



# Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation, 1945-1995 (Religion & American Culture)

*Mark Newman*

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**This groundbreaking study finds Southern Baptists more diverse in their attitudes toward segregation than previously assumed.**

Focusing on the eleven states of the old Confederacy, *Getting Right with God* examines the evolution of Southern Baptists' attitudes toward African Americans during a tumultuous period of change in the United States. Mark Newman not only offers an in-depth analysis of Baptist institutions from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and state conventions to colleges and churches but also probes beyond these by examining the response of pastors and lay people to changing race relations.

The SBC long held that legal segregation was in line with biblical teachings, but after the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision in favor of desegregating public institutions, some Southern Baptists found an inconsistency in their basic beliefs. Newman identifies three major blocs of Baptist opinion about race relations: a hard-line segregationist minority that believed God had ordained slavery in the Bible; a more moderate majority that accepted the prevailing social order of racial segregation; and a progressive group of lay people, pastors, and denominational leaders who criticized and ultimately rejected discrimination as contrary to biblical teachings.

According to Newman, the efforts of the progressives to appeal to Baptists' primary commitments and the demise of de jure segregation caused many moderate and then hard-line segregationists to gradually relinquish their views, leading to the 1995 apology by the Southern Baptist Convention for its complicity in slavery and racism. Comparing Southern Baptists to other major white denominations, Newman concludes that lay Baptists differed little from other white southerners in their response to segregation.



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