

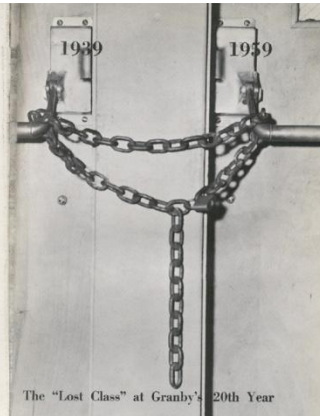


The Mollie and George Radin Archives
Trust-Sponsored Religious School Essay Contest
2018

The Courage of Our Convictions



Rabbi Malcolm Stern



“If we don’t rise above our partisan feelings of segregation versus integration, we’ll have disintegration in our public schools.” – Rabbi Malcolm Stern, Ohef Sholom Temple, Norfolk, Virginia, 1958

“As Jews – even in the South – we must face up to the nobility of our heritage.” – Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild, Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, (also known as “The Temple”), Atlanta, Georgia, 1956

“... the climate of today’s South [is such that] basic democratic freedoms no longer exist It is in such an atmosphere that the Jew finds himself. If white Christians are fearful, the Jew is panic-stricken.” Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild, 1956



From the 1890s to 1954, public school **segregation** [separation of white and African-American children in public schools] was the law in the American South. However, in two landmark, unanimous decisions in 1954 and 1955, the Supreme Court of the United States declared that separate schools are “inherently unequal,” and the Court ordered the **desegregation** of all public schools “with all deliberate speed.”

In the American South, whether it was called *school desegregation* or *integration*, the idea that white and African-American children should be allowed to go to school together almost always caused controversy, often caused confrontation, and sometimes caused bloodshed.

In Tennessee, the National Guard was called in after white mobs tried to stop the integration of a white high school. In Little Rock, Arkansas, President Eisenhower sent in the U.S. Army to protect nine African-American high school students who were attempting to integrate the city’s white public high school. And in Norfolk, Virginia, the governor closed six all-white public schools in order to prevent them from being integrated.

It was part of a state law called “Massive Resistance,” and it was a state-wide policy (in Virginia and other Southern states) that allowed the governor of a state to close any public school to prevent its integration. At Granby High School in Norfolk, in September of 1958, heavy chains and padlocks were used to prevent anyone from entering the building. Two other Norfolk high schools and three Norfolk junior high schools were locked and bolted. The 17 African-American and 10,000 white students who were supposed to be going to those schools, along with their teachers and administrators, were now locked out.

At first, no one could believe what was happening. “To me,” Ohel Sholom’s Rabbi Malcolm Stern later said, “it was unthinkable that public schools could be closed.” High

school students worried that colleges would not accept them. Working parents worried about where their children would be while they were out working. Some parents sent their children to live with friends or relatives in other cities and states, and some enrolled their children in private “segregation academies.” For those who didn’t have the opportunity to send their children away or to local private schools, another solution was sought.

Stern later reported that “frantic parents organized with the teachers a series of tutoring groups and prevailed on the churches and synagogues to open their classrooms” to students and teachers who had been locked out of their public schools. At the time, Stern had worried that opening Ohef Sholom Temple to these tutoring sessions would actually be used as an excuse to keep the six public schools closed, but in the end, he and OST’s Board of Directors agreed to open OST’s doors to these tutoring sessions.

In the months that followed, groups of parents, businessmen and women, and other private citizens organized to persuade the governor to reverse his order. Lawsuits were filed: the first, on behalf of a group of 26 white students, the second by the parent of two white children, and the third by the NAACP, an important national civil rights organization. There was public pressure from business leaders, civic and educational groups, and even the United States Navy, and finally a decision by a panel of three federal district judges ordered the schools reopened. On February 2, 1959, the six Norfolk schools, along with schools in Charlottesville and Warren County, Virginia (which had also been closed) were reopened after a six-month lock-out. In Norfolk, 17 African-American students and more than 7,000 white students finally went back to school.

Question

Rabbi Jacob Rothschild of Atlanta said that Jews “must face up to the nobility of our heritage.” What in our Jewish heritage made Rabbi Rothschild and Rabbi Malcolm Stern speak out against segregation in the 1950’s, and made some OST members join with other concerned citizens to prevail upon the governor to reopen Norfolk’s schools in 1958?

What is it in our Jewish heritage that gave Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel the courage to march with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, Alabama, in 1965, or inspired Jewish martyrs like Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman to travel to Mississippi to register African-American voters in 1964?

Using examples from the actions of at least one of these five courageous Jewish Americans, discuss what it is about the teachings of Judaism that made them put themselves on the front lines in the battle against segregation.

Submit your essay along with the attached student entry form. Do not put your name on your essay.

Rules of Entry:

- 6th through 12th graders from Ohef Sholom Temple are eligible.
- You must use at least four (4) sources to support your essay. At least one source must be from the OST Archives. Sources from the OST Archives are available on Wednesdays and Sundays in the OST Library. The OST Archivist and/or Volunteer Librarian David Titus will also be available to assist with archival research and with how to cite archival sources.
- Essays should be double-spaced, 12-point font, and no more than three pages.
- The essay must be the writer's original effort, created for this competition. If evidence of plagiarism is found, the entry will be ineligible.
- Submit your entry form and essay in hard copy to the Ohef Sholom Temple Office, Attn.: Archives Essay Contest, by April 15, 2018.

PRIZES will be awarded on May 6, 2018, the Final Day of Sunday Learning, 5778.

1st place - \$100 VISA gift card
2nd place - \$75 VISA gift card
3rd place - \$50 VISA gift card

Suggested Sources:

Stern, Malcolm H., "The Role of the Rabbi in the South," in *Turn to the South; Essays on Southern Jewry*, [book available for reference or photocopying in the OST Library].

"Excerpt from Transcript of Interview with Rabbi Malcolm Stern," Ohel Sholom Temple Archives Oral History Project, [transcript and excerpt are part of the OST Archives Oral History Collection, available for reference in the OST Library].

Rothschild, Jacob M., *The Southern Rabbi Faces Desegregation*, article written for the *Journal of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, June 1956 [manuscript copy is from the OST Archives, available for reference in the OST Library].

Reif, Jane, *Crisis in Norfolk* [32-page pamphlet, available in the OST Library or as a downloadable file from the Old Dominion University Libraries Digital Collections]
<http://dc.lib.odu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/sdinv/id/1865/rec/1>

Sachar, Howard, "Jews in the Civil Rights Movement," My Jewish Learning,
<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jews-in-the-civil-rights-movement/>

"Jews and the Civil Rights Movement," Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism
<https://rac.org/jews-and-civil-rights-movement>

"American Jews and the Civil Rights Movement," Jewish Virtual Library
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-jews-and-the-civil-rights-movement>

The 2018 Mollie & George Radin
Archives Trust-Sponsored

RELIGIOUS SCHOOL ESSAY CONTEST
Presented by Ohef Sholom Temple

STUDENT ENTRY FORM

A copy of this form must accompany all essay entries to the contest. Additional entry forms and copies of the guidelines can be found online at the Ohef Sholom Temple website, Quick Links at www.ohefsholom.org

ALL ENTRIES SHOULD BE MAILED OR DELIVERED BY APRIL 15, 2018, TO
Ohef Sholom Temple Office Attn.: Archives Essay Contest

For more information contact OST Director of Family Learning Chris Kraus at
chris@ohefsholom.org

Student Name _____ Grade Level _____

Parent Name _____

Home Address _____

Home Phone _____ Student's email _____

Parent's email _____

Title of Essay _____

I understand the guidelines of the 2018 Archives Trust-Sponsored Religious School Essay Contest. This work is my original effort, created for this competition. I understand that Ohef Sholom Temple has the right to reproduce, publish, exhibit and/or use any/all entries for publicity.

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Deadline: 4:00 pm, Sunday, April 15, 2018