



# To Stand Aside or Stand Alone: Southern Reform Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement

*P. Allen Krause*

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In 1966, a young rabbinical student named P. Allen Krause conducted interviews with twelve Reform rabbis from southern congregations concerning their thoughts, principles, and activities as they related to the civil rights movement. Perhaps because he was a young seminary student or more likely because the interviewees were promised an embargo of twenty-five years before the interviews would be released to the public, the rabbis were extremely candid about their opinions on and their own involvement with what was still an incendiary subject. Now, in *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone: Southern Reform Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement*, their stories help elucidate a pivotal moment in time.

After a distinguished rabbinical career, Krause wrote introductions to and annotated the interviews. When Krause succumbed to cancer in 2012, Mark K. Bauman edited the manuscripts further and wrote additional introductions with the assistance of Stephen Krause, the rabbi's son. The result is a unique volume offering insights into these rabbis' perceptions and roles in their own words and with more depth and nuance than hitherto available. This exploration into the lives of these teachers and civic leaders is supported by important contextual information on the local communities and other rabbis, with such background information forming the basis of a demographic profile of the Reform rabbis working in the South.

The twelve rabbis whom Krause interviewed served in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Virginia, and the substance and scope of their discussions cover some of the most crucial periods in the civil rights movement. Although some have provided accounts that appeared elsewhere or have written about their experiences themselves, several new voices appear here, suggesting that more southern rabbis were active than previously thought. These men functioned within a harsh environment: rabbis' homes, synagogues, and Jewish community centers were bombed; one rabbi, who had been beaten and threatened, carried a pistol to protect himself and his family. The views and actions of these men followed a spectrum from gradualism to activism; while several of the rabbis opposed the evils of the separate and unequal system, others made peace with it or found reasons to justify inaction. Additionally, their approaches differed from their activist colleagues in the North even more than from each other.

Within these pages, readers learn about the attitudes of the rabbis toward each other, toward their congregants, toward national Jewish organizations, and toward local leaders of black and white and Protestant and Catholic groups. Theirs are dramatic stories of frustration, cooperation, and conflict.

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