

Jane Dailey: Thanks Doug for your very interesting papers. I'll be brief. Recently, an international team of literary scholars came to the startling conclusion that Humpty Dumpty was a Virginian. [Laughter] Had he lived in our century, the rotund albino would no doubt have identified himself as a white southern liberal. For as he explains to Alice through the looking glass, when I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean, nothing more, nothing less. Like other white southern liberals, Humpty Dumpty would also have been interested in issues of labor equity. When I make a word do a lot of work like that, said Humpty Dumpty, I always paid extra. The word liberalism has been drawing time and a half for southern historians for years now. A lot of _____ take our sources seriously have somehow been translated along the way into a reluctance to question our sources' terminology and classification. Is it really possible for historians as opposed to historical actors to talk seriously about a mid-twentieth century racial liberalism that takes at it's starting point the preservation of segregation and white social dominance. **Gunner Myrtle** didn't think so. In the middle of World War II, **Myrtle** was mystified by the **incongruities** of white southern liberal support for the Jim Crow system of racial segregation and subordination. You can almost hear him shaking his

head, “Southern liberalism is not liberalism as it is found elsewhere in America or the world,” announced **Myrtle** in 1944, “it’s a unique species.” It’s probably an analytical error to assume with **Myrtle** that there is a stable taxonomy of liberalism by which white southerners may be measured and be found wanting. Even if we take the most basic definition of liberalism, as most of the world understood it in 1944, as a commitment to equal rights of all citizens with a liberal democracy, most southern white liberals fall short. I’m not suggesting that because people like **Virginia Stably** and **Jesse Daniel Aimes** sought to maintain racial hierarchy that they were not liberals. If there’s one thing that we’ve learned from the past twenty-five years worth of scholarship on liberalism, it’s that liberalism has historically, if not ideally, been founded on exclusions of women, of children, of racial and ethnic minorities. What I am suggesting is the way that we use the word, liberal and liberalism, today and the way that many mid-century white southern liberals used these words is fundamentally dissimilar. In this, **Gunner Myrtle** was right. Liberalism in the south did not necessarily imply racial equality. This is why white southern journalists like **Dadny** and **Rumple McGill** could, as **Mort Susnick** explains, “base their existence to fascism on democratic ideology while denying that this same ideology implied any basic change in the south’s regional status quo.” Liberal on the white southern context does not mean liberal on the race question. It’s

important to remind ourselves when we talk about liberalism as modern scholars that white southern liberals of the **hyrodium** variety simply believe what two generations of white southern liberals before them believed, that there was a way to reconcile regionalism (i.e. white supremacy) and segregation and democracy. At the heart of southern regionalism and at the heart of white southern liberalism lay an undemocratic commitment to racial hierarchy. It's the great virtue of **Mort Sesnick's** paper to point to this tension, a tension that explains in part the disillusion many African American's felt with liberalism and their openness during the 1930s and 1940s to non-liberal alternatives, particularly communism. This tension may also explain why when another group of southerners gathered at **Highlander** and stood up in Montgomery and Birmingham and Jackson, they spoke in the language of Christian universalism and not liberalism. Richmond editor **Virginia Dabney** is as good an example as any to reveal the limits of liberalism as practiced by self-identified white southern liberals. **Dabney** was not, however, the only southerner advocating an **ameliative** approach to race centered on making separate truly equal in the New Deal South. This was, in fact, the end of **Lacy Pea's** legal strategy in the 1930s. Rather than mount a frontal assault on Jim Crow, the NAACP decided to bankrupt it by forcing the south to live up to the equality explicit in the **Plessy** decision. There's a difference, however, in using the separate but equal doctrine

strategically to reveal its essential infeasibility and unconstitutionality in trying to implement it in order to save a broader system of racial hierarchy, as **Virginia Stadney** aimed to. Treating **Virginia Stadney** and other white southerners interested in making segregation more humane as representative of liberal sentiment pushes those southerners actually dedicated to liberal democratic ideals to the sidelines as radicals. In this scheme, all southern liberals are white, the NAACP isn't southern, and **James DeBrosky, Aubrey Williams, and Howard Kesner** are communists. What were some of these radicals advocating? In the spring of 1945 as Allied forces occupied Berlin, a panel of experts consisting in the words of a critic, 'one buck negro, one Jew, one New York social service official, and Congressman **H. Jerry Voyers** of California,' was asked to discuss the question, are we solving America's race problems on the popular radio show, America Town's Meeting of the Air. The 'buck negro,' referred to by the outraged letter writer was none other than **Richard Wright**, someone who might fairly be considered a southern liberal, despite the fact that he wrote from outside the south. On this occasion, as ending on most, **Wright** spoke directly on the point. At once let's define what we mean by solution of the race problem, he advised. If the race problem was solved, we would have no black belts, no Jim Crow Army or Navy, no Jim Crow Red Cross Blood Banks, no negro institutions, no laws prohibiting intermarriage, no customs assigning

negros to inferior positions. We would all simply be Americans and the nation would be better for it. This was exactly the kind of broadcast that kept **Virginia Stadly** awake at night. Desegregated public transportation was not going to satisfy **Richard Wright**. **Richard Wright** wanted equality, nothing more, nothing less. It is to **Virginia Stadley's** credit that he recognized this, although it was precisely this understanding that underlay his resistance to **subsistent** change in the south. **Doug Smith** tells us that **Dadney** was opposed to school integration, even the integration of the graduate school at the University of Virginia, because he believed that integration would lead to racial **imalformation**. This position, as _____ tells us, was a standard **chipila** of the white supremacist south (i.e. it was truism, empty of all meaning). Smith says furthermore that late in life, **Dadney** continued to express his own personal disapproval of miscegenation, no doubt a comforting position for a man that never recognized that African American aspirations had nothing to do with interracial marriage and sexual relations. African American aspirations did have to do with interracial marriage and sexual relations. Restricted marriage laws were the foundation of the Jim Crow system. Every African American leader, from **W.E. Duboise** to Martin Luther King, recognized this. **Duboise** wrote the right of freedom of association into the Niagra Movement, the predecessor to the NAACP. **Roy Wilkons** upheld that pledge when he insisted that blacks and whites

belonged on a plain of absolute political and social equality. Martin Luther King could not have been clearer when he said on television in 1958, I quote him, “the thoroughly integrated society means freedom. When any society says that I cannot marry a person, that society has cut off a segment of my freedom.” **Hannah Orent**, by the way, made the same argument in 1957 when she said that the Supreme Court should have declared antimiscegenation laws and not segregated schools unconstitutional. It’s worth wondering what the history of the Civil Rights Movement might have been if the courts had not ducked that question in 1955 and only returned to it in 1967. As far as **Virginia Stadney** goes, however, he foresaw the progressive path that desegregation would take from integrated public transportation to integrated schools to integrated marriages, its thoroughly liberal path, one that upholds constitutional notions of freedom of association, even as it protects individual rights. It was a path that **Dadney** was unwilling to follow. What could be avoided in 1945 could no longer be avoided in the 1950s. **Jeff Norell** claims in his paper for this conference is that, I quote, “the only southern liberalism of any significance in shaping events in the 1950s was **SRC’s**.” This is a rather large claim for a world that included organizations like the Montgomery **Prumont** Association. It does seem to be the case that the **SRC** became more, rather than less, devoted to liberal ideals after it’s eleventh hour denunciation of segregation in 1951. To use **Guy**

Johnson's terms, "the **SRC** aimed it's guns at the distant peaks only after others had captured the foothills." The organization did endure and it made a difference. Especially at the local level in the forms of state visional councils. In South Carolina, for example, the council on human relations was there to mediate when African Americans turned a direct action in that state. Perhaps more importantly, though, the southern regional council changed and advanced towards what even **Gunner Myrtle** would have recognized as liberalism. Indeed, one of the clearest pieces of evidence of the **SRC's** eventual and decisive turn towards liberalism is that **Virginia Stadney** quit.

We do have some time for questions. We're running a little bit late because we started a little late, but please direct your questions to our panelists.

?: Jane, could you also ask that people identify themselves when they ask their questions?

Jane Dailey: Please identify yourselves. Otherwise I'll identify you.

Paul Gaston: You all talked about the meaning of words, and they said, they never get fixed in time. We're all prisoners of them. All of you have sort of praised **Mirgal**, and yet he committed one of the worst errors in naming his book, the subtitle, the negro problem. It wasn't a negro problem. There wasn't no problem with negros. It was a white problem. **Mirgal** had not yet evolved to that point where he

understood that he was mistaking the problem. We, at the American **Glem**, it's a great book, but we're all prisoners of words. I feel the same way about the use of the term liberalism. **Eric Goldman** was writing a book, you younger people may not remember when it came out as I do, **Rileyho** destiny, a History of Modern American Liberalism. A reporter came out to speak to him about this book he was writing. He said, **Mr. Goldman**, what does liberalism mean? **Mr. Goldman** said, well, I guess it means dueces are wild. It's enormously important that **Doug** and **Mort** and **Jane** identify this particular branch of cautious southern liberalism that folks in the 1920s and 1930s that tried to be compatible with segregation. It included people like **Hogan Gardner** and **Virginia Stadney**, but it seems to me that the important thing is not that the white southerners that you described at the end of your talk made **SRC** sort of the cockpit of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, but that liberalism changed. There remained a very distinctive brand, very hard to identify. **Goldman** was right. Liberalism does mean who can survive. It's very hard to identify. People themselves changed, and they were educated by their black comrades as well as by their old reading. I think what I wanted to see and what we see in this department is the evolution of thought and action. The council still has a lot more to

learn in the 1960s. It's a constant program of awareness and I hope somebody will be aware enough sometime to reissue an American dilemma and entitle it the white problem.

Jack Davis: I hesitate to follow that with my comment, but on the subject of **Howard Odem** in regionalism, it's interesting to note that **Odem's** two sons, **Eugene** and **Howard T** were both ecologists. **Eugene** was at the University of Georgia's prominent college, and **Eugene** was at the University of Georgia and **Howard T.**, H.T. as they called him, was here at the University of Florida. I found that interesting for a couple of reasons. One, that somebody so brainy as **Howard, Sr.** was usually produces freaks as offspring. Also, his two sons went into ecology. Yet, when you think about it, their careers in ecology were not such a great detour from his. **Odem** saw, in regionalism, he saw each region as a part of a larger whole. He saw that within each region there were unique features within the physical and the cultural environments that constituted an integrated system, an American system. I would argue then that racial discrimination was not regional. It was, in fact, systemic. I wonder then, **Mort**, if you think that the criticism of **Odem** and his regional model, or regionalism, was in fact the disguise?

Morton Sosna: I think that's a very interesting question, especially the way that you approached it. In my paper, I was mentioning both **Odem and Dadney** together, but I would really draw a distinction between

them. **Odem** wasn't the committed separate-but-equal ideologically that **Dadney** was. I don't think miscegenation was a major issue for him. I think he thought in terms of the time wasn't right. I don't think he had a severe ideological. In fact, he stepped out and he was one of the people preventing the southern regional council going on record as supporting segregation. To get back to regionalism, I think you're right, the way you've phrased **Odem's** conception of regionalism. One of the things that really upset him about **Myrtle's** book was that he not once mentioned his southern regions of the United States. Hell hath no fury in any case. I think regionalism for **Odem**, it was conceived in national terms. At the same time, the south really had a special place in that regional framework in so many ways. What I think he was proposing, and the people who supported regionalism as a workable ideal was a kind of regional affirmative action program for the south that would draw in national resources, governmental resources to do things in connection with educational reform, economic reform. At the same time, certainly make steps towards equalizing race relations in the south but never go so far as to fundamentally challenge the whole assumption of Jim Crow. That was a workable regionalism as far as **Odem** is concerned. I would argue that the war and all the things we've been talking about made

it so irrelevant and out of place. It was a very advanced deal in 1935. **Odem** and to some extent **Dadney** were not only ahead of people in the south but they were ahead of people in Chicago and New York on most of these issues.

Jack Davis: As the Civil Rights Movement showed later on, those are the issues that were needed in all the regions around the country. Wherever blacks went in this country and wherever they educated for the constitutional rights, they encountered the same sort of racial discrimination, and in some cases in great intensity.

Morton Sosna: I think that's true, and I think other people have talked about this, but during, especially in the war and the post-war period, the Civil Rights period, certainly through the 1960s, the south suffered as kind of a lightning rod for the nations conscious. The people could ignore what's going on the west coast or the midwest or the northeast in terms of the injustices and inequities and race, but somehow was made easier to live with because all of the really terrible stuff was happening in the south. At least I think that's the way a lot of people outside of the south felt. The south served, in the nations' psyche, it was good to have the south. I couldn't read it in the paper, but I quoted a piece from **Margaret Meade**. **Meade**, during the war, was serving on some national committee to assess morale on the home front. She traveled all around the

country. Of course, one of the places she traveled was the south. In her papers, there's this wonderful memo. She had never been in the south. She literally writes, oh my God. It's more like New Guinea than it is like anywhere else in the United States. The south was different. It really was part of that whole World War II phenomenon, that shortly afterwards, and even **Faulkner** wrote in one of his first post-war novels, that outlanders will just believe anything about the south providing it's bizzare enough and insane enough. I think the south taking on a kind of threatening distinctive otherness, you were really going to back, not to the 1920s, but I think you were going back to the mid nineteenth century and the Civil War reconstructive period.

Matt Lassiter: I'm Matt Lassiter from the University of Michigan. I was wondering if you would respond to _____ comments about your comments about **Virginia Stedney** and interracial societies. During your paper, the first time it came up I thought, he's using this strategically or this kind of language doesn't make sense in the context of this larger language he's trying to explain, then you hear he's still saying this in 1970s. I think the larger point is that the story does have something to do with these issues is accurate, but obviously the white segregation critique is all over the place. I was wondering if you had a statement on that.

J. Douglas Smith: Absolutely. Thank you for that. James' point is well taken, and it would be very easy for me to add one or two words, but to say that had nothing to do with it would be an overstatement. My point certainly was that the point for African Americans and segregation, not that they all wanted to go out and marry whites. That was not the preeminent concern. That's the extent to which I meant to suggest that. While **Dadney** and others focus on that, and it's probably been ten years now when I interviewed **Mills Dodwin** in the 1990s, that was still the parting line for him. That mass resistance was about postponing interracial marriage. I just think that maybe it would have happened in more frequency, but we're not going to all of a sudden have one giant interracial world. African Americans were opposed to interracial marriage as much as whites were. You see that in literature all the time. James is quite right to call me on the extreme language that I used to say that. It had nothing to do with it. I think the point is very well taken.

Matt Lassiter: Is there a sense that he believes this? There's questions about what is _____ talking about.

J. Douglas Smith: **Dadney**, the fact that he continues to make this comment into the 1970s and is certainly not alone in this, I thought it hard to believe that given the absence of any actual evidence of proof that this was

really going to happen, that we were really going to become a nation of mulattos, I sort of feel like to that extent it was something that people got worked up over and they used this as the reason to oppose everything else. With a graduate education, in 1935, he says, that's what's going to happen if we allow this. By the late 1950s he acknowledges that there haven't really been any consequences for that. I think it's hard pressed to have to acknowledge that you step along the way that interracial marriage doesn't lead to a nation of mulattos.

Steve Suits: I want to take up Paul Gaston's _____ southern liberals.

Presley Dunbar wrote his last book _____, I said, you can see _____ southern white gentlemen. By that I meant that he was a person who tried to honestly search the best principles to live by and then actively engaged to try to bring the world to that place. I happen to agree with his version many times with what the content of that liberalism should be. I think it's dangerous to start excluding people because after the fact you see that their version of liberalism was wrong. I think what's important is struggling through the ideals of their content and their achievement and doing it with a sense of humility and humanity. Those are quite vague terms, but in the everyday world they were very important guidelines. For the _____ of Paul, I would ask that you remember a little on that point on humility. I've heard this morning a little of the tone that I would call the **H.L. Menten analysis of the south**. We

know what was right and wrong then and we measure people today by whether they were right or wrong by our standards. That's an important judgment. It's not very insightful about what was strategies and opportunities for people to make change then and to realize their version of an honorable southern gentleman.

Steve Suits: If I could respond for a second to what you say, I think you're right about we need to be careful about not necessarily making these judgments after the fact, but in looking at somebody like **Dadney** I'd argue that we could judge **Dadney** on his own terms based on what the options were at the time. My point would be that although there were all sorts of people in the twenty-first century telling **Dadney** he was wrong, but there were all sorts of people in the 1940s telling **Dadney** he was wrong, especially people like **P.B. Young and Jordan Hancock**, he had served with for many years and had a very good relationship. These were the people telling him that you were wrong, that there are limits to your version of a better world. The angle that I would like to approach this, and I have a lot of sympathy for **Dadney** on a lot of levels, but glorifying **Dadney** _____ is somewhat tragic because I think that **Dadney** did know better. I think he knew on an intellectual level that he was wrong on some of these things, but he couldn't quite get there despite the presence of people at the time who he respected who were telling him that he was wrong. I think it is fair to make those judgements based on the options of

that time.

Jane Dailey: I don't think it's the job of the historian to declare people right or wrong by contemporary standards.

John Due: You have to remember that there was a war going on. I think the greatest thing by Dr. King ever written was not the 'I Have a Dream,' speech, a 'Letter from a Birmingham Jail' should be required reading. I always wondered, who was he talking about when he talked about moderates? Was he talking about _____ council? _____. When he was talking about moderates. Then somewhere else he was concerned about liberals and their lack of commitment. Again, he responded to the harmony that Martin Luther King had with the so-called white fathers. I'm going to ask that question again tomorrow, by the way.

Morton Sosna: I think David's paper will be addressing that specifically later. As I recall, it was interesting because while 'A Letter from a Birmingham Jail,' King does complain about moderates, where are they basically. How are they going to lead you when you're not saying anything or doing anything for us. At the same time, he mentioned, he exempted a few people, including **Ralph McGill** and **Lillian Smith**, who were much more outspoken in antisegregation than **Ralph McGill**. Nonetheless, I think it stresses your point, who did he really mean if he includes both **Lillian Smith and Ralph McGill** as if exempting them from the state where he was then

portraying moderates under.

J. Douglas Smith: I would expect that by 1963 whether **Dadney** would even be considered amongst the moderates by this point in time. At least by this point he's been describing himself as a conservative. Certainly, in the specific address to the people of the church who claimed to believe that segregation is wrong, in one respect they're talking about believing that segregation is wrong, but the time isn't right, we've been waiting for 300 years. I think that certainly he is including people who say, keep waiting, keep waiting, keep waiting, and believe in a very slow gradualism. Yet, this speaks to the point where this ideology has changed so much in twenty years. He's not just talking about people, there's no such thing as a liberal in 1960 who still believes in segregation. He's not referring to people who still want to support Jim Crow at this point. People who suggest that Jim Crow is wrong, but we need to take more time.

Morton Sosna: If I could also respond to Steve's point on liberalism and how you define it and how you judge it and what he means. The question now seems to be not happened to southern liberals but what happened to liberalism. That's what people are raising right now. When I was working on _____, I was actually working on that project in the early 1970s, at that time, I couldn't have fathomed that politicians today would be afraid to even use what

they called the 'L-word.' It just resonates in a completely different way now. No one out there on the political horizon seems to be identifying themselves with or trying to connect themselves with "liberalism." That's really an astounding page in the last forty-five years.

John Boone: I came to this conference because I'm confused. You mentioned the south. I'm all country. Inside though, I realized, too, that I was an ugly American. It's worse than anywhere I've been in America. It's worse than the south. The criticisms by **Dunbar**, I guess that's why I'm standing here talking, because he, like Jesus Christ, in the way he founded anybody in America. It's absolutely the worst country. Don't talk about sections, talk about what's happening in America. It's very, very bad. Thank God for this country. I hope the southern regional council can operationalize so we can get on the real problem. Race is all over, it's worse in Boston. _____liberty_____. It's too narrowly perceived.

Jane Dailey: Thank you. I want to thank our paper givers and the audience for your comments.