted the ethnic character of the Jewish community, causing white southerners to increasingly associate Jews with being an ethnic minority that belonged on the other side of the color line, putting them at increased risk of discrimination and negating their political influence.[60]

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[59] Ibid., 36-37.
[60] Ibid., 36.

As soon as Moshe Cahana arrived in Houston, he began bucking against this dominant narrative on Jewish civil rights activism. Upon arrival, Cahana joined the Houston Rabbinical council, where he would eventually become an officer and a leading voice within the organization. With his role in the council, Cahana impacted the trajectory of rabbinic activism in the city and used his influence to help convince Jewish owned businesses to integrate quietly. This was done to avoid the violence and bloodshed that visited much of the South in the 1960s. Cahana also helped found the Houston Biracial Committee on Race and Religion in 1961. This committee brought together various white, black, and Latino religious leaders in the hopes of ending segregation and solving the divisive racial issues that were rampant across the city.[61] Cahana spent many years speaking at various churches, attending demonstrations around Houston, and fighting segregation in his everyday life, even going so far as sitting in sections designated for black Houstonians when he went to cinemas or theaters. For Cahana, "living what you believe" was the underpinning principle of a moral and ethical life.[62]

Perhaps Cahana's largest accomplishment as a civil rights activist in Houston was the Houston Conference on Race and Religion in 1963. Cahana and other

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[61] Despite including representatives from three ethnic groups, the committee was called the "Biracial Committee" because Latinos in Texas were often seen as white. See George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995); Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz, *Generations of Exclusion: Mexican-Americans, Assimilation, and Race* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2009); Natalia Molina, *How Race Is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014); Julie Dowling, *Mexican Americans and the Question of Race* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015); and Lori Flores, *Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

[62] Malev, "The Jew of the South in the Conflict on Segregation," 36.

religious leaders devised this conference upon returning from the National Conference on Religion and Race held in Chicago in January 1963. The national conference brought together representatives of more than 70 of the major American Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant organizations to discuss the racial divide in the United States. The four-day event, organized by a coalition of the National Council of the Churches, the Synagogue Council of America, and the National Catholic Welfare Conference in April 1963, convened to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. The event brought together over 800 representatives and saw speeches from some of the most prominent civil rights leaders in the United States, including Martin Luther King. Nearly one-third of the conference participants were Jewish and represented 20 separate Jewish religious, civic, fraternal, and defense organizations in the United States.[63]

The Houston conference, held in June 1963, followed the same format as the national conference, albeit on a smaller scale. Organized by Cahana and Stanley Hauser, an Episcopal minister and president of the Association of Ministers of Greater Houston, the one-day conference brought together ministers and lay leaders from around the city to discuss the problem of continued racial discrimination in Houston. Cahana was one of four speakers at the conference and delivered a speech entitled "Confession and Repentance," in which he discussed his recent trip to Birmingham and the necessity of civil rights activism on the part of religious leaders. Cahana probed the role of religion in attacking racial discrimination in the South: "We speak

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[63] "National Conference on Religion and Race Opens Today in Chicago," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin*, January 14, 1963.

in the Name of God. God entrusted in our hands his precious flock. God called us to shepherd, to rule his children. Let us say what God and our conscience tell us to say. Let us be involved with this freedom fight as God wants us to be involved. Let us be involved without fear, without swift excuse and without dangerous caution."[64] For Cahana, it was not possible to be observantly Jewish and support continued segregation in the South. Further, in his mind, as a religious leader, it was his moral responsibility to do everything he could to fix Southern society through integration. This was central to his ethos as a spiritual leader and something he strove for throughout his time as a rabbi in Houston, even in the face of adversity and pushback from congregants and Houstonians.

Returning to Alabama

Two years following his trip to Birmingham, Moshe Cahana was again inspired to travel to Alabama to partake in civil rights protests. While at a luncheon for local Houston religious leaders in March 1965, Cahana found himself following local television coverage of the Selma protests and the images of bloodied and injured marchers trying to cross Selma's Edmund Pettis Bridge. When seeing these images, Cahana became indignant, as the actions of Selma's police resembled those taken by British troops in Palestine. Cahana immediately decided he would travel to Selma to offer his assistance to the protesters. He reached out to his good friend John Stevens asking for his company in this trip. At a luncheon held by the Episcopalian diocese of Houston, Stevens further recruited fellow Episcopalian ministers Herbert Beadle and

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[64] Moshe Cahana's Speech at Houston Conference on Race & Religion, 1963

Jack Bosman to join the him and Cahana in Alabama. The four of them left the next day and arrived in Selma early Tuesday morning.[65]

The Selma marches originated shortly after the successes of the Birmingham Campaign when the African American activist organization Dallas County Voters League (DCVL) sought to overcome widespread voter suppression and push for large African American voter turnout in local elections. After the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee joined in voter registration efforts, and following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the movement gained steam and local and regional protests for voting rights began in late-1964 and early-1965.[66]

By the end of February 1965, roughly 3,000 demonstrators were arrested while attempting to register voters. Tensions grew stronger following the death of two activists. On February 26, 1965, state trooper James Bonard Fowler shot and killed Jimmie Lee Jackson, an activist and deacon for his church, during a peaceful march in Marion, Alabama. This killing outraged local activists, particularly James Bevel, who was leading the SCLC's Selma voting rights movement, and who called for a dramatic and public march to from Selma to Montgomery in hopes of garnering national attention for the struggles of African Americans trying to vote in Alabama.[67]

Bevel and the SCLC planned for their march to take place on Sunday March 7, 1965. In the morning of March 7, nearly 600 protesters, led by SNCC's John Lewis and Bob Mants, and SCLC's Hosea Williams and Albert Turner, gathered on U.S. Highway 80 and marched southeast out of Selma. When protesters crossed the

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[65] "Our Side of the Tracks," *The Bellaire & Southwestern Texan*, March 31, 1965.
[66] Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 372.
[67] Ibid., 391.

Edmund Pettus Bridge, they came upon a wall of state troopers and deputized locals waiting for them on the other side. Days earlier, the sheriff of Dallas County, Jim Clark, issued an order for all white males over the age of twenty-one to report to the courthouse Sunday morning to be deputized. Roughly 150 men stood in the sheriff's posse, armed with nightsticks and tear gas. The contingent's commanding officer, John Cloud, urged demonstrators to disband and return home and deputies began shoving protesters, knocking many to the ground and beating them. Other deputies shot tear gas into the crowd, while some charged through the crowd on horseback, trampling protesters. By the end of the melee, 17 protesters were hospitalized and 50 more were treated for lesser injuries.[68] Within Alabama's black community, this demonstration became known as "Bloody Sunday."

The second Selma march took place Tuesday March 9, 1965. Following the events unfolding two days prior, several hundred more protesters turned out to march alongside Selma's black activists. Martin Luther King specifically called upon clergy to turn out at the march, feeling that the presence of religious officials would add more weight to what they hoped to achieve. The second march, however, ended up being more of a symbolic gesture than a proper march. The day before, to prevent another outbreak of violence, SCLC officials attempted to gain a court order prohibiting police from interfering with the progress of the march. However, Federal District Court Judge Frank Minis Johnson instead issued a restraining order prohibiting the march from occurring until he could hold additional hearings later that week. Not wanting to

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[68] John Lewis, "Testimony of John Lewis from a hearing resulting from the March 7, 1965, march from Selma to Montgomery in support of voting rights," National Archives—Southeast Region, Morrow, Georgia, Records of District Courts of United States.

defy Judge Johnson, who was often sympathetic to civil rights efforts, and being aware that they lacked the movement infrastructure necessary to engage in a long march to Montgomery, movement leaders decided that they would march across the Edmund Pettis Bridge, further than they got in the first march, but then turn around and return home. This march, consisting of roughly 2,500 marchers, became known as "Turnaround Tuesday."[69]

Only SCLC leaders knew this plan in advance, leaving many marchers confused and annoyed. Cahana was amongst those upset by the change in plans noting that it was disappointing to have driven all night just to march to the arch of the bridge and turn back. His mood changed, however, when one movement leader told him that their presence was greatly appreciated as the inclusion of white ministers helped ensure that police would not harm the protesters, something they would not have been guaranteed otherwise. Throughout the rest of the day, the four men took part in other protests and rallies around Selma. Cahana met with several movement leaders and spent much of the evening walking the streets of Selma and meeting with both black activists and white Alabamans. While many white Alabamans treated Cahana with hostility and anger, he noted that others offered a quiet support for what they were doing, hoping only to find a peaceful end to the injustices faced by black Alabamans.[70]

White Pushback to Activism

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[69] Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 400-405
[70] "Our Side of the Tracks," March 31, 1965, 1.

Almost as soon as he began his activism in Houston, Moshe Cahana met resistance from white segregationists. Cahana received threatening phone calls, had racial slurs such as "nigger-lover" and "filthy kike" hurled at him, and on numerous occasions was mailed photographs of Hitler attached to threatening letters.[71] One morning at about three, the Cahanas awoke to a cross burning on their front lawn. Soon thereafter, a man claiming to be the Houston Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan called and threatened the Cahana family's safety in response to Moshe Cahana's activism. When he returned from Birmingham, Cahana received a slew of hate mail and derisive comments. From the larger community in Houston, Cahana returned to a chorus of "Nigger lover, wait we'll get you," "Why don't you go back to Palestine," and "Why not teach the Bible to your members instead?"[72]

With each threat, Moshe Cahana remained strong to his core principles. One man called Cahana and asked him to "please help [him] pronounce the Doom Written on the Wall" – Mne Tkel Upharsin," which translates to "God has numbered thy kingdom and brought it to an end. Thou hast been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided and given to others."[73] The passage, from the legend of Belshazzar's Feast, served as a warning of impending striking down to an increasingly arrogant King Belshazzar. Thus, the caller, by citing these words, threatened Cahana with violent retribution should he continue his "arrogance" and activism. Cahana, emulating Gandhi's Satyagraha, allowed the man to finish his

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[71] Ibid., 8.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Rainer Albertz, "Social Setting of Daniel," in John J. Collins, Peter Flint, Cameron Van Epps, *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception* (New York: I. Brill, 2001), 6-7.

message and sat on the phone with him for several minutes helping him learn the

proper Hebrew pronunciation.[74] When the Houston Grand Dragon called the Cahanas,

Moshe's wife Alice answered the phone and challenged the man, "What kind of man

calls a family at three in the morning? Does your wife know that she's married a

coward?" In response the man stammered out an apology, not expecting to be

challenged in such a manner.[75]

At the height of his activism in the 1960s, not even Brith Shalom was a place

of refuge for Cahana. Upon his return to the pulpit following his trip to Albany,

Cahana faced criticism from many members of his congregation and brought him into

direct conflict with the congregation's president at the time. The conflict between the

two men became so severe that the president attempted to have Cahana fired on

multiple occasions.[76] This tension between Cahana and congregation leadership

continued throughout Cahana's time as a prominent activist. Though many members

of his congregation eventually softened to and even embraced Cahana's political

activism, several congregation board members remained opposed, fearing the backlash

that could befall the Jewish community. Many members of Brith Shalom also

questioned the effectiveness of Cahana's activism, believing that despite his noble

aspirations, he would not be able to effect change through his chosen forms of protest.

One member asked Cahana in 1963, "there are one thousand people already jailed and

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[74] Ibid. 8.

[75] Michael Cahana, "Obituary for Alice Lok Cahana," *Jewish Herald Voice*, December 14, 2017.

[76] Michael Cahana, interview by author, November 10, 2015.

dogs were loosed upon them; so, one more person will be there and will be bitten by a dog. What good will it be?"[77]

The struggles between Cahana and congregation leadership finally came to a head in 1965 after Cahana returned from the Selma marches. The congregation's leadership became so resolute in their opposition to Cahana's continued activism that Cahana chose to resign instead of continue butting heads with them. Cahana spent much of the summer of 1965 away from the pulpit before returning after many at Brith Shalom voiced their support for his activism and what he hoped to achieve by marching with Dr. King.[78]

Conclusion

By the late 1960s, much of the initial vitriol that accompanied Cahana's activism subsided. As he continued civil rights pushes in 1966 and beyond, Cahana routinely experienced a groundswell of support from the congregation. Over the next few years, temple leadership changed hands, and by the end of the decade, the congregation president was one of Cahana's biggest supporters. This change in leadership allowed Cahana wider latitude to implement his ethical teachings into Hebrew School and adult education curricula. By the time he retired, congregants at Brith Shalom lionized his career and saw themselves as the 'activist temple' in Houston.

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[77] The Rabbinical Assembly, *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly,* Volume 27 (Greenfield Park, NJ: 1963).

[78] "Rabbi Cahana to Remain at Brith Shalom," *The Bellaire & Southwestern Texan*, August 11, 1965, Archive of Texas Newspapers, University of North Texas, Denton, TX.

Throughout all of his activism, Rabbi Moshe Cahana kept his identity as an Israeli-American Jew at the forefront. His crafting of the concept of ethical Zionism was crucial to maintaining this. In ethical Zionism, Cahana was able to shift political Zionism beyond the boundaries of Israeli politics and focus on a Jewish state. In doing so, Cahana adapted it into a political ethic applicable to various political movements around the globe.

Ethical Zionism offered Cahana a framework by which he could translate his own colonial identity, forged under the British Mandate, to American frameworks which similarly disenfranchised a large portion of its population. African Americans' lack of political power, social inequality across the American South, and institutional violence against black Americans resembled the worst of British colonialism in Palestine and allowed Cahana to draw easy connections between the two struggles. This compelled Moshe Cahana to civil rights activism throughout the 1960s, bringing him to Albany, Birmingham, and Selma along the way. By implementing ethical Zionism in all of his activism, civil rights activism became a natural extension to his own identity as a Jew, and Israeli, and former colonial subject.

4 – Meir Kahane, Maimonidean Zionism, and the Fight for Jewish Survival

"He is convinced that the black militants and New Left movements are bringing about a backlash that one day will bathe the streets of the country in [Jewish] blood," read an article in the *State Island Advocate* in June 1969, which characterized Meir Kahane's Jewish nationalism as a reaction to the increasingly divisive nature of American politics in the late-1960s. Meir Kahane believed that American Jews stood at a political precipice in the 1960s. From one side of the political spectrum, Kahane believed that Jews faced a two-pronged threat of exploitation, intimidation, and delegitimization in New York's traditionally Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens. He believed that poor New York Jews faced exploitation and intimidation from "blockbusters" who sought to upend traditionally Jewish neighborhoods and force residents out, and black and "leftist" activists who sought to "delegitimize" the Jewish character of neighborhood institutions such as community boards and schools. In an effort to fight this, Kahane crafted a political movement focused on the idea of militant Jewish self-defense.

In contrast to his cousin, Meir Kahane's ideology stemmed from a Halakhic interpretation of Zionism based in Jewish law. Whereas Moshe Cahana saw Zionism as an anti-colonial ethic that could be applied to numerous political struggles around the globe and various oppressed populations, Kahane interpreted Zionism as a strict Halakhic extension of Maimonides' Laws of the Kings in the Mishneh Torah.[1] In this interpretation, Israel belonged to the Jews, and non-Jews had the option to live under

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[1] The Mishneh Torah, or "Repetition of the Torah," is a definitive interpretation of Jewish religious law compiled by Maimonides between 1170 and 1180 CE while living in Egypt.

Jewish autonomy and supremacy or be forced out of the land. This, he thought, was the only hope for Jewish survival in the Middle East. Thus, for Kahane, Zionism as an ideology was the sole property of the Jews, and to extend its precepts to other populations endangered Jewish life, as it directed attention away from Jewish communal issues and thus weakened Jewish political power.

Similarly, when faced with the specter of threats to Jewish survival in New York City, Kahane adapted his Zionism to craft an ideology of Jewish sovereignty and power in traditionally Jewish neighborhoods in the five boroughs. This ideology of Jewish power pushed back against the civil rights efforts black and Latino residents who sought control over local institutions as the majority populations.[2] This came to a head in the late-1960s during struggles over school decentralization and affirmative action. Kahane founded his militant Jewish Defense League at that time as a local Jewish mechanism for violent self-defense, fashioning it as an American form of Etzel.

Unlike his cousin, Moshe, Meir Kahane is hardly new to scholarship. Historians have picked apart Kahane's activism for decades. Authors contemporary to Kahane's activism focused on Kahane as a neo-fascist figure in American and Israeli politics.[3] These works have focused on his calls for Jewish supremacy in Israel and

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[2] In Jewish neighborhoods in Western Brooklyn, the primary Latino migrants were Puerto Rican. In this dissertation I use "Latino" in place of the modern convention of "Latinx" to recognize the linguistic convention at the time. Meir Kahane used the term "Puerto Rican" as a catch-all for all Latino migrants, but that was often a racist over-simplification of the racial diversity of 1960s Brooklyn.

[3] See Ehud Sprinzak, *Kach and Meir Kahane: The Emergence of Jewish Quasi-Fascism* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1985); Yair Kotler, *Heil Kahane* (New York: Adama Books, 1986); Raphaël Mergui and Philippe Simonnot, *Israel's Ayatollahs: Meir Kahane and the Far Right in Israel* (London: Saqi Books, 1987); and Robert I. Friedman, *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane, From FBI Informant to Knesset Member* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990).

ethnic cleansing of Arab Israelis and Palestinians, and compared them to European

fascists in the 1930s and 1940s who sought to cleanse their countries of Jewish

populations. Following his assassination in 1990, scholars increasingly looked at

Kahane as an anti-civil rights activist in the United States.[4] These works addressed

Kahane's relationship with black and Latino populations in New York and

characterized Kahane as a straightforward, racist, anti-civil rights activist who helped

create a chasmic divide between black and Jewish populations in the United States.

By the 21st century, however, more nuanced approaches to Kahane's activism

emerged. These works often either portrayed Kahane not as exceptional, but rather as

an outcropping of postwar changes in the Jewish community; as a violent reaction to

the atrocities of the Holocaust; or as the manifestation of Jewish anxieties over

continued persecution after World War II.[5]

Despite the abundance of previous works, they fail to fully capture Meir

Kahane's political activism. To understand Kahane's conception of Zionism's role in

U.S. civil rights efforts, there needs to be an examination of Kahane's colonial

identity. This is an often under explored facet of Meir Kahane's activism. Like his

cousin Moshe, Meir Kahane saw his Jewish identity as colonial. Discussion of British

imperialism in the Middle East dominated his early life. Following British evacuation

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[4] See discussion of Kahane and the Jewish Defense League in Jonathan Kaufman, *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1988); Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation & Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York: Free Press, 1995); and Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[5] See Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We'll be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2010); and Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

and the subsequent creation of Israel, Meir Kahane saw Arabs in Israel and Palestine as a colonizing force. In his estimation, Arabs perpetrated a centuries-long occupation of Eretz Israel and the establishment and expansion of an independent and Jewish Israel represented Jews decolonizing the land from Arab imperialism.[6]

When previous works addressed Kahane's place on the colonial spectrum, they portrayed Kahane as the extreme manifestation of oppressive Jewish colonialism. Only in recent years have scholars began understanding Meir Kahane as reacting to colonial forces. In his 2015 article in the *Journal of Jewish Ethics*, for example, Shaul Magid suggests that Meir Kahane's ideology was in many ways a response to a perennial anti-Semitism that equated to internal colonialism. This perception is key to Meir Kahane's activism. Magid argues that while Kahane was not a conversant in contemporary neocolonial literature, Kahane's responses to anti-Semitic violence corresponded and contrasted with late-twentieth century postcolonial theory.[7]

The United States, in Meir Kahane's estimation, offered no safe harbor from this colonial anti-Semitism. While American Jews, by the mid-20th century, benefited from many of the social and economic privileges of whiteness, their position in the American racial spectrum was hardly guaranteed. Between the late-19th century and the end of World War II, most Americans viewed Jews as separate and distinct racial minority. It was only after World War II when the mix of economic prosperity and Western shame over the horrors of the Holocaust allowed Jews to be accepted into the

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[6] Meir Kahane, *Time to Go Home* (Los Angeles, CA: Nash Publishing: 1972).
[7] Shaul Magid, "Anti-Semitism as Colonialism: Meir Kahane's 'Ethics of Violence,'" *Journal of Jewish Ethics* 1, no 2 (2015), 202-232.

American white majority. Despite this new whiteness, many American Jews still faced regular discrimination, whether from religious prejudice or American fears over the communist proclivities of Jews with Eastern European last names. As a result, by the time Meir Kahane became a public figure in the 1960s, American Jews straddled a precarious balance between white and nonwhite.[8]

Meir Kahane responded to continued, often violent, anti-Semitism with a radical form of Zionism that privileged Jewish safety and survival over the rights of American and Israeli minority groups. This is an overlooked facet to Meir Kahane's activism. Kahane's radical form of Zionism stemmed from his religious ethics-based interpretation of the political ideology, which informed his ideas of race in the United States and Israel. Kahane argued for the forceful removal of Arabs from both Israel and Palestine, Jewish conquest of Palestinian land, and a strong Israeli government that was distinctly Jewish in its character and followed a strict adherence to Halakhic law. Through this, Kahane believed Jews could escape an endless cycle of anti-Semitism and violence perpetrated against them in Israel and the Diaspora.

Kahane interpreted politics in New York City in a similar fashion. Rising to prominence in the wake of high-profile conflicts over neighborhood change and control in Brooklyn, particularly in the case of the Ocean Hill-Brownsville School District, Kahane adapted his ethos of Maimonides-inspired religious Zionism to fit the interethnic conflict in New York, swapping out Arab Palestinians for black and Latino New Yorkers. To remedy anti-Semitism in New York, Kahane championed violent

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[8] For more on Jews and Whiteness, see Eric L. Goldstein. *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

self-defense, maintenance of Jewish control over local institutions, and racial

separation, both socially and civically. These steps, he felt, would shield Brooklyn

Jews from, what he believed to be, broad-spectrum black and Latino anti-Semitism.

Maimonidean Zionism

Meir Kahane's ideology centered around melding political Zionism with the

Mishneh Torah. As an observantly-religious Jew, Kahane felt that all aspects of

Jewish life needed to revolve around strict adherence to Jewish law, Halakha. For

Kahane, observant Jews had a "constant cloak of purpose" and a "continual sense of

mission" that served as the basis for individual discipline. In his estimation, it was not

enough to adhere to most precepts outlined in the Torah, a proper Jew must adhere to

all aspects of Jewish law. Kahane believed that adhering to Torahic law in Western

civilization proved difficult, as they were antithetical to one another. While

observances such as maintaining a kosher diet and abstaining from forbidden activities

on Shabbat could prove easy in heavily Jewish areas of New York, issues related to

gender segregation and modesty often proved more difficult. However, these, Kahane

believed, were "the seeds from which evils sprout." Thus, to combat this, Kahane

argued that Torahic law must be treated as a single, unified, all-or-nothing, entity.[9]

Kahane's strict adherence to Halakha translated to his interpretation of

Zionism as well. Specifically, Kahane proposed a Zionist ideology that derived from

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[9] Meir Kahane, "Torah Morality," *Jewish Press*, July 7, 1961 and July 14, 1961.

Maimonides' 12th-century Law of the Kings, or *Melachim uMilchamot*.[10] In this

portion of the Mishneh Torah, Maimonedes relates the spiritual laws by which Jewish

kings, judges, and leaders were to abide. Maimonides intended these laws to be the

governing principles during a time of Messianic reestablishment of a King David's

monarchy in the Kingdom of Israel and be a guide for how the Jews were to relate to

neighboring populations once they reclaimed Eretz Israel.[11] In his estimation,

Maimonides knew war with other inhabitants of the land would be inevitable and thus

a future king needed a guiding principle for waging a more "humane" and

"compassionate" brand of warfare.[12]

As a strict religious Zionist, Meir Kahane believed that the Zionist enterprise in

Israel and Palestine was a fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. As such, Kahane

believed that Maimonidean laws should apply to the creation of a Jewish state in the

20th century. In his book *Uncomfortable Questions for Comfortable Jews*, Kahane

argued that "the people of Israel [were] given a Torah, given a land in which they were

to create a Torah society…[and] there is no escape from it….That is why a Jewish

government in a Jewish State is established and precisely fixed by halacha, by Jewish

law, and commanded to see to it that the Jewish nation within the Jewish state will,

indeed, obey the will of G-d for our own sake."[13] In his estimation, the military

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[10] Literally "The Laws of Kings and Their Wars."

[11] As mentioned in Chapter 1, fn. 9, Eretz Israel is the religious conception of the region in the Southern Levant that encompassed the ancient Kingdom of Israel, which Jewish religious belief and tradition holds as a God-given inheritance of the Jewish people.

[12] Reuven Brauner, *Laws of Kings and Wars, Translated from the Rambam's Mishne Torah* (Ra'anana, Israel: Talmudic Books, 2012), 3.

[13] Meir Kahane, *Uncomfortable Questions for Comfortable Jews* (Seacaucus, NJ: Lyle Stewart Publishing, 1987), 259-260.

victories won by Israel proved a divine providence, and thus the state that resulted from these victories should be governed as such. That the country's leaders at the time imposed a Western, liberal, and democratic government, to Kahane, suggested an immorality and self-indulgent, anarchic, materialism. He believed that such a government squandered the "divine mandate of Zionism" and was an afront to a God that bequeathed the land to them. Further, Kahane argued that a continued secular government would only anger God, leading to a national punishment on the level of the various expulsions in Jewish history.[14]

To properly institute a Torah society, Meir Kahane believed that Israel should be governed by the precepts laid out in the Laws of the Kings. This began with instituting a monarchy. Maimonides deemed the appointment of a king to be the foremost commandment for establishing a Jewish nation. Drawing from the books of Deuteronomy and Samuel, Maimonides had argued that naming a Jewish king should be the first act of a Jewish nation, even before the conquest and acquisition of territory. Maimonides also insisted that a Jewish nation would be run by a Court of Seventy elders, or Sanhedrin, to sit in tribunal and decide on all matters related to Jewish law. These elders were to consist of religious experts and were to be revered above all, so much so that in their presence the King should raise from his throne and bow at their feet.[15]

Building off Maimonides, Meir Kahane argued in the 1960s that a Jewish government in Israel must be ruled by a King or other strong executive and should

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[14] Kahane, *Uncomfortable Questions*, 255-262.
[15] Brauner, *Laws of Kings and Wars,* 5.

place judicial authority in the hands of a rabbinic court to interpret all matters of government under the guidance of Halakha. For example, respecting Sabbath would be compulsory, with use of cars being banned under the law, and restaurants and public spaces in Israel would be required to abide by the kashrut dietary laws. Kahane believed that establishing a Western-style democracy demonstrated that early Zionist leaders failed to appreciate the exceptionalism of Jewish life. Jewish monarchy in Israel would set the Jewish national project apart from other countries and establish a metaphorical sociological wall separating Jews from non-Jews, who he deemed to be lesser.[16]

Most importantly, aside from governmental structures and processes, Meir Kahane's Maimonidean Zionism focused on how Jews were to interact with non-Jews. For Maimonides, wars were an inevitable part of global society and would ultimately be necessary to ensure the security and survival of a Jewish nation. Maimonides encouraged war not to be sought, but to only be a last resort if peaceful means failed. If a rival nation was willing to peaceably resolve diplomatic rows, Maimonides argued that they should be allowed to make peace so long as they cede land and migrate out of conquered territories. To do this, Maimonides urged that in the course of conquest invading armies should always leave part of a territory un-besieged to allow citizens to flee. If this were to take place, the conquering king should be willing to offer some form of compensation for the evacuating populations.[17]

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[16] "Interview with Meir Kahane," in Raphael Mergui, *Israel's Ayatollahs: Meir Kahane and the Far Right in Israel* (London: Saqi Books, 1987).
[17] Brauner, *Laws of Kings and Wars*, 16.

Bringing this forward to the 20th century, Kahane argued that the only means for achieving internal peace in Israel was to adopt this precept into the Arab and Jewish peace process. Kahane believed that a Jewish state could never fully achieve internal security if there was a large segment of the population constantly fighting to upend the Jewish-centered system of government put in place. To remedy this, Kahane proposed largescale population transfers between Israel and its Arab neighbors. This transfer would allow for the Jewish populations of Arab countries to migrate to Israel, something that became increasingly desirable as conditions for Middle Eastern Jews deteriorated. This transfer, Kahane proposed, should be done as peacefully as possible, even offering emigrating Arabs full compensation for their property. Only if Arab Palestinians refused this offer should the Israeli government resort to forcible removal without compensation. This would mitigate potential ethnic violence between Arabs and Jews in Israel and allow for a peaceful transfer between Israel and neighboring Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan.[18]

Not only did Meir Kahane apply Maimonides' law to internal affairs, he also saw it as a framework for foreign policy questions. In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides had suggested that any conquered persons who did not wish to evacuate could be offered a chance to remain in the conquered territory if they accepted servitude and tribute to the king. To maintain peace and further prevent war, Maimonides believed that rival nations should be granted an opportunity to live under Jewish rule, but only if they were willing to abide by the laws of the land. In his

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[18] Meir Kahane, *They Must Go* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1981), 129.

discussion, Maimonides cited the biblical war with the Midianites as an example. Since the source of conflict between the Israelites and the Midianites was a matter of religious observance, Maimonides argued that acceding to the rule of the Jewish king meant accepting the religious and cultural precepts of the kingdom.[19]

Meir Kahane argued that this aspect to the Law of the Kings should be the way in which an Israeli government should interact with Arabs remaining within state boundaries. For him, Arabs who did not wish to evacuate a Jewish state should be ready to unequivocally "accept the State of Israel as the exclusive state of the Jewish people and of no one else." Adapting "servitude to the king" for modern governmental processes, Kahane suggested that Arabs in Israel would be granted the status of "resident stranger," and be granted personal rights, but be denied any form of national or citizenship rights. In his estimation, Arabs in Israel could achieve general economic, social, cultural, and religious freedom, but will not have an opportunity to participate in civic affairs or affect the trajectory of the state in any manner or fashion. This would allow them to remain in their villages, but the security and certainty of a Jewish state would be ensured.[20]

If the aforementioned offers of peace were rejected by rival nations, Maimonides argued that a Jewish nation should not shirk from the responsibility to wage war with nations that posed a threat to Jews. In the case of the Midianites, it was a war of vengeance after years of Israelite oppression. Even in cases where they suffered at the hands of anti-Semitic oppression, Maimonides believed that Jews

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[19] Brauner, *Laws of Kings and Wars,* 14.
[20] Kahane, *Uncomfortable Questions*, 250; Kahane, *They Must Go*, 149.

should always wage war in an ethical manor that stood in concert with Jewish law. To achieve this, Maimonides argued that Israel should always seek peace first. It was unethical to seek and glorify war, but Jews should also not refrain from war should the need arise. Thus, if genuine offers of peace with Israel should ever be rejected, Maimonides argued that Jews could seek all forms of violent conquest, even slaying all men in a city and razing it to the ground if warranted by battle.[21]

Meir Kahane adapted the necessity for violent conquest into his ideology for combatting anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism, in Kahane's estimation, presented an existential crisis for world Jewry. Still reeling from the Holocaust, Kahane argued that discovery of the atrocities only presented a temporary reprieve from violent anti-Semitism. The near extermination of Jews offered global sympathy toward the Jewish people and made anti-Semites a temporary pariah. Coupling with this newfound sympathy came a postwar economic boom that Kahane argued caused a suspension of anti-Jewish hatred, as people were often more focused on consumerism and prosperity to pay attention to racial discord. These conditions, however, were only temporary and would never eradicate anti-Semitism from Western society.[22]

American Jews, in Kahane's estimation, saw similar threats to internal communal stability from the influx of black and Latino New Yorkers to traditionally Jewish neighborhoods in Brooklyn. After World War II, economic prosperity, booming residential development, and government-backed mortgage programs

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[21] Brauner, *Laws of Kings and Wars,* 14; Avraham Fischer, "Compassionate Conquest," *My Jewish Learning*, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/compassionate-conquest/.

[22] Meir Kahane, *Never Again: A Program for Jewish Survival* (Los Angeles: Nash Publishing, 1971), 82.

allowed white Americans opportunities to leave racially-mixed urban centers in favor

of segregated suburban neighborhoods that remained closed to black and Latino

Americans. The ensuing process of "white flight" fundamentally altered the makeup

of American cities as massive depopulation and repopulation, and the economic

restructuring that accompanied the staggering demographic shift, fueled a breakdown

and decay of urban environments.[23]

Increasingly reaping the economic privileges of whiteness in the postwar years,

American Jews eagerly joined the process of white flight. Previously Jewish-

dominated neighborhoods in Brooklyn, such as Crown Heights or Brownsville,

underwent massive demographic change. In the earliest postwar years, economically

stable Jews either migrated to suburban Long Island and New Jersey or chose intracity

migrating routes, settling in Queens and new areas of Brooklyn such as Canarsie, Mill

Basin, or Jamaica Bay. Replacing migrating Jews was a predominantly black

population. Institutional racism and economic segregation prevented black migrants

to Brooklyn from achieving widespread economic security, and Brooklyn's working-

class reputation deterred established, middle-class black populations. As a result, the

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[23] For more on 'white fight,' see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), Setha Low, *Behind the Gates: Life, Security, and the Pursuit of Happiness in Fortress America* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), David M.P. Freund, *Colored Politics: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

economic fortunes of western Brooklyn declined.[24]

Neighborhood relationships between black migrants and established Jews in Brooklyn deteriorated in the 1960s. City housing regulations gave preference to black New Yorkers who were displaced elsewhere, including many who were referred to euphemistically as "problem families" denoting previous criminality or juvenile delinquency. The combination of racial prejudice and the fear of increasing crime caused another round of outmigration in the Jewish community and neighborhoods that were 66 percent Jewish in 1957 were 75 percent black and Latino by 1962. The combination of poverty, violence, fears, and flight exacerbated tensions between the two communities and by the mid-1960s, racial tensions in Brooklyn reached a tipping point.[25]

Meir Kahane believed that new migrants to Jewish neighborhoods like Brownsville and Crown Heights brought with them a propensity for crime and violence. This, Kahane argued, often negatively affected Jewish businesses, as they were often the targets. As a result, Jewish businesses were faced with the option to shutter or relocate, leading to further breakdown of the neighborhood and expanding isolation of remaining Jews who were often too poor to leave for newer Jewish neighborhoods on Long Island.

Meir Kahane particularly chastised the Small Business Administration policy of "deferring disaster area" loans to merchants in northern urban areas in hopes of

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[24] Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 129-132.
[25] Gurock, *Jews in Gotham*, 130-136.

transferring stores to local ownership. Kahane argued that this practice subjected

Jewish merchants to public threats that those who refused to accept the loan and leave

would be forced out through arson and violence. In his critique of this practice in the

Jewish Press, Kahane drew upon the example of Washington D.C. and claimed a Jew

in D.C. was the victim of arson every night in the weeks that followed Martin Luther

King Jr.'s assassination and that extremist black activists repeatedly claimed that local

Jewish merchants were the enemy of the black community.[26] Kahane believed that

this type of violence left Jews with the choice of leaving their neighborhoods or

suffering under the yoke of repeated violence. For poor Jews in Brooklyn who could

not afford to relocate, Kahane argued that this was practically a death sentence.

While Kahane shied away from suggesting relocation of black and Latino New

Yorkers from historically Jewish neighborhoods, he continued to extoll the danger that

mixed neighborhoods held for Jews. He argued that he, "far more clearly than other

Jewish leaders – understood the breakdown of the concept of the 'melting pot' and the

growth of ethnic separation in the wake of Black Power." Kahane believed that mixed

neighborhoods, whether they be the mixture of Jewish and black found in Brooklyn or

the mixture of Jewish and other white ethnic groups found in suburban communities

on Long Island, naturally created a "populist force that was at best passively hostile to

Jews and, worse, brimming with resentment and hatred."[27] This, he felt, would

ultimately lead to the downfall of American Jewry at the hands of increasingly violent

anti-Semitism. The only remedy, in Kahane's estimation, was a tacit policy of ethnic

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[26] Meir Kahane, "Jewish Merchants Being Forced Out," *Jewish Press*, May 3, 1968, p. 1
[27] Meir Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League* (Radnor, PA: Chilton Books, 1975), 189.

separation to allow Jews to retain control over their own neighborhoods and institutions without fear of anti-Semitism or forced assimilation.

In New York, Meir Kahane saw this as the answer to local disputes over institutional control, particularly as it related to the New York City teachers strike. Kahane believed that if black and Latino New Yorkers wished to move into Jewish neighborhoods, then they should be willing to accept Jews dominating local institutions. This came to a head in the late-1960s as black and Latino New Yorkers in Brooklyn sought to localize control of neighborhood institutions, such as the school district and chamber of commerce. This, Kahane believed, was done as an attempt to disenfranchise local Jewish residents and change the character of the neighborhood away from its early-20th century Jewish roots toward one of anti-Semitic minority nationalism.[28]

Meir Kahane believed that the school decentralization movement in New York sprung out of prominent black nationalist movements of the 1960s, which he argued were anti-Semitic in nature. This belief largely stemmed from black nationalist critiques of Zionism in the wake of the 1967 War. Prominent black nationalists, such as SNCC's Stokely Carmichael, increasingly linked the struggles of African Americans in the United States with Palestinian nationalism. After Israel captured and occupied Palestinian, Syrian, and Egyptian territory in 1967, these comparisons increased. Stokely Carmichael repeatedly denounced "Zionist aggression," the *SNCC Newsletter* published pro-Palestinian political cartoons that relied on anti-Semitic

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[28] Meir Kahane, "Racism and Subversion in NYC Public Schools is Growing," *Jewish Press*, March 3, 1968, 2.

imagery and caricatures, and the magazine of the Black Panthers wrote "We're gonna burn their towns and that ain's all. We're gonna piss upon the Wailing Wall. And then we'll get Kosygin and DeGaulle. That will be ecstasy, killing every Jew we see."[29]

Kahane decried black nationalist support of the decentralization movement in New York City public schools, believing it to be an attempt to remove teachers for being Jewish. He similarly argued that governmental initiatives designed to achieve racial parity in education, such as affirmative action, unfairly targeted Jewish students and were an attempt to further remove Jews from public educational institutions in New York. These programs, Kahane argued, violated Jewish sovereignty in local institutions and thus ran afoul of the major precepts for peace laid out by Maimonides.

In American society, Kahane believed anti-Semitism accompanied racial strife and neighborhood change. Kahane believed that conflicts over the ethnic character of neighborhoods and institutions, clashes between white and black workers, and increasing competition for decreasing resources would ultimately lead to increased anti-Semitism, as both sides blamed Jews for the poor circumstances in which they found themselves. Since American Jews occupied a precarious racial and social position in postwar American society, Kahane feared that increasing anxieties stemming from societal shifts would upset the balance and cause anti-Semitism in the United States to skyrocket. As urban economies began to downturn in the 1960s, white and black blue-collar workers in urban areas faced job shortages and increased

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[29] Keith P. Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

competition for limited resources, causing racial strife, and often outright violence, between the two groups. As both groups looked for answers and scapegoats, Kahane feared that Jews would become the default scapegoat, as they had been for centuries in European society.[30]

These social changes, and the growing political and social strength of minorities in the United States, Kahane argued, demonstrated to white Americans that their own status and position was threatened, driving them into a corner of fear an apprehension. This threatened feeling often fueled white American anti-Semitism. As displaced European Jews arrived in the United States after World War II and established Jews entered suburban America in unprecedented numbers, white Americans increasingly embraced anti-Semitic views. Canards that Jews were a "Godless people" who controlled American money and wealth flourished. In many cases, devout Christian groups shared these sentiments, believing Jews to be "materialistic, dishonest, and vulgar."[31]

Meir Kahane worried that this simmering anti-Semitism could create a white backlash against American Jews. White Americans, Kahane believed, would resent the influx of black workers into the urban labor force and unpopular racial changes such as desegregation and affirmative action. Kahane believed that white Americans would point to Jewish "leadership, guidance, financial, and physical help to the civil rights movement" and blame Jews for increasingly poor economic prospects. He also

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[30] Kahane, *Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 80-85.
[31] Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press., 1994), 162.

believed that the relative dearth of Jews in American blue-collar jobs would further fuel suspicions of Jewish economic control.[32]

Similarly, Kahane believed that black and Latino New Yorkers would see Jewish business owners and landlords as the source of their economic and social woes. Since the end of the Civil War, Jewish shop-owners and landlords often engaged in business with black customers and tenants, typically filling a need left by overarching segregation. In northern urban centers, such as New York, Jewish immigrants were far more likely to engage with black customers, causing black Americans to disproportionately conflate Jews with control of local institutions, a belief that built upon centuries-old anti-Semitic tropes about Jewish economic control. Kahane worried that increasing economic marginalization in black and Latino communities would create an anti-Semitic backlash against those they believed to be controlling their economic struggles.[33]

He pointed to community leaders who openly criticized "ruthless Jewish landlords" and "Jewish gouging merchants" and argued that minority leaders in New York were echoing the same canards that riled up Germans in the 1930s and 1940s. While this language was by no means common amongst African American leaders in New York, Kahane cherry-picked the most vocal proponents to bolster his claims of impending backlash.

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[32] Kahane, *Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 84.
[33] David Levering Lewis "Parallels and Divergences" in Jack Salzman, ed. *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews* (New York: George Braziller, Inc, 1992), 17-25.

Meir Kahane also claimed that minority leaders stoked fears of colonialism in their chiding of local Jews by arguing that Jews were pilfering money from minority neighborhoods to send over to Israel to further the expansion of a "racist, fascist, expansionist state" akin to Rhodesia and South Africa.[34] This discourse stemmed from black nationalist critiques of Israel. After the 1967 War and occupation of Palestinian territory, many black activists drew connections between the experiences of black Americans and Arabs in Palestine. These leaders argued that continued occupation relied on the same racial violence and state repression endemic within the American imperial culture. They drew connections between Israeli suppression of PLO activists and ongoing police brutality in American cities, arguing that they were similarly imperialist systems. By drawing these connections, Meir Kahane argued that black leaders in New York hoped to foster a violent form of anti-Semitism that would result in the targeting of Jewish residents and businesses.[35]

To remedy the perceived rise in anti-Semitism, Meir Kahane proposed a program of violent Jewish self-defense. Violence, Meir Kahane argued, was traditionally a Jewish ethic. Violence saved the Jews at Masada, the men of Bar Kokhba, and Juda Maccabee.[36] To Kahane, violence was an inherent part of the Jewish religious tradition and a recurring theme in the Hebrew bible. Violence, he argued, only left the Jewish ethos in the diaspora. In the horrific diaspora ghetto,

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[34] Kahane, *Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 88.

[35] Feldman, *A Shadow over Palestine, 118-120*.

[36] Masada was the site where in 66 CE, a group of Jewish rebels defeated a large Roman garrison; Bar Kokhba was a Jewish rebellion in the Roman province of Judea led by Simon bar Kokhba circa 132 CE; Juda Maccabee was a Jewish kohen (priest) that led the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire circa 160 BCE.

"with its fears, neuroses, and insecurities," Jews learned to react out of fear rather than what Kahane saw as self-respect. The new nonviolent ethos was un-Jewish and marked an unacceptable assimilation into Christian society and an embrace of "turning the Christian cheek."[37] Kahane decried the ethos that suggested "one did not sink to the level of a bigot by returning his attacks" and argued that this ethos not only did nothing to quell the tide of anti-Semitism, but also played into the hands of bigots and encouraged them to step up anti-Semitic attacks.[38] Instead, Kahane suggested Jews follow the Mishnaic precept "He who comes to slay you – slay him first." Peace, he believed, should not be prioritized over social freedom and equality. He instead argued that Jews have the religious obligation to be willing to forcefully respond to anti-Semitism. Kahane argued that Jewish law mandated that Jews "not stand idly by thy brother's blood" and that if Jews were suffering under the yoke of anti-Semitism, then Jewish law deemed a violent response not only permissive, but obligatory.[39]

Harkening back to his own family's response to anti-Semitic violence under the British Mandate, Meir Kahane believed the only way for Jews to overcome rising anti-Semitism was the establishment of self-defense organizations. Under British rule, Jews formed organizations such as Haganah, Etzel, and Lehi to protect Jewish communities from violence and push for rights and representation apart from the British government, which culminated in the 1948 War and Israeli independence. Kahane believed that if Jews in New York were to ever feel safe in their city, then

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[37] Kahane, *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 100.
[38] Kahane, *Never Again*, 76.
[39] Meir Kahane, "On Violence", *Jewish Press*, January 29, 1971, 3.

they needed defense organizations that were not afraid to fight back against anti-Semitism, even if it meant resorting to violent means to achieve it. This ultimately led to Kahane's creation of the Jewish Defense League in 1968.[40]

This program of self-defense was indicative of Meir Kahane's attempt to reclaim Jewish masculinity. Much like Revisionist leaders in the 1940s, Meir Kahane believed that Jews in the diaspora suffered from lost masculinity. Kahane argued that when Jews arrived in the United States, they had a masculine Jewishness that "survived an exile of twenty centuries." He argued that arriving Jews were proud nationalists who agonized over every Jewish tragedy. They arrived "fortified with a faith of deep substance and great moral and spiritual strength." For the arriving Jew, this strength "sustained him and his fathers before him in a Europe where the Czar impressed his eight-year-old child into the army for twenty-five years. It was this which kept him from surrendering when the pogromist sought his body and the Church his soul. It was this which preserved him when the bitter winter sapped his energy bitterer poverty grasped at his existence."[41]

Jewish life in the United States, Kahane argued, destroyed this strong Jewish identity. He believed that the United States compelled assimilation. The central belief that the United States should serve as an ethnic 'melting pot' caused Jewish immigrants to abandon the aspects of their identity that made them exceptional and instead adopted an inferior, homogenized American identity, which chipped away at the masculine core of the Jewish man. He argued that Jews "uniformly marched down

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[40] Kahane, *Story of the Jewish Defense League.*
[41] Kahane, *Never Again*, 53.

the American road with a melting pot under their arms, be3ating it over and over again and shouting forth the Eleventh Commandment to the American Jew: Thou shalt melt!"[42]

Kahane's conception of Jewish masculinity ran afoul of dominant concepts of Jewish masculinity in the 20th century. Whereas many American Zionists argued that Jews in America were able to eschew their label as effeminate because of their freedom from regular persecution, Meir Kahane believed the opposite.[43] Kahane argued that it was survival in the face of Jewish persecution that made Jews masculine. The lack of persecution in the United States made Americans weak and threatened to erode the core of their Jewish identity. It was only through asserting Jewishness, fighting anti-Semitism through a program of militant self-defense, and emigration away from the United States that distinctive Jewish identity could survive.[44]

Meir Kahane argued that anti-Semitism in New York was reaching the point of violence. Kahane pointed to allegations of anti-Semitic harassment, arson, and assault against Jewish merchants in New York and argued that crime instigated by black and Latino New Yorkers echoed the violent general strike instigated by Arab Palestinians in 1929 and 1936. He contended that "assaults on Jewish students and youth – as Jews – are made by cursing black militants. 'Jew-stores' are looted and burned, and 'Goldberg' is shaken down for money." In his assertions, he purposely paired anti-

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[42] Meir Kahane, "What Makes Bernie Run?" in Meir Kahane, *On Jews and Judaism: Selected Articles, 1961-1990* (Jerusalem: Institute for the Publication of the Writings of Meir Kahane, 1993).
[43] Sarah Imhoff, *Masculinity and the Making of American Judaism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2017), 186.
[44] Kahane, *Never Again, 97.*

Jewish violence in Brooklyn with the Mandate-era violence that caused Safed to reel from arson, assaults, and murders. Kahane drew firm connections between the two and replaced the specter of Arab violence in Palestine with a looming "menace" in black- and Latino-led crime waves.[45]

Kahane further built upon his lingering fears from the Arab Revolts by arguing that Jews remained isolated in the violence. He argued that New York City officials, local police, and the Jewish establishment refused to take action for fear of being portrayed as anti-black. He chastised them, writing, "How slow were they to see the violent anti-Semitism of the New York City school strike, and how little was done about all the events that preceded the strike itself, events that made it clear that Jew-hatred was raging in black areas. How little was and is done and said about Jewish merchants in urban areas who are targets of looting. How great is the silence as campuses become hotbeds of open anti-Jewish articles and speeches by black radicals."[46] Within this chiding, Kahane connected growing anti-Semitism in New York City and the lack of attention paid by New York establishments to the believed British inaction in the face of Arab assaults on Jewish communities in 1929 and 1936 Mandate Palestine. He believed that New York Jews were similarly abandoned by government officials tasked with protecting their community and believed that with this persistent inaction, the violence would continue to grow and eventually cause mass death in the Jewish community.

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[45] Ibid., 101.
[46] Meir Kahane, "Racism and Subversion in NYC Public Schools is Growing," *Jewish Press,* March 10, 1968.

For Meir Kahane, this policy of Maimonidean Zionism was the only means of survival for New York Jews. In his mind, a specter of anti-Semitism loomed heavily over postwar Jewish life. To combat this, Kahane adapted Maimonides' medieval 'Law of the Kings' to modern Jewish nationalism. The resulting ideology privileged Jewish ownership, segregation, and militant self-defense. In a New York that Kahane believed was gripped by black crime and anti-Semitism, this translated to the protection of Jewish neighborhoods from black and Latino in-migration

Meir Kahane's formulation of Maimonidean Zionism and the ways it resonated within a Brooklyn Jewish community caught in the middle of rising racial tensions propelled Kahane's career to new heights. Struggling through his early career and a steady stream of failed ventures, Kahane found a complex issue to which he could attach his firebrand ideology of violence. This allowed Kahane to become the face of Jewish outrage in the late-1960s and early-1970s.

"The Miracle at Howard Beach"

Meir Kahane took his first pulpit position at the Howard Beach Jewish Center (HBJC) in 1958. The Howard Beach Jewish Center was in a working-class section of Queens, in a mixed-Jewish-Italian neighborhood that was experiencing large in-migration of black and Latino residents. Struggling with finances and decreasing membership, HBJC operated in a run-down, two-storied, frame house with the temple located upstairs and offices and classrooms on the ground floor. From the start of his tenure at HBJC, Kahane attempted to institute his philosophies on Halakha

observance. Upon hiring, Kahane demanded HBJC adopt Orthodox practices, including a kosher kitchen, traditional prayers and separate seating for men and women with a partition, or mechitzah, between them. He also insisted that HBJC resign from the United Synagogue of America, the organizing body of Conservative temples, in favor of a more orthodox organization. This concerned several members since a majority of the congregation was loosely observant or nonobservant of Halakhic laws. However, Meir Kahane commanded a much smaller salary than the average Conservative or Reform rabbi in New York City, which compelled the struggling synagogue to concede to his requests.[47]

At the Howard Beach Jewish Center, Meir Kahane first discovered his ability to reach and inspire Jewish youth. Though many adult congregants rejected Kahane's pushes for Orthodoxy, Kahane succeeded in introducing the youth of the temple to his brand of Orthodoxy. His fire-and-brimstone style of preaching resonated with Jewish youth, and his ridicule of the Reform and Conservative movements convinced students that Orthodox Judaism was the best way to shun the supposed assimilationist nature of American Jewry.[48]

Kahane's preaching of Jewish and Orthodox exceptionalism particularly resonated for Jewish youth struggling with notions of identity and place in a changing postwar American culture. American Jews emerged from World War II in a better social position than they held before the war. The revelation of the horrors of Nazi

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[47] Libby Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane: His Life and Thought, vol. 1: 1932-1975* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2008), 42.

[48] Robert I. Friedman, *The False Prophet: Rabbi Meir Kahane From FBI Informant to Knesset Member* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1990), 48.

genocide caused a reactionary push for Jewish inclusion in American society. As a result, American Jews moved to suburban towns and neighborhoods that initially barred them, forcing the formation of new Jewish communal patterns. Outside the core of urban Jewish subculture, Jewish identity could no longer be absorbed from the surrounding atmosphere. In New York's suburbs, Jewish families were scattered at random and living within a cluster of Jewish homes became exceedingly rare. Jews were no longer a majority, or even plurality, in their neighborhoods. Accompanying these communal changes was a rise in intermarriage and less strict adherence to Jewish religious practice. Jewish youth in the postwar years faced the brunt of these changes, as they navigated traditional community attachments and the urge to assimilate into the dominant American culture.[49]

The postwar years proved particularly challenging for Orthodox Judaism. As Jews moved into suburbs and away from traditional Jewish institutions, attachment to liberal denominations in Judaism, such as Reform and Conservative Judaism, prevailed. Once the dominant denomination of Judaism in the United States, by the 1950s, Orthodoxy struggled to keep adherents among an increasingly suburbanizing population. Increasing assimilation in these suburbs brought about shrinking personal patterns of observance, and the ascendancy of Conservative Judaism as a denomination that offered a mixture of traditional piety with modern acculturation,

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[49] Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism, A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 282-293.

forced Orthodox Jews to reckon with a modern New York they increasingly did not fit in.[50]

Meir Kahane's attempts at reinstating an Old-World orthodoxy ran counter to these changes in American Jewry. By 1960, leaders in HBJC grew tired of Kahane's changes, believing them to be increasingly obsolete in postwar America. In March 1960, the congregation called together a general meeting to discuss the fate of Kahane as the pulpit rabbi. Despite a blinding snowstorm, about 95 percent of the congregation attended the meeting and after several hours of debate with Kahane, the congregation voted to oust him as rabbi by a large majority, ending his tenure after less than two years.[51]

Following his removal as rabbi, several local papers reached out to Kahane to get his take on his firing. Having amassed a bit of a following at HBJC, editors believed that Kahane's experience might resonate with readers, particularly readers of Orthodox publications such as *The Brooklyn Daily*, later the *Jewish Press*. The editor at the *Jewish Press,* Sholom Klass, convinced Kahane to write a column on his firing for their paper, which was published under the headline "The End of a Miracle at Howard Beach." Writing the article as a supposed unnamed third party, Kahane argued that the he sought to "bring religion to ignorant assimilated Jews" and was fired because he "dared to turn the synagogue president's son into an observant Jew." He continued on to argue that the incident exposed the "illusion and shallowness [of]

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[50] Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Orthodox Jews in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 199-225.
[51] Friedman, *The False Prophet*, 45-53.

religion among modern Jews" and that his firing disgraced Judaism since the "leaders of a synagogue object[ed] to the very *raison d'etre* of that institution." Kahane's article inspired and galvanized the youth at HBJC who supported him, turning Kahane into a local folk hero amongst young Brooklyn Jews.[52]

With the success of the article on his departure from the Howard Beach Jewish Center, Meir Kahane began writing for the *Jewish Press* on a permanent basis. This position gave Kahane an outlet to spread his views on Jewish life, Zionism, Israel, and the state of civil rights and protest in the United States. At his height, Kahane wrote eight or nine different articles per week under different pennames, including Martin King, Meir David, Meir HaCohen, and Michael King. Recurring columns included "A Small Voice," which served as an outlet to chastise New York politics; "Israel Through Laughter and Tears" and "Israel News Analysis," which gave him an outlet for his Zionist principles and assessment of Israeli and Middle Eastern politics; "Spotlight on Extremism" and "Racism and Subversion," which focused primarily on black and Arab activism in the United States; and "Communism and Judaism" and "The Jewish Stake in the War on Communism," which discussed Cold War developments and their impact on Jews in Israel, the United States, and elsewhere in the Diaspora. Kahane's continued involvement in the paper transformed it to a political powerhouse in New York's Jewish community with a circulation over 200,000 at its peak.

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[52] Meir Kahane, "End of the Miracle of Howard Beach," *Jewish Press*, March 18, 1960, p. 3, 12.

Though Kahane's time at Howard Beach Jewish Center was brief, it established him as a prominent Orthodox voice in New York City. He both proved to be unrelenting in his application of Halakha and proved to strike a chord with young American Jews who felt a lost connection to traditional Judaism. This success emboldened a young Kahane during his rise to prominence. As he broke onto the national stage, these characteristics became central to his success in garnering political support and mobilizing his eventual base of Jewish youth.

John Birch and Anti-Communism

Meir Kahane's first foray into the American political sphere was through the Center for Political Studies, a private research firm in Washington, DC, which he founded with childhood friend Joseph Churba. Churba, a doctoral student at Columbia University, had links with both the CIA and Israeli intelligence officials. These connections allowed Churba and Kahane the opportunity to infiltrate American extremist groups and the growing anti-Vietnam War movement in the mid-1960s. In 1963, the FBI approached Kahane and Churba hoping they could infiltrate the then little-known John Birch Society, a far-right, anti-communist political group started by Robert Welch five years earlier.[53] Recognizing anti-Semitism in the organization, Kahane adopted the name Michael King and abandoned his kippah and tallit. Kahane

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[53] The John Birch Society was considered on the far-right fringes of American conservatism, disavowed by conservative leaders as William F. Buckley, who feared the radicalization of the American right.

and Churba spent the better part of two years working with the FBI, informing them of the membership and activities of the group.

The years he spent in the John Birch Society had two transformative effects on Meir Kahane. The first was that it exposed him to face-to-face virulent anti-Semitism for the first time. While undercover, Kahane met middle- and upper-middle-class members who claimed that America's various social ills, including racial tensions and drug abuse, were emblematic of a global Jewish conspiracy that sought to destroy the United States from within and make it ripe for a communist revolution on par with that in the Soviet Union. Kahane believed that this group posed a particular danger for American Jews. In his estimation, if anti-Semitic conspiracy theories abounded during a period of relative prosperity, then economic downturn and depression would likely lead to a high-level of Jewish scapegoating, much in the way it had during the interwar economic collapse in Europe. This placed American Jews at a perilous precipice wherein their safety and stability in American society was entirely contingent on economic prosperity.[54]

The second effect this time had on Kahane was to birth in him a strong anti-communist ideology that continued throughout his activism. Communism, Kahane believed, was inherently anti-Semitic and dangerous to the Jewish people. Particularly offensive to Kahane was Marxism's antithetical attitude toward religion. Marx argued that religion was the opium of the masses that was a useful tool for the ruling classes in their continued subjugation of the working class, as it offered false hope of

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[54] Meir Kahane, "Is the John Birch Society Anti-Semitic?" two parts, *Jewish Press*, February 3, 1967 and February 10, 1967.

millennialism, or a the believe that a Golden Age or Paradise will occur on Earth prior to the final judgment, and distracted them from their own oppression. Soviet Marxist-Leninism further saw religion as a hindrance to human development and implemented rules to enforce state atheism. Kahane argued that the demonization of religion resulted in persecution of the Jews, most notably in the form of forced assimilation. He believed that communism sought to eradicate the distinctiveness of Jewish identity, thereby nullifying national claims and protections against discrimination.[55]

Meir Kahane also took umbrage with the Soviet Union's alignment with Arab nationalist groups in Palestine. Zionism was a focal point for communist expansion beginning with the Third Comintern Congress in 1921. In a letter to member parties, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) argued that without revolution in Asia, the greater proletarian revolution could not occur. This letter specifically singled out Zionism for criticism, arguing that it was "aiming to divert the Jewish working masses from the class struggle and was nothing but a petty bourgeois counter-revolutionary utopia."[56] As Israel emerged as a Western ally, Communist leadership feared Zionism could cause internal dissent and opposition among a substantial segment of party members who were Jewish. This prompted the Soviet Union to increasingly back Palestinian nationalism in their fight against Israel. Responding to this, Kahane argued that the "Soviets [were] using the Arabs…to destroy not only Israel, but all vestiges of Western and democratic influence in the

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[55] Meir Kahane, "Communism vs. Judaism," *Jewish Press*, April 14, 1967, p. 20.
[56] Musa Budeiri, *The Palestine Communist Party, 1919-1948: Arab and Jew in the Struggle for Internationalism* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 1979), 1.

Middle East."[57] Kahane pointed to the Tricontinental Conference in 1966, which saw

delegates from national liberation movements and parties in 35 countries meet in

Havana, Cuba. He argued that the conference codified the anti-Israel stance of global

communists. He quoted the Soviet delegate to the Conference, Sharaf R. Rashidov,

who argued that "the Soviet people are in solidarity with the struggle waged by the

Arab peoples for the inalienable and lawful rights of the Palestinian Arabs. They

resolutely condemn the subversive activities of the Zionist circle in Israel, which are

directed against the national liberation movement and which serve the interests of

international imperialism." Kahane argued that delegates sought to bring down Israeli

sovereignty and push out the Jewish population in favor of an Arab nationalist

government. Thus, the expansion of Communism in the 1960s, for him, presented an

existential crisis for Israel and global Jewry.[58]

As part of their work on the Center for Political Research, Joseph Churba and

Meir Kahane organized their fledgling July Fourth Movement in 1965. This

movement worked with conservative students on college campuses in New York,

particularly students at Columbia, to "try and fill the void in colleges and among

young people of our cities where there seems to be no voice to answer back the

Communist-inspired appeasement drives and the 'Let's get out of Vietnam crusades.'"

The most notable project taken on as part of the July Fourth Movement, other than

recruitment, was to award a posthumous medal to the parents of a Green Beret killed

in Vietnam, at a small press conference attended by little more than group members

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[57] Meir Kahane, "Communism vs Judaism," *Jewish Press*, June 23, 1967, p. 47.
[58] Meir Kahane, "Communism vs Judaism," *Jewish Press*, July 7, 1967, p. 14.

and the soldier's family. This movement failed to attract the attention Kahane and

Churba hoped for, and within a few years the two gave up on the movement. Churba

and Kahane suffered further setbacks in 1967 when cutbacks in the federal budget led

to the closing of the Center for Political Research. The two men wrote "The Jewish

Stake in Vietnam" later that year before having a falling out that resulted in Meir

Kahane's move back to New York in early 1968.[59]

This anti-Communist ideology thrust Meir Kahane into the American political

right-wing. American conservatives rallied around anti-Communist foreign policy in

the 1960s and the escalation of containment efforts in Vietnam offered a unifying ideal

for the American right-wing. Coming out of World War II, American conservatism

focused primarily on supporting a philosophy of smaller government and traditional

community values. Conservatives stood united behind their advocacy for a society

free from government interference, believing that if a government became too large, it

was bound to become totalitarian. While most movements in conservatism were anti-

Communist, there was no single consensus on what anti-Communism should look

like.[60]

The onset of the Vietnam War presented a watershed moment for American

conservatism. Still reeling from Barry Goldwater's humiliating defeat in the 1964

presidential election, which saw Lyndon Johnson win the largest share of the popular

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[59] Untitled article, *New York Journal-American*, July 4, 1965, Box 2, Folder 3, Jewish Defense League Collection, Yeshiva University Archives; Yair Kotler, *Heil Kahane*. (New York: Adama Books, 1986), 24-30.

[60] Seth Offenbach, *The Conservative Movement and the Vietnam War: The Other Side of Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 2019).

vote of any candidate since 1820, the Vietnam War gave American conservatives an issue to regroup and rally around. American conservatives adopted a hawkish stance that not only supported American intervention in Vietnam, but also pushed for the expansion of this intervention. With the rise of anti-war New Left movements in the late-1960s, conservatism gained a reactionary foil galvanize activists around on the home front.[61]

This is where Meir Kahane flourished in the conservative movement. For Kahane, American political discord in the 1960s was a powder keg that threatened Jewish security in the United States and Israel. The John Birch Society demonstrated that anti-Semitism was a lingering threat waiting to boil over within fringe right-wing, white, political movements in the United States. On the other hand, he believed the expansion of Communism into the Middle East represented an existential threat to Jewish survival in Israel. Ultimately, this anti-Communism won out over worries about white, conservative, anti-Semitism, and he spent the bulk of his activist career attempting to quash left-aligned movements in New York.

Kahane and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Strike

Meir Kahane entered the national consciousness for the first time during the New York public teachers' strike in 1968 and the protests that unfolded in the Ocean Hill and Brownsville neighborhoods of Brooklyn. Since Jewish immigration began *en*

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[61] Ibid.

masse in the 1880s, Brownsville was a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. At its height in the 1920s and 1930s, Jews constituted over 80 percent of the population and the neighborhood quickly became nicknamed "little Jerusalem." These demographics changed beginning in the 1930s, as African Americans left the South in search of better economic opportunities in prosperous urban areas in the North. In 1940, African Americans constituted six percent of the neighborhood population, and by 1950, they constituted nearly 15 percent. As the 1960s began, however, this gradual demographic shift increased exponentially. Rising crime and social mobility compelled wealthier Jews in the neighborhood to migrate to neighborhoods further out on Long Island.

This outmigration of New York Jews coincided with a larger phenomenon of white flight in the 1950s and 1960s. As postwar civil rights and integration victories pushed more heterogeneity in American society, many middle-class white populations racially-mixed neighborhoods for more homogenized suburban areas. The creation of new road and highway systems in major American cities exacerbated this issue as workers could increasingly reach jobs in city centers while living on city outskirts. Racial discrimination in housing and redlining further enforced segregation in newly opened neighborhoods, as African Americans remained excluded from the economic incentives that compelled migration.[62] This outmigration of white New Yorkers in the

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[62] See Gerald Gamm, *Urban Exodus: Why the Jews Left Boston and the Catholics Stayed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); and Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

1960s further opened migration opportunities for black and Latino New Yorkers and by 1970, Brownsville was 77 percent black and 19 percent Latino, leaving lower-class Jews in a stark minority.[63]

The influx of African Americans and Latinos resulted in overcrowding at Brownsville schools. By the mid-1960s, overcrowding became so bad that local schools had students attend in shifts. Compounding this problem, the mass arrival of people of color caused a reaction from adjoining neighborhoods, which sought to prevent public school redistricting that could bring about more diverse student bases. As a result, plans for new school construction met fierce backlash and lobbying, resulting in the stalling and cancellation of projects. Overcrowding and stalemates continued throughout the 1960s, as school desegregation became an increasingly divisive issue in New York.

These stalemates fueled racial divides in Brooklyn, as predominantly black and Latino neighborhoods fought against a predominantly-Jewish United Federation of Teachers (UFT). Bolstered by previous civil rights victories, local black activists demanded authority over the schools in which their children were educated. The burgeoning community-control movement sought locally-controlled schools that instilled a "black value system" emphasizing unity, collective work, and responsibility. This plan gained traction with New York Mayor John Lindsay and wealthy business leaders, who suggested that community control could serve as a

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[63] Wendell E. Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 84, 148-149.

pathway toward social stability. In 1967, the city experimented with community control in three areas around the city, including the Ocean Hill-Brownsville area of Brooklyn, which became a decentralized school district before the 1967-1968 school year. The new school district operated under a separate, community-elected governing board that had authority over all administrative and faculty hiring decisions. The district quickly appointed one of the city's most racially diverse set of administrations, including New York's first Puerto Rican principal.[64]

In May 1968, district officials requested the transfer or dismissal of 83 employees, an overwhelming majority of whom were Jewish, citing a loss of faith in their suitability for employment on the part of the community. Jewish leaders quickly decried the firings, and the American Jewish Congress immediately condemned the actions as anti-Semitic.[65]

The furor that followed the firing granted Meir Kahane an opportunity to garner a national spotlight. Kahane wrote several weekly columns at the *Jewish Press* in 1968 which he used to voice concerns over the policy of school decentralization. Kahane believed that school decentralization in Ocean Hill-Brownsville was not to empower black communities and offer them control over local institutions. Instead, he believed that black activists sought to specifically unseat Jewish teachers and upend any remaining Jews from the neighborhood. He cited the district's rejection of the United Federation of Teachers and the firing of the 83 district employees as proof that

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[64] Ibid., 229-230.
[65] Leonard Buder, "11 Teachers Defy Local Dismissals: Six Supervisors Ousted by Experimental Board in Brooklyn Also Show Up," *New York Times,* May 11, 1968, 1.

black activists were disproportionately targeting Jewish educators. Kahane likened this to large-scale Jewish economic displacement in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and Arab countries after the 1948 War.[66]

From his post as editor, Kahane stoked fears of what he called "negro Nazism." Kahane's column, "Racism and Subversion in New York Public Schools is Growing," chastised and vilified black activists and personnel on a weekly basis, decrying them as anti-Semitic, communistic, and a threat to American democracy. He argued that because of school decentralization, "the possibility of total racist and leftist takeovers in certain areas [became] appallingly probably." The gravest risk for local schools, Kahane argued, was the fact that "racists and subversives [had] become increasingly bolder" and "openly anti-Semitic remarks [were] made by Negro teachers."[67]

In his analysis, Kahane constantly harped on the idea that the principle goal of black New Yorkers was to disenfranchise local Jews and eventually force them out of the neighborhood, drawing upon years of previous anti-Semitic violence in Europe and the Middle East. In *Jewish Press* columns, Kahane routinely wrote of an impending holocaust, juxtaposing images of strutting black militants against pictures of Nazis goose-stepping down German streets. Kahane compared violent outbursts in New York and New Jersey to the Arab Revolts and placed stories of black nationalists and Palestinian militants side-by-side under inflammatory headlines like "The Fascist

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[66] Kahane, "Racism and Subversion."
[67] Meir Kahane, "Racism and Subversion in New York Public Schools is Growing," *Jewish Press*, March 8, 1968, 1, 14.

Alliance in America" and "A Greater Wave of Anti-Semitism." He flooded the paper

with stories of black and Latino violence against Jews and with every outbreak of

protests and disorder, he argued that black community leaders were trying to "control

our cities and establish a Black Klanism."[68]

When addressing the Ocean Hill-Brownsville decentralization movement,

Kahane claimed that the move by the school district to install black and Latino

teachers who were not part of the UFT signaled local schools attempting to instill an

anti-Semitic, black nationalist agenda amongst the youth, thus further alienating and

villainizing the remaining Jews in the neighborhood. In response, Kahane called for

mass protests and demonstrations at the New York Board of Education. He urged

readers to voice outrage to Board President Alfred Guardino or Superintendent

Bernard Donovan, providing their contact information in his paper. He also urged

readers to call on the African American Teachers Association to affirm that it

disavows "racist or bigoted feelings" or risk having "its members banned from the city

school system."[69]

Meir Kahane's rejection of school decentralization was hardly exceptional

among New York's Jewish community. Albert Shanker, the president of the UFT,

used accusations of anti-Semitism to rally New York Jews around his union's cause.

As passions enflamed, the Anti-Defamation League and New York Board of Rabbis

joined the teachers' union in their criticism of teacher firings, labeling them as anti-

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[68] Meir Kahane, "Spotlight on Extremism," *Jewish Press*, June 20, 1969.
[69] Meir Kahane. "Racism and Subversion in New York Public Schools is Growing," *Jewish Press*, April 5, 1968, 3.

Semitically motivated.[70] Going a step further, Earl Rabb, executive director of the

Jewish Community Relations Council, dismissed the entire decentralization movement

by arguing that "calls for community control and decentralization masked an emerging

black anti-Semitism."[71]

Despite these accusations of anti-Semitism within the movement, school

decentralization attracted the support of many New York Jews and Jewish

organizations. The Jewish Cultural Clubs and Societies endorsed community control,

arguing that New York City schools operated under an inflexible bureaucracy and

could not properly meet the educational needs of local minorities.[72] Robert Goodman,

father of slain civil rights activist Andrew Goodman and president of local news

station WBAI, routinely defended his station's choice to offer decentralization

activists a prominent platform, believing accusations of anti-Semitism to be

overblown.[73]

The primary focus of Kahane's activism was Herman B. Ferguson, a teacher

and assistant principal in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville district and a black nationalist

activist. Herman Ferguson rose to prominence as an activist in the 1950s as a member

of Malcolm X's Organization of Afro-American Unity. Throughout the 1950s and

1960s, Ferguson pushed for civil rights issues in New York and was a staunch

proponent for black control over their own neighborhoods. Ferguson began his career

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[70] Jonathan Kaufman, *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 130-164.
[71] Glen Anthony Harris, *The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Conflict: Intellectual Struggles Between Blacks and Jews at Mid-Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 123.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Kaufman, *Broken Alliance*, 160-161.

as an educator in New York in 1949, after obtaining a master's degree from New York University. In 1963, Ferguson was named assistant principal of P.S. 21 in Brooklyn before moving to P.S. 40 in Queens. When Ocean Hill-Brownsville became an independent district in 1967, Ferguson became the principal of I.S. 55, one of seven new schools in the district.[74]

It was in his position as principle of I.S. 55 that Ferguson rankled Kahane and Brooklyn Jews. Ferguson pushed for a curriculum in Ocean Hill and Brownsville that privileged local values, including a greater emphasis on black and African history and culture, as well as teaching Swahili and African numeric systems. This was a move that Ferguson thought would offer a greater emphasis on cultural pluralism in local schools and offer students a curriculum relatable to their lived experiences. This upset local Jews, however, as many argued that Ferguson was attempting to impose a black nationalist agenda into local schools.[75]

Kahane devoted several weeks in the *Jewish Press* to coverage on Ferguson in a weekly column, "Racism and Subversion in the N.Y.C. School System." Kahane argued that under Ferguson's leadership, local public schools would become a cesspool for racism, anti-Semitism, and communistic subversion of American values. He particularly targeted Ferguson's involvement in the black nationalist organization Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM). RAM was a black revolutionary group that advocated applying the philosophy of Maoism to the conditions of African Americans,

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[74] "Firebrand or Educator?: Herman B. Ferguson," *New York Times*, February 28, 1968, 50.
[75] Jerald E. Podair, "'White' Values, 'Black' Values: The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Controversy and New York City Culture, 1965-1975". *Radical History Review* 59 (Spring 1994): 51-53.

a political ethos that inspired other black nationalist groups, such as the Black Panther

Party. Kahane characterized the group as a "violently communist Black nationalist

group" that "[advocated] a radical civil war in the United States" and was "attempting

to carry on a number of operations in major Negro ghettos, often functioning under

different names."[76] He blamed RAM for causing the Cleveland riots in 1967 and the

Chicago riots in 1968, arguing that it was only a matter of time until RAM began

rioting in Brooklyn and directly attacking Jewish institutions and residents. Thus, in

Kahane's estimation, they posed a direct threat to the local community and anyone

professing to be a member should be banned from all positions related to public life.

Further, Kahane argued that RAM was an organization that was a direct threat

to the United States government. Drawing on their criticism of the Vietnam War,

Kahane argued that the group was a treasonous group that willingly aligned with

enemies of the United States, including the Viet Cong. He pointed to a statement the

group released in 1964 that promoted their alliance with the Viet Cong and

commended them for their "inspiring victories against American imperialism in South

Vietnam." This alliance, Kahane believed, posed a threat to New York Jews because

it taught black New Yorkers to think like guerilla fighters and take up arms against

local oppressors.[77]

The New York City teachers' strike lasted several months until New York

State Education Commissioner asserted state control over the Ocean Hill-Brownsville

district in November 1968. The district reinstated the dismissed teachers, transferred

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[76] Kahane, "Racism and Subversion," March 8, 1968, p. 14.
[77] Ibid.

three of the new principals to other schools in the city, and the district reopened in

September 1969. In the aftermath, New York remained sharply divided along racial

lines and school decentralization plans for other districts were scrapped.

The Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike raised Meir Kahane's profile in the city, as

his position at the *Jewish Press* gave him a prominent voice against perceived anti-

Semitism. As editor, Kahane stoked the fire of racial tensions between New York's

black and Jewish communities, which allowed him to champion his belief that black

and Latino New Yorkers refused to accept Jews in positions of power or community

control. This not only violated the Maimonidean principle of Jewish communal

control, he argued, it also placed American Jews on the precipice of Holocaust-level

anti-Semitism. The only recourse for such threats to Jewish social positioning, would

be violent militancy.

Creation of the JDL

Responding to increasing racial tensions during the New York teachers' strike in the

summer of 1968, Meir Kahane founded the Jewish Defense League. Kahane

fashioned the Jewish Defense League to resemble the Black Panther movement, even

informally referring to activists at "Jewish Panthers" on several occasions. Like the

Black Panthers, JDL activists wore black leather jackets and black berets, with round

white buttons on their lapels with the JDL logo inside, which featured a clinched fist

that resembled the Black Power salute. This was far from the only time that Kahane

borrowed parlances from black nationalism. Kahane often used phrases such as

"Jewish is beautiful" and "be proud that you're a Jew," instilling ethnic pride in his young followers. In 1971, Kahane argued "there were so many young Jews who were very envious of black soul, brothers and sisters, who yearned for it. So, they tried to become black or they tried to become this or that. But they're not black, they are not this or that. They are Jews." Kahane drew upon these themes after seeing how it galvanized young black activists. Kahane hoped to garner the same sense of ethnic pride in young Jewish activists and develop a militant following that rivaled Malcolm X.[78]

This organization, Kahane believed, would serve as militant defense force for embattled Jews across the country. Conceived after services at Laurelton's Young Israel Synagogue, Kahane worked with Bertram Zweibon, a probate lawyer whose father was a colleague of Jay Lovestone in the Communist Party, and Morton Dolinsky, a public relations manager who, ironically, masterminded Kahane's kidnapping by Betar years earlier. Although all were previously at odds with one another politically, what united this motley crew of activists was their combined fear of New York's black community.[79] The organization chartered in July 1968 and stated their goal as "To combat anti-Semitism in the public and private sectors of life in the United States of America, to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to support all agencies of government charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order; to foster a sense of obligation by the

[78] Walter Goodman, "I'd Love to See The J.D.L. Fold Up. But -- ': Rabbi Kahane says: Rabbi Kahane The J.D.L. has a "Soviet-Southern" political strategy," *The New York Times*, November 21, 1971.
[79] Friedman, *The False Prophet*, 85.

individual to the community, state, and nation; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom, and democracy." Central to the group's ideology was five fundamental principles: a love for the Jewish people; pride in and knowledge of Jewish tradition, the willingness to fight for Jewish image through strength, force, and violence; and a sense of Jewish exceptionalism as a nation. The group also stated that they rejected all forms of hate and illegality and believed firmly in the rule of law, backing community policing and fighting "political extremism" and "racist militancy."[80]

To gain legitimacy amongst Brooklyn's Jewish community, Kahane launched "Operation Haganah" to ensure the safety of the streets in Jewish neighborhoods. JDL members, armed with clubs, patrolled Jewish neighborhoods and ambushed suspected vandals, who more often than not fled rather than try to put up resistance. Following initial successes, Kahane hoped to broaden the reach of patrols and sought donations from national organizations. Kahane reached out to eight national Jewish organizations to create a $100,000 fund to purchase cars and equipment for JDL patrols. The national organizations ultimately declined to fund Kahane's organization, but he managed to turn his appeals for help into an instrument for his own publicity. With national organizations turning down his request for funds, Kahane was able to

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[80] Jewish Defense League. "The Jewish Defense League: Principles and Philosophies" (New York: Educational Department of the Jewish Defense League, 1971); New York State Department, JDL Certificate of Incorporation, approved September 25, 1968; Meir Kahane, "Jewish Defense League Manifesto." (New York: Educational Department of the Jewish Defense League, 1969).

craft a narrative of inaction by the Jewish establishment and position himself as the

lone activist willing to stand up for beleaguered Jews in Brooklyn.[81]

The organization became one of Meir Kahane's few immediate successes with

the main bases for activism being Jewish neighborhoods in Borough Park and

Flatbush in Brooklyn, Laurelton in Queens, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and

several neighborhoods in the Bronx. Within a few years, it claimed over 10,000

members and chapters chartered in seventeen cities, the largest being in Boston and

Philadelphia.[82]

Aside from regular patrols of Jewish neighborhoods, JDL activists also

protected Jewish-owned shops during protests. At the request of local shop owners,

during the protests by black and Latino youths in Passaic, New Jersey in August 1969,

groups of JDL militants stood watch outside shops armed with shotguns and,

according to Bertram Zweibon, planned to shoot rioters if they descended upon Jewish

neighborhoods. While many activists decried such a radical response to neighborhood

unrest, JDL activists in Passaic argued "maybe there are times when there is no other

way to get across the extremist that the Jew is not quite the patsy some think he is."[83]

Meir Kahane's formation of the Jewish Defense League in 1968 saw the

fruition of his Maimonidean value of militant self-defense. In the JDL, Kahane

offered New York Jews an inroad to his Maimonidean Zionism and gave them an

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[81] Kotler, *Heir Kahane,* 34; Kahane, *Rabbi Meir Kahane*, 132-133.
[82] David Gumpert, "Militant Jewish Group Sparks a Controversy in New York City Area." *Wall Street Journal*, November 4, 1969; p. 1.
[83] Ibid.

opportunity to apply their national and colonial identities to New York politics in unprecedented ways. The amalgamation of these identities with the principle of ethnic self-defense resonated well amongst the identity movements of the late-1960s and early-1970s and allowed Kahane to gain a national reputation as the face of American Jewish militancy.

James Foreman Protest

After he gained regional attention during the teachers' strike, Meir Kahane sought to bring national attention to the Jewish Defense League as they orchestrated a protest at New York's Temple Emanu-El. In May 1969, JDL activists lined the steps out front of the temple wearing blue berets and brandishing baseball bats and chains. Their goal was to bar black civil rights activist James Forman from entering as part of his campaign against white religious institutions.

James Forman was a prominent southern civil rights leader who, while active in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), played a pivotal role in significant civil rights campaigns such as the Albany movement, Birmingham campaign, and the Selma marches, all of which saw Moshe Cahana as an active participant. However, by 1969, in the wake of civil rights legislative victories in the mid-1960s, Forman turned his attention toward continued racial inequality and disparities in the urban North. This brought Forman in line with more-radical black political organizations at the time, even briefly taking a position within the Black Panthers.

In spring 1969, Forman began touting a new "Black Manifesto," which was formally adopted as part of the Black Economic Development Conference in Detroit in 1969. Styling it after Marx's famed "Communist Manifesto," Forman argued that the United States needed to reckon with years of black resources and labor exploitation. Black Americans, Forman argued, were "forced to live as colonized people inside the United States, victimized by the most vicious, racist system in the world." To remedy this, Forman called for churches and synagogues, which he argued were part and parcel of an oppressive capitalist system, to pay a half billion dollars in reparations. These funds, Forman proposed, would be meted out through a Southern Land Bank to uplift black farmers, a major publishing and printing industry devoted to provide printing opportunities for black Americans in an otherwise "white-dominated and controlled printing field," creation of black-owned television networks, and a research base to grow black involvement in academia.[84]

To promote his "Black Manifesto," Forman interrupted services at New York's famed Riverside Church, a historic interdenominational church on Manhattan's Morningside Heights started by John D. Rockefeller Jr. He entered the church during the first hymn and commandeered the pulpit, despite senior minister Ernest T. Campbell's efforts to stifle him. The move caused the immediate cancellation of the 11 o'clock service and caused many Protestant leaders to immediately condemn his actions as radical and in bad form. Even those who supported Forman's message,

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[84] "Black Manifesto," The Church Awakens: African Americans and the Struggle for Justice, accessed January 23, 2020, https://episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/items/show/202.

notably many in attendance at Riverside Church, condemned Forman and argued that it put congregations at risk when "proper rule of law" was not upheld by protestors.[85]

Despite initial pushback, other black activists around the country began orchestrating the same form of demonstration, including Muhammat Kenyatta who stormed a church in Philadelphia, and a group of twelve black activists stormed the First Methodist Church in downtown Los Angeles. Following his demonstration at Riverside Church, Forman next planned a similar demonstration at the historic Congregation Emanu-El on the Upper East Side for May 30, 1969.[86] This, Kahane believed, was an attack on Jewish sovereignty and freedom and one for which he publicly decried James Forman. As New York's most prominent synagogue, Temple Emanu-El was the most outward symbol of Judaism for most Americans, and Kahane argued that Forman's planned disruption would constitute a *chillul Hashem*, or a desecration of God's name. In a column in the *Jewish Press*, Kahane characterized Forman as "a man with a record of racism, extremist calls for revolution, and at least two cases of hospitalization for psychological problems." He chastised Forman for his proposed protest and argued that if Forman attempted to disrupt services at Emanu-El, the JDL would be waiting outside the temple and was not averse to responding with violence if necessary.[87]

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[85] Edward B. Fiske, "Churchmen Critical of Forman Tactics: Churchmen Critical of Forman's Militant Tactics" *New York Times*, May 6, 1969, 1, 36.

[86] John Kendallm, "Forman Expresses Confidence About Drive on Churches," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1969, A1.

[87] Meir Kahane, "Exclusive: James Forman's Record: Was Committed to Calif. Mental Institutions," *Jewish Press*, May 16, 1969, 1.

Activists from the Jewish Defense League arrived at Emanu-El at five in the evening on May 9, 1969 just before the start of weekly Shabbat services. Emanu-El leadership shunned their arrival and had police on hand attempting to remove JDL activists from temple grounds, despite activists' initial insistence that they were merely attempting to enter the premises for prayers. The demonstration drew reporters from local and national newspapers, radio stations, and television channels who gathered around JDL members, conducted interviews, and captured footage of the protest. In the end, their demonstration proved fruitless, as neither James Forman nor any other black activists showed up to interrupt services.[88]

The JDL appearance at Emanu-El riled up numerous leaders in the Reform Jewish community, who likened the Jewish Defense League to white-power militias prominent in the South. In response to the protests, Maurice Eisendrath, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the congregational body for Reform Judaism, denounced the JDL as "in essence, no different" from the Ku Klux Klan while speaking before the UAHC board of trustees during their semi-annual meeting. He contended that Kahane and the JDL "violate[d] every ethic and tradition of Judaism and every concept of civil liberties and democratic process in American life." Eisendrath objected to the presence of JDL activists at Emanu-El to protest James Forman speaking and argued that Jews in the United States did not require protection from any form of anti-Semitism, much less what he believed to be a fictional anti-Semitism emanating from the black community. By rabbi-led activists bearing

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[88] Kahane, *Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 104-105.

baseball bats and chains standing outside the temple like a "goon squad," Eisendrath argued that the group was no different "from whites carrying robes and hoods, led by self-styled ministers of the gospel, standing in front of burning crosses."[89]

Despite James Forman not coming to Emanu-El, the incident proved beneficial for Meir Kahane and the Jewish Defense League. The demonstration received front-page attention from all of the New York papers and gave Kahane more publicity than he could have bought in advertisements. Kahane capitalized on this with a recruitment campaign that highlighted the newfound public notoriety and emphasized their commitment to protecting local Jewish communities.

Affirmative Action and the Fight for College Campuses

The Jewish Defense League was particularly popular amongst young Jewish activists from lower-income families in Queens and the Bronx. Increasing suburbanization and assimilation in the postwar years left young Jews struggling with questions of identity and what it meant to be a Jew. In low-income areas of Queens and the Bronx, this uncertainty combined with an increasing feeling of isolation resulting from being left behind in old neighborhoods during an era of white flight. As a result, many became disaffected with prevailing Jewish and secular institutions in New York.

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[89] "Jewish Defense League Denounced, Likened to KKK by Reform Leader Rabbi Eisendrath," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin,* May 19, 1969, 4.

This core demographic shaped much of Meir Kahane's activism in the late-1960s. As the JDL gained popularity on college campuses around New York, their largest demonstrations centered on affirmative action and perceived anti-Semitism on campus. The organization's first official demonstration in August 1968 was on the campus of New York University. JDL activists protested the hiring of John F. Hatchett, a civil rights activist for the Congress of Racial Equality who had recently been selected to run the Martin Luther King Jr. Afro-American Student Center on campus. Before his appointment, Hatchett wrote an article for the *African-American Teachers Forum*, "The Phenomenon of Anti-Black Jews and the Black Anglo-Saxon: A Study in Educational Perfidy," in which he claimed that Jews dominated and controlled New York schools and "mentally poisoned" black children. Kahane and fourteen other activists gathered at the Washington Square Arch and picketed NYU holding signs reading "No Nazis at NYU" and "Black is Beautiful, Nazism is Ugly" and chanting "No Nazis at NYU, Jewish rights are precious too," while marching down Fourth Street to Vanderbilt Hall, which housed the university's top administrative offices. The demonstration only lasted about forty-five minutes and failed to garner a large amount of attention outside of student leaders, who chastised the group for threatening the relationship between black and Jewish students at NYU.[90]

Meir Kahane returned to criticize New York University in 1969 after the establishment of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship Fund designed to offer

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[90] "15 Jews Protest Action by N.Y.U." *New York Times*, Aug 6, 1968, 34; Meir Kahane, "Demonstration at NYU…" *Jewish Press*, August 9, 1968, 33.

scholarships to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. To ensure this, precepts of the scholarship limited eligibility to blacks, Latinos, and other students of color. Jews, under the rules of the scholarship, were not considered a disadvantaged ethnic group. Kahane, writing in his weekly column for the *Jewish Press*, attacked the scholarship program on the basis that it discriminated against poor Jews in Brooklyn who attended many of the same schools as black and Latino applicants and similarly struggled to pay for a private education at NYU. He argued that this illegally privileged black students and created further disenfranchisement of Jews in the boroughs, who were now being denied the opportunity of being classified as an underrepresented minority, despite possessing a history of social marginalization in the United States during the 20th century.

In the spring of 1969, after the black student newspaper *The Faith*, published by the Black Allied Student Association, ran an article on their front page that attacked Jews as the cause of ills in the black community, Meir Kahane rallied Jewish Defense League activists back to New York University to protest. Kahane claimed that the article attacked Jews for "poor public education, birth control, and family degeneration" within the black community and claimed Jews masterminded a plot to undermine America "so that their coming generations would have little or no competition from the vast 'unchosen' majority." His article drew connections between editors of the student paper and wider black nationalist movements in the United States and claimed that it was yet another example of rampant black anti-Semitism in the city. As head of the Jewish Defense League, Kahane called a press

conference discuss their response to the article, but no physical protest manifested from this incident.[91]

Meir Kahane similarly attacked the City University of New York system for what he saw as a racist affirmative action admissions policy. Heading into the 1969-1970 academic year, the university system hoped to achieve an incoming freshman class that "accurately [reflected] the ethnic distribution of all high school graduates that year," becoming the first urban institution in the country to undertake affirmative action policies in admissions. While City University officials designed this initiative to offer increased opportunities to black and Latino students from beleaguered public schools in New York, Meir Kahane saw it as creating discriminatory admission standards that disproportionately harmed Jewish applicants. Kahane argued that at Jewish-majority institutions in the system, such as City College, incoming Jewish applicants would be turned away based on nothing more racial discrimination and the hope to artificially achieve a racial quota. He argued that City University schools would uphold a faulty standard of "showing promise" for black and Latino students, while Jewish students would continue to be judged by test scores and grade performance. This, he argued, violated provisions set forth by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned discrimination based on racial categories.[92]

Besides racial biases in student admissions, Kahane argued that colleges in the City University system were systematically attempting to force out Jewish professors.

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[91] Meir Kahane, "NYU Black Student Paper Attacks 'Jewish Plot'" *Jewish Press*, March 28, 1969; 1, 17.

[92] Meir Kahane, "Flagrant Bias in N.Y.C. Colleges" *Jewish Press*, February 14, 1969, 1, 19.

Kahane pointed to calls for diverse hiring practices by the black and Latino student group Third World Coalition, whom he claimed were responsible for earlier violence on the campus of San Francisco State University. The group sought to achieve a faculty that matched the diversity of the institution they served, a move that Kahane argued would force the firing of most, if not all, Jewish professors in the City University system.[93]

In response, Kahane urged Jewish activists and the Jewish Defense League to protest City University schools. In the winter of 1969-1970, Kahane and the Jewish Defense League brought a lawsuit against the City University system pushing them to reassess newly proposed admissions practices at City College, a case ruled in their favor by the New York Supreme Court. In October 1970, JDL activists led by Meir Kahane also took over the executive offices of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in New York, occupying them for two hours and demanding $6 million to fight for equal Jewish educational opportunities at local colleges. This action, too, was ultimately successful, as the Federation appointed a special committee to discuss increasing representation for Jewish students at local schools. Each action undertaken by the Jewish Defense League grew more radical in nature, as these successes further emboldened Kahane and other activists to take more drastic steps to confront the targets of their protests.[94]

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[93] Meir Kahane, "N.Y. College Gives in to Quotas: Jewish Teachers to be Dropped," *Jewish Press*, May 09, 1969, 1, 22.

[94] "JDL Stages Sit-in at Office of President of Federation of Jewish Philanthropies," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin,* March 24, 1970, p. 4; "Federation of Jewish Philanthropies Studying Request for More Jewish Education Funds," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin* March 25, 1970, 4.

In the wake of Kahane's calls for increasingly confrontational protests, Jewish Defense League activists were involved in a brawl with black students on Brooklyn College's campus. On May 8, 1971, after a contentious speech by Kahane decrying the university's policy of affirmative action, a group of 150 Jewish youth followed Kahane into the university's student center where they encountered a large group of black students, resulting in a large melee between the two groups. JDL activists blamed the black students and lingering black anti-Semitism for instigating the brawl, while black students argued that the Jewish activists provoked them using racial epithets.[95] The brawl spilled over into neighboring parts of the student center and the street outside, with about 200 black students and 300 white students and activists participating at the melee's peak. After about 20 minutes of violence, roughly 100 NYPD officers arrived on the scene and broke up the violence, with only one arrest made.[96]

In his book *The Story of the Jewish Defense League*, Meir Kahane claimed that the brawl was part of a wider pattern of anti-Semitic violence on Brooklyn College's campus. He argued that there were regular beatings and robbery of Jewish students and that black students had sectioned off a corner of the student union to be forbidden for white students to enter. The JDL protest, he claimed, were an attempt to stage a sit-in in this section of the student union before several black students arrived to intimidate them into leaving. When they refused to leave, the fighting between the

[95] "JDL Warns Jewish Youths at Brooklyn College Will Fight Back if Attacked" *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin*, May 6, 1971, 1.
[96] "Uneasy Truce Holds at Brooklyn College," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 8, 1971, 1.

two groups erupted.[97] In framing the brawl in this way, Meir Kahane attempted to paint JDL members as civil rights activists and connected their actions to the nonviolent protest measures undertaken by Southern black activists in the early-1960s. Kahane believed that fashioning their protest in such a way would garner sympathy from the larger Jewish community and portray the black students as being akin to the violent white segregationists who sought to disrupt civil rights victories in the South.

The anti-civil rights JDL protests of the late-1960s and early-1970s all sought to highlight a Jewish plight of erasure. In each action, Meir Kahane highlighted his belief that the nebulous racial identity of American Jews precluded them from benefiting from civil rights efforts as well as from receiving the full privileges of whiteness. In framing these efforts this way, he highlighted his own colonial belief that the only people that could save Jewish life in the United States were Jews. This principle of self-defense derived from his own Maimonidean Zionism played out in very violent manner on Brooklyn College's campus in 1971, and cemented Kahane's self-fashioning as a defender of American Jewry.

Conclusion

The actions of Meir Kahane and the Jewish Defense League in the late-1960s and early-1970s positioned themselves in their own narrative as victims of extensive anti-Semitism that plagued the United States. In Kahane's mind, black and Latino

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[97] Kahane, *Story of the Jewish Defense League*, 279-281.

communities in New York sought nothing less than the complete destruction and disenfranchisement of local Jews, if not the complete expulsion of them from traditionally Jewish neighborhoods. His narrative was one of a bitter fight for Jewish survival, one that necessitated Jewish activists resorting to any means necessary to fight against perceived anti-Semitic slights, even if it meant starting fights, taking over offices, or killing protesters deemed too close to Jewish shops. In Meir Kahane's ideology of Maimonidean Zionism, this was not only justified, it was Halakhically mandated.

This ideology stemmed from his interpretation of the Law of the Kings. While it urged the seeking of war only as a last resort when all peaceful means have failed, Kahane argued that this is where the state of interethnic relations stood by 1968. In his estimation, black and Latino New Yorkers would never accept Jewish presence or control in their neighborhoods, schools, and institutions, and therefore stood as combatting enemies to the Jewish nation. Thus, the only remaining option was a bitter and violent program of Jewish self-defense.

This program came in the form of the militant Jewish Defense League. From its founding in 1968, to the point in late-1971 when Kahane opted to take a step back from the organization and migrate to Israel, the group pushed forth a policy of violent resistance to civil rights protestors perceived as anti-Semitic. From confronting black student groups at NYU, to threatening James Forman, to the fight at Brooklyn College, Kahane consistently challenged civil rights efforts on the basis of the harm they would bring the Jewish community.

After leaving the Jewish Defense League, Kahane continued his life as an activist for Maimonidean Zionism but brought it back into its originally intended focus of Israeli politics and interethnic relations between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. Here he relied on many of the same incitation and rhetoric that made him so prominent in New York and translated many American ideas of race onto the Israeli population, demonizing Arab Israelis in the process. As a result, the impact of his political activism in the five boroughs of New York only continued to grow in subsequent decades.

Epilogue

As the 1970s began, both Moshe and Meir Kahane served as community
leaders on their respective sides of civil rights activism. By the late-1960s,
congregants at Brith Shalom warmed considerably to Moshe Cahana's civil rights
activism and he quickly became a beloved figure in Houston's Jewish community.
When Cahana marched in Chicano rights and Farm Workers' movements in the mid-
to late-1960s, several congregants joined him, carrying banners professing Brith
Shalom's support for the movements. As the decade ended, Congregation Brith
Shalom earned its burgeoning reputation as Houston's "activist shul." In the early-
1970s, Meir Kahane was one New York's most controversial figures. His Jewish
Defense League had chapters across the Eastern Seaboard and claimed a membership
of 15,000 at its height in in the early-1970s. Within his movement, Kahane had
militant followers willing to serve jailtime for fighting the supposed specter of anti-
Semitism and community death. Outside of his supporters, many Jews in New York
criticized Kahane's extremism, with the Anti-Defamation League referring to them as
"thugs and hooligans."[1] Kahane's extreme political ideologies and willingness to
resort to violence made him a polarizing figure throughout his life.

Despite civil rights efforts separating the two cousins politically and thrusting
them to opposite ends of the American political spectrum, several issues brought the
Kahanas together. Concurrent to struggles over minority rights in the United States,
Moshe and Meir Kahane both participated in struggles aimed at decolonizing Jewish

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[1] Michael K. Bohn, *The Achille Lauro Hijacking: Lessons in the Politics and Prejudice of Terrorism*
(Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2005), 176-177.

populations around the world. Both men believed their respective Zionisms to be anti-colonial movements; and as Jews in the Soviet Union and the Middle East faced outbursts of violence in the 1960s and 1970s, both men shaped their Zionist activism to address the struggles. Despite their divergent applications of Revisionist Zionism in previous movements, in the wake of Israeli wars in 1967 and 1973, the Kahanas rallied around Israeli militaristic and diplomatic goals and became leaders in a shared political ideology of Religious Zionism.

Religious Zionism and Jewish Decolonization

The Orthodox religious backgrounds of the Kahana family increasingly informed Moshe and Meir Kahane's Zionism in the 1960s and 1970s. Whereas the family's orthodoxy initially clashed with political Zionism, both men found ways to merge the two by the latter half of the 20th century. The resulting ideology was a form of Religious Zionism, a blending of Orthodox Jewish practice and political Zionism that saw the creation of Israel as fulfillment of messianic prophecies.

From this belief, Moshe and Meir Kahane's anti-colonial Zionisms gained added purpose. Not only did they seek to liberate global Jewish populations from the yoke of political inequality and social repression, the Kahana cousins also embraced messianism and sought to end the Jewish Diaspora. As a result, the Kahanas became local leaders in both the struggle to evacuate Jews from the Soviet Union and the support of Israeli diplomatic and military goals.

The primary target of both Kahanas in decolonization pushes was the Soviet Union. Jews in Russia suffered under anti-Semitism for generations. Following the Bolshevik Revolution, Soviet leaders pushed for state secularism and forced assimilation of Russian Jews. The Soviet Union passed anti-religious laws that, in part, banned religious education and religious expressions. Starting in 1919, Soviet authorities seized communal Jewish property, such as synagogues and religious schools, and dissolved Jewish communities. Following the creation of Israel in 1948, the Soviet Union grew increasingly suspicious of the national leanings of Jews in Eastern Europe and the Caucusus. Facing continued anti-Semitism, many Soviet Jews sought to migrate to Israel but by the 1960s, diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Israel broke down and the Soviet Union increasingly backed Arab nationalist movements in the Middle East, including Palestinian nationalism. As a result, the Soviet Union barred Jews from emigrating to Israel.[2]

Jewish emigration out of the Soviet Union became a central focus for Moshe and Meir Kahane's activism. In Houston, Moshe Cahana gathered local civil rights groups to protest in support of Soviet Jewry. Harkening back to his ideology of ethical Zionism, Cahana urged local civil rights leaders that just as the plight of African Americans was an issue nationalist Jews, so too should the plight of Soviet Jews be a civil rights issue for African Americans. In the early 1970s, community leaders in Houston led several marches in support of Soviet Jews. Moshe Cahana

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[2] Henry L. Feingold, *"Silent No More" Saving the Jews of Russia, The American Jewish Effort, 1967–1989* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry*. (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2011).

argued that their intent was "to give moral support to Jews in Russia and to let them know they are not forgotten."[3]

Moshe Cahana not only engaged in anti-Soviet activism at home, he also travelled to Soviet-aligned countries in Eastern Europe to help smuggle Jews to Israel. Notably, as his wife Alice toured Hungary and Romania promoting her art career during the 1980s, Moshe Cahana met with local underground Zionist groups, teaching them how to sneak Jews out of Eastern Europe and down to Israel. Cahana's experience smuggling Jews into Mandate Palestine in the 1940s and his close contacts with high-ranking government officials made him an invaluable asset to Jews looking to escape Soviet states.[4]

Meir Kahane, like his cousin, was a local face of the Soviet Jewry movement in the early-1970s. Kahane led Jewish Defense League protests of Soviet missions in New York, led boycotts against Russian cultural programs, including touring Soviet ballet and orchestra troupes, and threatened Soviet diplomats in the United States. Kahane's actions resulted in numerous arrests and caused him to be investigated by the FBI.

The Soviet Jewry movement also saw Meir Kahane working with civil rights groups he protested just a few years before. In 1971, Meir Kahane and the Jewish Defense League joined with the National Economic Growth and Reconstruction

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[3] "Marchers Protest USSR Jewish Policy," *Bellaire & Southwestern Texan*, April 7, 1971, 1.
[4] Shlomo David. *Generații de Iudaism și Sionism Dorohoi* (Ķiryat Byaliķ: Organizatia Israelienilor Originari din Orasul si Judetul Dorohoi, Saveni, Mihaileni, Darabani, Herta, Radauti-Prut, România, 1992)

Organization (NEGRO), a Harlem-based civil rights group, to act on behalf of Soviet Jews. As part of this working arrangement, NEGRO sent a delegation to the Soviet Union to meet with local Jews and reported back their findings on the struggles of Soviet Jews to black activists in New York. NEGRO leader Dr. Thomas Matthew argued that it was their job as civil rights activists to "combat any form of discrimination and persecution," no matter where it occurred. Despite his record with civil rights groups in New York, Meir Kahane believed that the struggles of Jews in the Soviet Union trumped political differences between American organizations.[5]

Both Kahanas saw the opportunity for interethnic coalitions in the Soviet Jewry movement, believing that their struggle for civil rights in the Soviet Union mirrored other civil rights and decolonization movements that minority activists in the United States championed. Moshe Cahana built upon his years of interethnic cooperation and coalition building, but for Meir Kahane, this marked a departure from previous activism. For Kahane, the ability for Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel and fulfill his Zionist goals outweighed previous ethnic tensions. Thus, the struggle for Soviet Jewry brought the Kahanas political leanings in concert with one another.

The second issue bringing the Kahanas together politically was Israeli militarism. As Israel engaged in wars with neighboring Arab nations, both Kahanas' attachment to Israel increasingly focused on military strength. For both men, "Israel's actions [were] not motivated by hate or revenge or any hostility toward its neighbors. Rather they [were] motivated by the most constructive of all causes – the need of

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[5] Black Group, JDL Pledge Common Action for Soviet Jews, Black-Jewish Relations, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily Bulletin*, May 19, 1971, 1-2

survival."[6] Thus, as Arab nations created political alliances in the late-1950s, the Kahanas increasingly saw a need for increased militarization and a willingness to engage in defensive warfare, although their definitions of 'defensive' varied.[7]

The 1967 War, or Six Day War, between Israel and allied neighboring Arab countries galvanized both men behind a religious defense of Israeli militarism. Moshe Cahana believed that Israel's victory in the 1967 War represented a messianic redemption for Israel and proof of the national covenant it possessed.[8] Cahana argued "[Israel was] called upon to liberate Jerusalem from the Ammonites (an Arabian tribe from the eastern side of the Joran River who illegally occupied the city for nineteen years)." He firmly believed that it was Israel's sworn duty as a Jewish nation to capture the entirety of Jerusalem and push Jordanian forces from the city. When the June war lasted a week and resulted in large territorial gains, Cahana argued that "The spirit of the King was awakened…and so awoke the spirit of Elijah, and the spirit of Moses, the faithful Shepherds of Israel."[9] The Israeli victory and the capture of East Jerusalem, for Cahana, represented the rebirth of the ancient Jewish kingdom.

In August 1967, following the territorial gains during the Six Day War in June, Moshe Cahana led a group from Brith Shalom to tour newly occupied territory in Jerusalem, Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. This trip to Israel, Cahana mixed

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[6] K.J. Robbins. "Israeli Speaker Fields Attack," *The Daily Cougar*, Houston Hillel Scrapbooks, Rice University Manuscript Collection, MS 732, Box 1, Houston Jewish Archives, Rice University, Houston, Texas

[7] For more on the Arab-Israeli Wars, see Avi Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry: Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), and Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).

[8] At the core of Religious Zionism is the belief that Israel is the physical manifestation of God's continued covenant with the Jewish people.

[9] Moshe Cahana, *Ethics for the 21st Century* (Houston, TX: Self Published, 2001), 133-134.

religious Judaism and political Jewish nationalism. Cahana led trips to major religious sites, including the Western Wall. These trips sought to instill a stronger sense of religious attachment in the travelling group. On top of this, Cahana coordinated meetings with Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, President Zalman Shazar, and his friend Menachem Begin, who was a cabinet minister at the time, to learn about Israeli foreign policy. The group also visited the construction of a new Jewish settlement in newly occupied territory in the West Bank. Cahana's trip was one of several made by American rabbis in the summer of 1967 to discuss broadening connections between the American and Israeli Jewish communities, and was the first of many times that Cahana returned to Israel as a Religious Zionist representative of American Jews to meet with government officials.[10]

Meir Kahane similarly embraced the military victories of 1967 as divine providence. As editor of the *Jewish Press*, Kahane ran a six-month run of articles entitled "Chronology of a Miracle." In this series, Kahane extolled Israeli militarism as "heroism" and chastised Arab nationalism as "barbarism." Kahane championed Israeli reservists eagerly signing up for active duty and crowned them as "heroes of the Jewish nation." Before the war began, in front of a crowd at Young Israel in Laurelton, Kahane argued that "God said He would never abandon the Jewish people," reassuring the nervous crowd of a national covenant. Kahane ultimately believed himself vindicated following Israel's victory in the brief war. In "Chronology of a Miracle," Kahane framed the war as "Thirteen Moslem nations threatened to destroy

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[10] "Rabbi Cahana Returns," *The Bellaire and Southwestern Texan*, August 9, 1967, 1,13

Israel. Thank G-d in one week Israel captured Sinai, Old Jerusalem, the Western Bank of Jordan, and part of Syria, a miracle far above Chanukah and Purim."[11]

Israel's military victory in 1967 encouraged the Kahanas as Zionist leaders in their respective communities. In Houston, Moshe Cahana served on several Zionist organizations around the city and spoke at meetings and dinners throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Cahana served as the spiritual advisor for Hillel and the Israeli Students Association at the University of Houston, and from this position he routinely spoke at meetings and demonstrations condemning the Palestinian and Arab nationalist movements as "terroristic" and dangerous to the sovereignty of Israel. Following the Coastal Road Massacre in 1978 that killed 37 Israelis outside of Netanya, Cahana led a memorial service on campus in which he criticized the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) for "only attacking children and not soldiers." Throughout his speech, Cahana criticized the PLO for being detrimental to the peace process and called them the biggest hindrance to a Palestinian state.[12] Throughout his life, Moshe Cahana remained hostile toward the PLO and their leader Yasser Arafat, whom he believed to be an untrustworthy partner in peace negotiations.

In addition to his work at the University of Houston, Moshe Cahana organized Zionist events around Houston, the largest of which was the annual Yom Yerushalayim celebration he founded and organized. Yom Yerushalayim is an Israeli national holiday commemorating the capture of East Jerusalem, and subsequent

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[11] Meir Kahane. "Chronology of a Miracle," *Jewish Press*, July 14, 1967.
[12] Marcia Friedman, untitled article, *The Daily Cougar*, Houston Hillel Scrapbooks, Rice University Manuscript Collection, MS 732, Box 1, Houston Jewish Archives, Rice University, Houston, Texas

administrative unification, during the 1967 War. Since the holiday celebrates Israelis

gaining administrative control of the Western Wall, it is also a minor religious holiday

in Judaism and a key celebration for Religious Zionists. Cahana organized local

commemorations of Yom Yerushalayim beginning in 1972 to mark the fifth

anniversary of the war. This annual celebration took a sharply nationalist tone with

criticism of Arab nationalism, praise for Israeli military victories, and a celebration of

"the day the Biblical prophecies of redemption were fulfilled."[13]

In New York, Meir Kahane led the Jewish Defense League in protests of local

Arab institutions. Over the course of the 1970s, the Jewish Defense League attacked

PLO offices, attacked Syrian, Egyptian, and Iraqi missions in New York, plotted the

hijacking of Arab airlines, and planted bombs at several Arab diplomatic institutions

in New York. In 1971, federal authorities arrested Kahane for conspiring to

manufacture explosives, for which he received a five-year suspended prison sentence.

In 1975, Kahane was arrested for conspiring to bomb the Iraqi embassy in New York

and was sentenced to a year in prison for violating the probation terms of his previous

sentence.[14]

Meir Kahane spent most of the 1970s splitting his time and residency between

the United States and Israel. While in Israel, Kahane increased his focus on

implementing Maimonidean Zionism. Throughout the 1970s, Kahane developed lists

of Arab citizens he believed were willing to emigrate for compensation and initiated

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[13] *The Message*, United Orthodox Synagogue monthly newsletter (Houston, TX, May 1975), UOS 712, Houston Jewish Archive, Rice University, Houston, Texas

[14] ADC Research Institute, "The Jewish Defense League: A Cult of Racism and Terror, a Threat to Arab-Americans" (Washington, DC: ADC Research Institute, 1986)

protests that advocated the expulsion of Arabs. Israeli police arrested Kahane over sixty times for these protests and was often indicted for violating Israeli laws against 'incitement.'[15]

While in Israel, Kahane founded the political party Kach, which ran for Knesset in 1973, 1977, and 1981 but failed to achieve electoral thresholds. Kach received one seat in the 1984 legislative elections, which Kahane took. His legislative platforms focused on Jewish education, revoking citizenship from Arab Israelis, and transferring the Arab population out of Israel and the West Bank. A 1985 law barring racist political parties barred Kahane and Kach from seeking reelection in 1988, ending his legislative tenure after one term.

The Religious Zionism the Kahana cousins fueled their positions in Israeli politics throughout the latter half of the 20th century. This embrace of Religious Zionism marked a shift in the politics of the Kahana family. Despite early familial rejections of Zionism, Moshe and Meir Kahane's families embraced Religious Zionism as the defining facet of their Jewish and Zionist identities. Moshe and Meir Kahane injected their religious ideologies into their politics entrenching both men in the Israeli political right-wing for rest of the 20th century. While the Kahana cousins diverged in American politics, in the Israeli political sphere, they found themselves more aligned.

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[15] Ehud Sprinzak, "Kach and Meir Kahane: The Emergence of Jewish Quasi-Fascism," *Patterns of Prejudice* 19 (No. 3, July 1985), 15-21.

The Kahana Legacy

Both Kahana cousins left behind complex legacies. The shared heritage of the Kahana family fueled their eventual political activism and their respective positions on the American political spectrum. Moshe Cahana was an ardent Democrat and supporter of left-leaning political movements, most notably the African American civil rights movement in the 1960s. Following his years of activism, Moshe Cahana remained pulpit rabbi at Congregation Brith Shalom in Houston until a health scare forced his retirement in 1980. He spent the next two decades primarily devoted to his wife's art career, traveling alongside as Alice's work appeared around the world. During this time, he took intermittent rabbinic positions in the US and abroad, including serving as a temporary rabbi at Congregation B'nai Jeshuran in Cleveland, OH and serving as a temporary Chief Rabbinate for Sweden.[16]

In 2000, Moshe Cahana turned his philosophy of ethical Zionism into his book *Ethics for the 21st century*. Though not widely distributed, Cahana's book served as a core work in Brith Shalom's adult education curriculum. Moshe Cahana served as Rabbi Emeritus at Brith Shalom, delivering regular lectures teaching various adult-education courses during this tenure. Cahana died in May 2004, survived by two children who adopted Cahana's ethical Zionism for their own congregations in Portland and Montreal, ensuring his ideologies survive well into the twenty-first century.

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[16] La Monica Everett Haynes, "Deaths: Rabbi Cahana, Civil Rights Activist," *Houston Chronicle*, May 31, 2004

Meir Kahane's legacy remains far more pronounced than his cousin Moshe. Kahane continued aggressive Zionist activism through the 1980s before El Sayyid Nosair assassinated him in November 1990 following a speech before a group of Orthodox Jews at the New York Marriot East in Midtown Manhattan. Over 150,000 people attended Kahane's funeral in Jerusalem, making it one of the largest in Israeli history at that point.[17]

Kahane's children carried on his ideological legacy. His son, Binyamin Ze'ev Kahane founded the political party Kahane Chai following Meir's death and continued advocating for violence against Arab Israelis, which caused the party to be placed on the US State Departments list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations and barred from running in Israeli elections. Kahane's followers carried out several high-profile attacks on Arab Israelis and Palestinians, including the Cave of the Patriarchs massacre that killed 29 Muslim worshippers. In 2015, Israeli police arrested Kahane's grandson Meir Ettinger for incitement after he published a manifesto echoing Kahane's teachings and promoting the dispossession of non-Jews who live in Israel and denouncing churches and mosques in Israel as "idolatry." Kahanist parties still attempt to make an impact in Israeli politics, with the latest being Otzma Yehudit, which has run in the last five legislative elections but failed to garner any seats each time.[18]

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[17] Michael Specter, "Jewish Leader Kahane Slain in New York," *The Washington Post*, November 6, 1990

[18] Jodi Rudoren and Isabel Kershner, "Israeli Detains Meir Kahane's Grandson, a Scion of Jewish Militancy" *The New York Times*, 4 August 2015

The Kahana cousins are emblematic of the struggles that American and Israeli Jewries faced. As a Hasidic Orthodox family in Safed, Palestine, the Kahanas weathered the dangers of Ottoman and British imperialism, which colored the childhoods of both Moshe and Meir Kahane. The bitter nationalistic conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine destroyed family homes, killed loved ones, and eventually drove both men away from the Hasidic Orthodoxy that dominated previous generations of the Kahanas. These experiences as imperial subjects imprinted on both men a strong colonial identity that drove both men to militancy at different points and informed the entirety of their activist careers. This political similarity also compelled political divergence for the Kahana cousins. For Moshe Cahana, Jewish militancy was a last-resort effort for Palestinian Jews under the yoke of British imperialism and should not be actively sought. Meir Kahane, on the other hand, believed that the racial crises of the 1960s presented an equally threatening colonial yoke for American Jews, making the militancy of the elder Cahana a necessity for Jewish survival in New York.

These colonial identities, and their applications to Jewish nationalism, thrust the Kahana cousins into African American civil rights struggles, albeit on opposing sides of activism. The ethical Zionism of Moshe Cahana combined Revisionist Zionism with the ethical framing of Israel Salanter's Musar Movement and argued that all anti-colonial struggles should be Jewish struggles. This philosophy compelled Cahana to march alongside prominent civil rights activists like Martin Luther King and James Forman across the American South. Meir Kahane's Maimonidean Zionism framed Jewish activism differently by blending Maimonides' Law of the Kings with modern Jewish nationalism. In this framing of nationalism, civil rights efforts became

an anti-Semitic and colonial force seeking to disenfranchise local Jews. As a result, Meir Kahane positioned himself as a staunch opponent of civil rights efforts under the guise of protecting Jewish equality and dignity in New York City.

Ultimately, the activisms of Moshe Cahana and Meir Kahane intertwined enough over the course of the 1960s and 1970s that the two cannot be understood apart from one another. The impetuses for Cahana's left-leaning politics were the same as those causing Kahane's hardline right-wing militancy. Much like the wider Jewish world around them, their similarities informed their differences throughout their lives. When Meir Kahane died in 1990, Moshe Cahana spoke at his memorial and for the remaining ten years of his life he spoke highly of his cousin, though he was always quick to point out their political differences. Though the individual legacies of both men are remembered in very different ways, their shared legacy of Jewish nationalism's place in American civil rights struggles should not be.

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