

## The Question is "Why?": Stanford M. Adelstein: A Jewish Life in South Dakota

**Eric Steven Zimmer**

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Stanford M. Adelstein is a major figure in South Dakota business and politics, and Eric Steven Zimmer's *The Question is "Why?"* explains how he succeeded in public life despite being Jewish in a state with a minuscule Jewish population.

The book begins with Adelstein's family's immigration to the United States and their establishment of the Northwestern Engineering Company, the business that Adelstein eventually took over. This family narrative gives way to Adelstein's own accomplishments, and his business career is recounted via memorable stories, as of putting together a loan for the Crazy Horse monument, purchasing land nearby to block a development, and turning that land over to the memorial. In another case, he is seen organizing an effort to keep the most complete Tyrannosaurus skeleton in the state where it was discovered—this time, without success.

Adelstein's years in South Dakota politics are covered, including his stint as a delegate to the Republican National Convention and his run for office in 2000, after which he served in both houses of the state legislature. To counter the challenges of being a Jewish politician in a largely Protestant state, he teamed up with nuns to help fund an important hospital and took South Dakota politicians to Israel on a learning expedition. An admirer of Nelson Rockefeller, he is positioned as one of the last moderate Republicans in a state where the party's shifted far to the right.

Though this biography was commissioned by its subject, it's still a solid, in-depth, well-researched work. Adelstein occasionally speaks in the form of extended quotes, but mostly to add anecdotes or opinions to the narrative. Everything is covered through an effective mix of interviews, stories, and news reports.

*The Question is "Why?"* is a solid introduction to an exceptional giant in South Dakota life.

JEFF FLEISCHER (July/August 2019)

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