

THE VOICE IS THE VOICE OF THE RIGHT, BUT THE HANDS ARE THE HANDS OF THE LEFT: ON MEIR KAHANE

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Abstract

Meir Kahane is mostly known as an American immigrant to Israel who founded a political party based on Jewish militarism and supremacy that was eventually outlawed. However, in this essay I examine the foundations of Kahane's thought by claiming liberalism – whether American or the Israeli political culture in the 1960s and 1970s – was his main enemy. Yet Kahane had a complex relationship with the progressive American Left and often adopted their tactics and positions against liberalism. Kahane came to public notoriety in the late 1960s when the New Left in America was in full swing, when Black Nationalism, the quest for power supplanted civil rights and the culture and race wars threatened the liberal status quo. Kahane adopted the radical left politics as a tool to foster Jewish pride and rebellion against the assimilatory program of mainstream American Judaism. When he immigrated to Israel, he tried to transplant the American context into an Israeli one: Viewing the the secular Labor government as the American liberal mainstream, and the Arabs as the blacks who were threatening the Jews in their quest for recognition and power. I argue that understanding the religio-political program of Kahane in America, is essential to fully understanding his program, including its successes and failures, in Israel.