“WALKING THE TIGHTROPE”: AMERICANS FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION IN THE SOUTH, 1947-1963

By

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To my parents, for their love and support
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My study explored the history of the liberal political organization Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) as its leaders attempted to establish a series of chapters in the southern United States and influence the political fortunes of liberals in those states in the period following the end of the Second World War. ADA boasted a number of prominent members in its ranks and claimed to have a great deal of influence in national politics, but its efforts in the South were largely unsuccessful in attracting new members and contributing to the debate in southern politics.

ADA leaders made no fewer than three separate attempts to organize southern chapters with dedicated organizers on the scene in the region. The organization’s lack of success in the South was the result of a combination of factors. Its leaders were never able to sustain organizational efforts financially as a result of chronic shortages of money throughout its early history. They also had to deal with frequent charges that ADA, despite a clear repudiation of Communism dating to the group’s founding in 1947, had a close working relationship with Communists and their allies. The charge carried some weight in the South because of the
willingness of other southern liberals to work with Communists during the Great Depression and World War II.

A more fundamental problem was that ADA’s leaders did not understand the political dynamics of the South during this period. Liberals in positions of national prominence hoped that the long-standing conservatism of southern politics was coming to an end, and the election of several liberals to state and national office in the post-war years buoyed their optimism. However, several years of struggling to attract southerners to ADA did not create the network of chapters its leaders had hoped to create, and this dissertation shows how and why that process failed and contributes to the political history of the post-war South.
Those southern liberals who worked against the prevailing conservative nature of politics in the South have always seen themselves as at least somewhat exceptional and unique. As a result, it is not surprising to learn that modern historians of southern liberalism have treated their subjects in a similar fashion. Over the past thirty years, historians have produced dozens of biographies that have attempted to explain how these men and women arrived at their views and how they responded to the challenges they faced as a result of their convictions. For example, Warren Ashby’s 1980 biography of Frank Porter Graham recounts Graham’s rise to prominence as president of the University of North Carolina and a United States senator. Graham’s philosophy centered on better treatment for black Americans, “new rights for the laboring man, new concerns for the farmer, and a fair treatment of the businessman,” all in the service of “building a new South rather than tearing down an old one.” Ashby also shows how Graham’s liberalism, and his association with organizations such as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW), led to charges that he was a Communist and un-American.  

Each southern liberal’s story and personal philosophy was unique, but their willingness to challenge the southern way of life united them.

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As historians have told the individual stories of southern liberals, they have also sought to explain how their collective efforts affected the course of southern history in the twentieth century. The most important difference between these historians concerns the importance they place on racial issues. Morton J. Sosna, John Dittmer, David Chappell, and Jason Sokol have all concentrated almost exclusively on the process by which certain southerners became racial liberals and traced the effect these liberals had on the debate over legal and social segregation in the South.\(^3\) Sosna’s *In Search of the Silent South* is most explicit in defining southern liberalism along these lines, “classifying as ‘liberal’ those white Southerners who perceived that there was a serious maladjustment of race relations in the South” and fought against it by advocating anti-lynching legislation, voting rights for blacks, and desegregation of public facilities.\(^4\)

Other historians have advocated a more comprehensive view of what it meant for a twentieth-century southerner to be “liberal.” Patricia Sullivan’s *Days of Hope* does not deemphasize racial issues, but she does believe that southern liberals who were politically active during the 1930s and 1940s were just as concerned with overturning the region’s “defeating culture of poverty” through economic development and labor activism.\(^5\) Numan Bartley’s history of the “New South” also emphasizes the important role of southern labor in liberal activism, though he detects a shift in liberalism between the end of World War II and the mid-1950s. During the post-war period, according to Bartley, “economic reform had gone out of

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\(^4\) Sosna, viii.

style, and the new liberal fashion was to define objectives in racial terms.” This placed southern liberals in a difficult position, and many liberals became moderates who tried to gradually change the South without resorting to “northern intervention” in southern society.⁶

Bartley’s definition comes closest to defining what it meant to be a liberal southerner in the period following the Second World War. However, one aspect of the history of southern liberalism that has not received enough attention from historians concerns how southern liberals interacted with their northern allies. One of the most important liberal organizations of the mid-twentieth century was Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), founded in the wake of the 1946 Republican congressional landslide. From the beginning, this organization, which included such New Deal luminaries as Eleanor Roosevelt, economist John Kenneth Galbraith, United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, and Pulitzer-Prize winning historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., was dedicated to promoting the interests of “free men everywhere” by opposing Communism at every turn. Its founders announced that conscientious liberals could not support an ideology “hostile to the principles of freedom and democracy on which the Republic has grown great,” and they would not accept for membership those who were Communists, or those who wanted to work with Communists (or fascists) to achieve the goals of New Deal domestic liberalism.⁷ It is clear that ADA’s founders wanted to define liberalism along these lines and work to convince Americans that their prescriptions would lead to freedom and prosperity.


The fate of ADA liberalism in the South is the subject of this study, and it shows how the entrenched political conservatism of the region frustrated liberals who had convinced themselves that their philosophy could succeed in the South. In the period between 1947 and 1963, ADA leaders worked hard to establish a political and organizational presence in the South, and they believed they could succeed. According to historian Kevin Mattson, Niebuhr and Schlesinger succeeded in making Cold War liberalism “a humanist project committed to pushing people to think beyond the interests of the self.” Practically speaking, this meant they avoided “fanaticism” of all types and encouraged citizens to reach out to others.8

The problem for ADA liberals was that they possessed an inflated view of their own effectiveness. As Mattson has noted, they wrote for the best magazines and newspapers, held prestigious positions at the best universities, and traveled in the same “privileged, white, and well-educated” circles, largely through organizations like ADA. However, having influence over public debate did not translate into tangible political power. Their chosen presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956, Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson, lost each election he contested. In addition, political conservatives had organizations and intellectuals of their own making their case. In short, says Mattson, the idea of “a liberal consensus during [the 1950s] is little more than a myth,” and nowhere was that myth more painfully exposed than in the South.9

ADA liberals did have some success to show for their efforts. At the 1948 Democratic National Convention, Hubert H. Humphrey, mayor of Minneapolis and soon-to-be-elected senator from Minnesota, stirred the delegates with his call for a strong stand on civil rights. His words (“To those who say that we are rushing this issue of civil rights, I say to them, we are 172

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9 Mattson, 12-14.
years too late”) led to the withdrawal of several southern delegations and the creation of the Dixiecrat ticket with South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond at its head. In the face of this conservative challenge (and Wallace’s challenge from the left), ADA campaigned hard for a resurgent Truman, who won an unexpected victory in November. In 1948, the ADA’s efforts also had influence on any number of state and local races, particularly in the Northeast and on the West Coast. In this first election since its creation, congressional candidates, governors, and mayors consulted ADA, counted on its support, and worked for legislation to promote fair employment practices, expand public housing and education, extend Social Security and labor rights, and combat Soviet influence around the world.

ADA’s early successes were real and tangible, but their prestigious membership list and ability to wield influence in Washington masked serious political and organizational problems. While ADA boasted of its political effectiveness, it faced chronic shortages of almost everything such a group needed to remain a significant political force. One such shortage was in membership. As Steven M. Gillon notes in his comprehensive history of the ADA, and as its membership lists show, the group’s boasts about its size did not conform to reality. In 1953, to cite one example, the publicity brochure The Story of ADA claimed that the group’s membership exceeded 40,000, but ADA records showed that the real figure was closer to 20,000. The desire to exaggerate ADA’s membership numbers for the benefit of the media or politicians is understandable, but staffers and board members knew the truth.

Organizations such as ADA faced two additional problems, each tied strongly to the South: the limits of cooperation with political parties and other liberal organizations; and the


\[\text{\footnotesize 11} \text{ Gillon, 57-58.}\]
need to build a truly national organization. First, many of ADA’s potential members already had commitments to other groups, including the Democratic Party, labor unions, ethnic organizations, and the NAACP. ADA leaders tried to address this problem by portraying the organization as a clearinghouse for liberals. Its leaders acknowledged the role that other groups played in highlighting injustices on a narrower front (with the NAACP leading the fight on racial issues and civil rights, for example) while billing ADA as an organization for people who were concerned about all of the important issues of the day and needed a place to pool their intellectual and financial resources. Thus, ADA national conventions became gathering places for the liberal elite, whether or not attendees were actually members of the organization.

The other problem ADA faced, the problem highlighted in this study, was regional. If “Americans for Democratic Action” was to become more than a name, ADA had to find ways to expand its base of support in regions where liberalism had not been strong. Local chapters in the Northeast, the industrial Midwest, and California did not have trouble finding liberals committed to the ADA platform, but the same could not be said of Texas, Alabama, and Georgia. Nevertheless, the importance of the South in national politics and the intransigence of its politicians dictated that ADA needed to make strong efforts in the region, and between 1947 and the mid-1960s ADA leaders worked hard to interest southerners in their program. Liberals had long wanted to break what they thought of as a self-destructive cycle in southern politics, educating southerners on the virtues of liberalism so that they would begin to reject the conservative politicians they routinely elected. By electing people who were not afraid of integration or government intervention in the economy, liberals believed that southerners would accelerate the long, hard task of bringing their region in line with the rest of the country, which they believed had already accepted the New Deal.
In order to do this, ADA members needed to perform the long, hard work of writing letters, visiting communities, and educating potential members. In May 1947, ADA’s Executive Committee called for an expanded budget of $30,000 for organizing activities in regions where ADA did not yet have a large presence, including the South. According to the minutes of the meeting, James A. Loeb, ADA’s executive secretary, “stated that the greatest need at the moment was for additional field staff. He pointed out, for example, that we had only one organizer for the whole Midwest and only one for the whole South. The $30,000 proposed budget will permit several additional organizers.” However, Loeb was speaking of an ideal financial and political situation for ADA, one which he hoped southern contributions would enhance. It is clear that ADA faced a dilemma in the South: it certainly would have attracted many more members if it had organizers in every southern state, but it could not commit resources until organizers were sure that they could recruit more dues-paying members.

Moreover, the ADA’s decentralized nature made organizing politically difficult. While national ADA figures such as Mrs. Roosevelt and Schlesinger claimed, in the media and before Congress, to represent all ADA members, and while ADA’s constitution commanded all of its members to adhere to all of its policy pronouncements, in fact deep disagreements over the nature and extent of economic, political, and social change were rife. This was particularly true in the South, where national leaders and local members engaged in a difficult, tricky dance over civil rights. The issue was not ADA’s support for civil rights, but rather how this public stand would affect recruitment and retention of southerners who might share ADA’s goals in most other fields, but not its commitment to integration. Southern ADA members never explicitly

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pressed national leaders to change the platform, and many southerners shared their beliefs in voting rights and fair employment practices. At the same time, however, in most cases they did all they could to deemphasize civil rights when appealing to prospective members. For example, southern ADA members pressed for changes in ADA literature so that civil rights declarations would appear at the end of pamphlets instead of the beginning. Southern liberals thought ADA leaders were forcing them to make uncomfortable choices, and many potential members stayed away from the organization because of its liberal stance on civil rights.

The decisions about when and how stringently to pursue organization in the South were made exclusively at ADA’s national headquarters in Washington and at national board meetings, but the effects of these decisions were felt at the southern grass-roots level. In the first three years of its existence, ADA employed two Southern Field Representatives. Barney Taylor and Alden Hopkins traveled thousands of miles, speaking to hundreds of southerners, including labor leaders, prominent southern blacks, college presidents and students, and unaffiliated liberals who saw ADA as a chance to connect with liberalism on a national level. They reported promising leads, started chapters and exploratory membership committees, and engaged in fund-raising drives. In the end, however, their efforts were largely unrewarded. No southern chapters created in this period attracted more than fifty members. Taylor and Hopkins never raised more than a few hundred dollars for ADA (and spent thousands of dollars raising that money), and many of the people who expressed interest in ADA never actually became members.

As tireless as these early organizers were (and as promising as their leads seemed), they were stretched thin considering the territory they had to cover. In the end, the organizers had to make decisions about which areas they were to cover, and electoral politics dictated these decisions. For example, Hopkins, ADA’s southern organizer from April 1949 to February 1950,
confined her organizing to North Carolina and Florida. She did this because each of these states
was electing a United States senator in 1950, and each incumbent was a prominent southern
liberal with significant political problems. One of them was Frank Porter Graham, whose
affiliation with SCHW, coupled with accusations that Graham supported integration, helped
Willis Smith’s victory over Graham in the June 1950 Democratic primary. In Florida,
conservative Democrats had criticized Claude Pepper for his pro-Soviet sentiments. In the 1944
election, when the United States was a wartime ally of the Stalinist state, this had not hurt
Pepper. In 1950, these associations were among the factors that caused his bitter loss to
Congressman George Smathers in that summer’s Democratic primary.

ADA leaders knew that Graham and Pepper needed all of the assistance they could get.
This was the main impetus for sending Hopkins to these two states during the primary
campaigns. However, she found it difficult to organize in the South. Indeed, in North Carolina
and Florida, the politicians she was attempting to help did not want her help. The organizational
problems were primarily political: it was difficult to sell big-government liberalism in the South,
particularly if liberals also championed black civil rights. That being said, the requirements for
organizing a working chapter (25 dues-paying members) were not onerous, even if potential
ADA members had other political commitments. Hopkins’ more basic problem was that she
could never attract competent local leadership. During her time with ADA, Hopkins traveled
constantly, but she could not be in all places at once. There was only so much she could do via
telephone, telegram, and the mail to rally support during those long stretches when she could not
be in Charlotte, Raleigh, Tampa, or Miami. In her absence, the ADA staff in Washington needed
committed volunteers to pick up the slack, but these men and women often did not exist.
Hopkins’ efforts, like those of Taylor before her, were frustrated, and in 1950 she left ADA. However, her passion on the subject of southern organization was not dead. She had always acknowledged the difficulty of organizing ADA chapters in the South without compromising on the core ideals for which the organization stood, especially its support for racial integration. Nevertheless, Hopkins believed that liberals could be elected to Congress from the South, especially from major cities such as Nashville, New Orleans, and Atlanta. Her commitment to the South had not dissipated. “It seems to me building up liberal sentiment and organization in the South is much more than a matter of political expedience; it is a matter of political life or death nationally.”

Hopkins thought that the fate of liberalism in the 1950s depended on organizing the South, which would bolster liberalism’s credibility at home and abroad.

Hopkins certainly believed in the political importance of the South, but that did not change the fact that, most of the chapters Taylor and Hopkins attempted to organize failed to last beyond 1950. Hopkins believed that getting ADA off the ground in the South was a matter of “political life or death,” but she was unable to convince national leaders to commit thousands of organizing dollars to the region for such modest results when the same financial resources yielded far greater returns in New York, Washington, or Los Angeles. ADA leaders never stopped trying to attract support for liberalism in the South, but after 1950 it did so in a far more informal manner, waiting for inquiries about its platform from interested southerners before committing resources to the region. In the 1950s, ADA’s staff adopted an essentially passive approach. This approach mirrored important trends in liberal thinking during the 1950s, when

13 Alden Hopkins, memo to James A. Loeb, December 31, 1949, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.
intellectuals concentrated on consolidating liberal gains made over the previous decades instead of attempting to conquer new territory.

This passivity did not, however, preclude more substantive attempts at organization if an interesting possibility presented itself. One such opportunity arose in 1953, national ADA leaders seized an opportunity to organize in Texas, with the help of a former labor organizer, George Lambert. Texas was a unique case for ADA because of the open intransigence and double-dealing of the state’s conservative politicians, all of whom continued to proclaim themselves to be members in good standing of the national Democratic Party. However, these conservatives thought that their nominal loyalty to the party should have allowed them to exercise an absolute veto over the Democratic platform and the party’s presidential nominees. In 1948 and 1952, conservatives had thrown their support behind the Republican ticket when the national Democratic Party failed to conform to their agenda. Texas liberals such as Maury Maverick, Wright Patman, and Ralph Yarborough worked hard to lessen the power of conservative Democrats, but Dwight Eisenhower’s 1952 victory in Texas showed how little influence liberals actually had.

In 1953, Lambert proposed that ADA join the liberal campaign to blunt the power of Governor Allan Shivers, who led the conservative faction in the state. These “Shivercrats” (to use Lambert’s term for them) opposed the national liberal agenda, but they wanted to keep their positions of power and influence within the Democratic Party. Lambert and his allies in Texas wanted to expose Shivers and his allies, and ADA leaders approved a campaign designed to boost membership in the state while working with local liberals to reduce conservative power within the party. They wanted national Democrats to look past the money and power Texas conservatives controlled and excommunicate them as punishment for attempting to destroy the
party from the inside. Lambert also wanted to send a message to two prominent Democrats in Washington, Representative Sam Rayburn and Senator Lyndon B. Johnson. These two Texans were particularly susceptible to outside pressures: while they were enormously influential in Washington, D.C., they were vulnerable to challenges from Shivers, who always suspected them of being too liberal in supporting public housing, education, and government health insurance. For their part, liberals thought Rayburn and Johnson too conservative on civil rights and too zealous in protecting Texas oil and gas industries. Each side thought it could influence these two powerful men and seize control of the state Democratic Party in the mid-1950s.

In the end, neither side truly won the war. Rayburn and Johnson fended off challenges to their political positions through deft maneuvering that kept everyone off balance, and Shivers maintained his hold on the state’s political system for most of the 1950s. Years of struggle and organization amounted to little for Lambert beyond a few new ADA chapters in Fort Worth, Houston, and several smaller communities. Like Hopkins, Lambert found that organizing a place such as Texas required finding committed and hard-working people in those communities who were willing to sacrifice for the sake of their chapter, and those people were hard to find. He also suffered even more acutely as a result of the financial burdens ADA was carrying in the 1950s. Lambert was tireless in his quest to foster ADA liberalism to Texas. However, his efforts went largely unrewarded. The national organization ended its financial support for Lambert before the 1956 elections, in which Texas again cast its electoral votes for the Republican ticket.

Clearly, a new strategy for ADA organization was needed, and while ADA leaders never truly gave up on the South, their focus shifted to ADA’s student division, known as Students for Democratic Action (SDA) before 1958 and Campus ADA (CADA) afterward. This
organization, whose local leaders during the period included future Michigan Senator Carl Levin and future Vice President and Democratic presidential nominee Walter “Fritz” Mondale, was founded at the same time as ADA, but the bulk of its work in the post-war South happened after 1955. Before that year, the SDA chapters that had been formed at southern universities were much like their ADA counterparts: small, ineffective, and contributing little to the fight for liberalism. One of the main problems the student affiliates faced was that SDA members did not know what kind of relationship they should have with other liberal groups, especially on the campuses of historically black colleges.

In 1955, new SDA Field Secretary Yale Bernstein, who had spent several years working in New York state as an ADA organizer, brought new energy to the task of starting new chapters and cajoling existing ones into stronger action. Bernstein was especially eager to organize the South. He argued passionately that “there are few, if any, organizations working for liberalism, either on the student or adult level, in the South. Some church groups, sometimes some of the unions, and sometimes the NAACP will be active. These groups do not, however, because of their restrictive membership attraction, reach the majority of the liberal students.” Bernstein believed that “SDA could bring about a push toward this new South, which would be far out of proportion to its numbers, and could bring into the active, aware political arena, many students who would otherwise be lost to the movement.”

With Bernstein’s enthusiasm and the assistance of newly energized young liberals, SDA and CADA were far bolder in addressing important political issues of the South in the 1950s and 1960s. SDA students assisted blacks who boycotted the bus system in Montgomery, Alabama in the wake of the Rosa Parks incident. They also protested bans on interracial athletic competitions in Mississippi and Georgia,

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supported the Freedom Riders of the early 1960s, and fought for freedom of expression at southern universities. ADA’s student division made a bigger impact on the South than its adult division ever did.

The biggest impact this younger generation had on ADA was its willingness to challenge the status quo. Most ADA leaders who thought about the problems of the South had been cautious when addressing problems such as segregation. They knew that many potential members who might have agreed with them on other issues were unwilling to integrate schools and public accommodations. They also believed the primary goal of the organization was organizing: recruiting members, starting chapters, soliciting contributions, finding common cause on issues that could lead to successful campaigns for political change. Student organizers, in contrast, believed that the South had fundamentally changed between ADA’s founding in 1947 and the Brown decision of 1954. Timidity, compromise, and vacillation for the sake of the organization would no longer help liberals.

In the end, though, these students had an inconclusive impact on southern politics. The problems they faced were twofold, and they could do little about either. First, liberal students were largely unwilling to compromise their beliefs on civil rights in order to attract more members, and this made them pariahs on many campuses. Second, the transitory nature of the college experience meant that chapters were in a constant state of flux, with politically experienced students leaving the scene as they graduated. This meant that an organization such as SDA or CADA was unable to sustain pressure for liberal change on southern campuses. It also meant that this pressure was largely the work of committed individuals at certain flashpoints. The most significant of these campaigns was the 1962 fight to integrate the University of Florida in Gainesville. Campus ADA was involved in this fight largely because of
the effort of a handful of committed students who corresponded with black leaders in the state and pressured state and university officials to integrate the campus. The successful integration of the university was ADA’s most tangible contribution to liberalism in the post-war South.

This success, however, did not translate into the kind of organization ADA enjoyed outside of the South. The bulk of its membership continued to come from the Northeast, particularly New York and Washington, as well as Chicago, Los Angeles, and other large cities outside of the South. ADA members from the South attended board meetings and national conventions throughout this period, but in most cases they existed merely as curiosities, people who would normally have little contact with members from the rest of the country. They also failed to create a strong financial base in the South: most of the money ADA used in its organizing came from labor unions and wealthy patrons outside of the South, meaning any activity in the region was a financial drain throughout the two decades following World War II. The political fortunes of New Deal liberalism in the South were better than this record indicates, especially when considering the civil rights successes of the period. However, it would be a mistake to credit these accomplishments to the efforts of ADA.

It is also important to acknowledge that as ADA was trying to change the South, the organization itself was changing during the decades that followed the end of World War II. What it meant to be a liberal was also changing during that period, and many on the left had become disenchanted with Cold War liberalism by the 1960s. This disenchantment was partly philosophical, since the “New Left” was more concerned with personal liberation and tired of worrying about “great-power” politics. However, the rift within liberalism also had its practical causes. Many people believed that old-style liberalism was reaching the limits of its effectiveness, and the South was the most damning example of liberalism’s failure. ADA’s
failure to organize in the South, given the intellectual and political weight behind the 
organization, is an important aspect of the story of how a seemingly ascendant liberalism 
responded to the challenges its adherents faced in post-war America.
In the immediate wake of World War II, American liberals faced two key dilemmas: how to deal with Communists and their political allies; and what to do about the American South. The liberals who founded the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) explicitly addressed the former issue. Their concern about pro-Soviet elements on the American left, and the effect these elements had on the ability of liberals to win and retain political power, was the issue that originally brought them together in January 1947. Concern over what to do about the South’s political conservatism, its hostility toward organized labor, and its racial injustices would emerge as another key challenge as ADA activists sought to build a vigorous national organization.

In the same period, tensions among white southern liberals replicated the challenges that ADA activists faced nationally. Throughout World War II, two liberal organizations vied for influence in a South undergoing rapid industrial and demographic change. While the leadership of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW) openly welcomed Communist participation, the leaders of the Southern Regional Council (SRC) criticized SCHW’s approach and explicitly banned Communists and socialists from participating in their organization. With signs of progressive political rebirth emerging in the aftermath of war, the South posed both a complex dilemma and a rare opportunity for liberals at the national level.

Underscoring all of this were the events of 1945, which shook all Americans in a profound way. By August, Germany and Japan had surrendered to the Allies. Harvard-trained historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. was in Paris at the end of the war, freshly drafted into the U.S. Army after several years of working with the Office of Strategic Services in England and France as an intelligence analyst and writer. For many Americans, the end of the war was a curious moment.
They were enthusiastic about the prospect of peace, but the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12 had come as a great shock to people of Schlesinger’s generation. There had been a great deal of speculation on Roosevelt’s health in the months leading up to the 1944 election, but his death was still unexpected. As Schlesinger notes in his memoirs, “people my age hardly remembered any president before FDR. We unconsciously supposed that he would be president forever.”¹

The inability of younger Americans to comprehend what Roosevelt’s death meant was understandable, but Schlesinger’s reaction was also political. Schlesinger was a liberal, and his career to that point reflected his liberalism. His Pulitzer Prize-winning Age of Jackson, published in 1945, was a self-conscious attempt to place the events of pre-Civil War America in the context of the Great Depression and New Deal, arguing that the Jacksonian Democrats were proto-New Dealers like himself. Now the great champion of American liberalism had died, and Schlesinger told his wife that “his death leaves a kind of awful vacancy.”² He had been so effective in pushing the country to accept liberal legislation such as Social Security, banking reform, public power, and labor legislation. Moreover, he had created a solid Democratic coalition that passed liberal legislation and protected the gains of the New Deal from a conservative backlash. Now he was gone, and liberals were not at all sure where they fit in under Roosevelt’s successor, former Missouri senator Harry S Truman.³

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² Schlesinger, Life, 346.
Not all Americans reacted to Roosevelt’s death with sorrow. Many southerners, particularly the vast majority of elected officials and power brokers in the Democratic Party, had cooperated with the New Deal only begrudgingly, if at all. They looked forward to dealing with a President who seemed to think and act like “one of them,” especially on racial issues.

However, not all southerners cheered Roosevelt’s passing. Atlanta Constitution editor Ralph McGill, for one, made a trip to Roosevelt’s southern White House in Warm Springs to pay his respects, and he recorded his impressions of the trip through rural Georgia for his newspaper. McGill saw little of the negativity that the region’s political classes felt toward Roosevelt, reporting instead on the respect and admiration ordinary Americans had for the man who had been their greatest champion, even if his rhetoric often outpaced his achievements. This reaction, in part, led McGill to write that “all I can see for this country is the green light.”

McGill’s conclusion was optimistic in its assessment of the ability of the country to deal with the challenges of post-war life, with or without Roosevelt.

In a sense, both McGill’s cautious optimism and Schlesinger’s negativity were each valid. The divisions that had existed in the United States before the war had not disappeared, but had merely faded as international problems took precedence. One of these divisions was between North and South. Many Americans, particularly liberals, emerged from the war with the sense that they could no longer ignore pressing social and economic problems in their own country. Some of them were native southerners whose opinions, particularly on racial issues, had not survived their wartime experiences. Liberals hoped that this cohort of southerners was a large one. Guy Johnson, chairman of the SRC at the end of the war, boldly asserted that “the majority

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of our fighting men have had experiences which have taught them a new appreciation of their fellow Americans of another race.”

McGill was also sure that the South would become more liberal. He acknowledged the problems and divisions that were a fundamental part of the postwar political and social landscape. However, he also thought that the problems the United States faced should be viewed in the context of the five years that had just passed. His country was the most powerful, and richest, on earth, possessed of technology (including the atomic bomb) that now awed the world. America’s soldiers, along with the British and Russians, had beaten back the most fearsome armies mankind had ever produced. Under such circumstances, how could any challenge be daunting? McGill “wanted desperately to believe that people were basically decent and that, given a chance, they would do the right thing.”

Others who shared McGill’s generally liberal outlook were not so sure, and events in the months that preceded the founding of ADA in January 1947 showed that New Dealers who wanted to keep their vision of the country alive in the wake of Roosevelt’s passing would have to work hard to do so.

First, liberals had to reckon with a new president. Almost from the moment he assumed the office, Harry Truman had appeared unable to grasp the enormity of his position, and New Deal liberals had no confidence in his ability to lead as Roosevelt had. He took the side of large defense contractors when these businesses laid off tens of thousands of workers who were no longer needed in a peacetime economy. In May 1946, he shocked liberal sensibilities when he asked Congress for authorization to draft striking railroad workers, claiming that a national


emergency necessitated the move. Although he publicly proclaimed his support for a permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to combat racial discrimination in the workplace, he did not fight for it when powerful southern members of Congress blocked it. Several members of Roosevelt’s old cabinet did not last one year under Truman, resigning to protest what they considered to be troubling trends toward moderation or conservatism. In short, liberals believed that Truman’s domestic policies were far different from Roosevelt’s, and liberals had convinced themselves they would have to fight to remain a viable force within the Democratic Party.

Truman appeared to be equally unsure of his footing in foreign affairs. His limited experience in the international arena did not inspire confidence, especially in a postwar world where everything appeared to be up for grabs. He had to deal with the Roosevelt’s legacy here as well, but liberals were less sure of what that legacy was. The wartime Allies had defeated fascism and Nazism, but with that common enemy no longer a threat, prewar differences between the coalition partners reasserted themselves. Roosevelt had overcome these differences with deft personal diplomacy, especially in talks with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. However, by the end of the war many Americans had come to the conclusion that Stalin could not be trusted. It remains unclear whether the Soviet Union was a real threat to the United States in the early years of the Cold War, but the anxiety with which Americans regarded Stalin was certainly real. Truman believed that an American projection of strength would force Stalin into uncomfortable

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7 Gillon, Politics and Vision, 4.


positions, and his earliest use of this tactic came at the July 1945 conference held in Potsdam, Germany, where Truman casually informed Stalin that the United States, working with British and other Allied scientists, had successfully tested a special weapon (the atomic bomb) in the deserts of New Mexico. Truman hoped to scare Stalin into keeping his promises concerning self-determination in Eastern Europe with this new weapon, though he thought he could accomplish this whether or not the bomb worked.\textsuperscript{10}

The moment that Truman informed Stalin of the existence of this “new weapon of unusual destructive force,” however, was surprisingly anti-climactic, as Stalin showed little interest in it beyond its potential use in ending the war against Japan. The reason his reaction was much less dramatic than Truman had wanted it to be was that the Soviets already knew about the bomb. A German-born British scientist, Klaus Fuchs, had been passing along detailed scientific and mechanical information about the research at Los Alamos to Communists in Britain, who eventually relayed it to Soviet officials. Fuchs’s spying allowed the Soviet nuclear program, which had begun in 1942, to progress much faster than it would have otherwise. It also meant that Stalin was well-informed about what was going on in New Mexico. Truman’s news, therefore, was not news to Stalin.\textsuperscript{11}

Klaus Fuchs was not the only person working for the government of the United States who had a hidden agenda. Communist spies in the American government were active and important, and recently declassified documents have revealed important details about these spies. For example, although Alger Hiss defended himself to the end of his life against charges that he passed secrets from his offices in the State Department and White House to top-level Soviet

\textsuperscript{10} David McCullough, \textit{Truman} (New York, 1992), 442.

\textsuperscript{11} McCullough, \textit{Truman}, 442-443.
agents, in fact he was a long-time member of the Communist Party and had been leading a
double life during and after the Second World War.\textsuperscript{12} He was one of several well-positioned
government functionaries who were spying on behalf of the Soviet government during the 1930s
and 1940s.\textsuperscript{13}

The public had little knowledge of this espionage as it was happening, but Americans
across the political spectrum were already coming to the conclusion that while the Soviets may
have been wartime allies, Communism and capitalism were fundamentally incompatible. New
Deal liberals in particular found themselves at a crossroads as they debated how the United
States should deal with Communism. Some, including former vice president and Secretary of
Commerce Henry A. Wallace, saw no reason why the wartime alliance could not continue. He
argued that the United States should recognize Soviet influence in Eastern Europe and share
military and nuclear knowledge with the Soviets, believing that confrontation with Communism
would be the worst possible idea. He also saw little difference between Stalin’s purges of the
1930s and the actions of “reactionary” elements in his own country, especially in the South.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} G. Edward White, \textit{Alger Hiss’s Looking-Glass Wars: The Covert Life of a Soviet Spy} (New

\textsuperscript{13} Revelations about the extent of Soviet espionage within the Manhattan Project continue to this
day. One such spy was Dr. George Koval, an Iowa-born scientist who worked at the Oak Ridge
nuclear laboratories in 1944 and 1945 after earning his doctorate at the Mendeleev Institute in
Moscow and receiving special training from Soviet military intelligence. American intelligence
kept his espionage a secret for decades, but his usefulness to the Soviets became clear in
November of 2007, when Russian President Vladimir Putin posthumously honored Koval as a
“Hero of the Russian Federation” for his “his courage and heroism while carrying out special
missions” on behalf of the USSR. William J. Broad, “A Spy’s Path: Iowa to A-Bomb to Kremlin

Others, including Schlesinger, theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, and New York Post editor James Weschler, thought there was no contradiction between a continued commitment to the New Deal and recognition of the Soviet Union as an enemy that needed to be confronted. These men believed that the United States was far from perfect, and that domestic reform was vital to the realization of American greatness. No liberal could be completely proud of his nation while legal and cultural barriers separated blacks from whites in everyday life, or when thousands of American workers found themselves unemployed after they had helped to defeat fascism and Nazism through their efforts on the home front. However, they did not believe that Communism had any solutions to offer the United States. Not only did they believe that Communism did not work economically or socially, but they abhorred the fact that Communists, in practice, refused to allow any formal opposition of any kind. No good liberal could work with any person, American or otherwise, who would allow such infringements on human rights.\textsuperscript{15}

The division among liberals had its parallels in the South as well, though the debate was somewhat different. While Communism was a significant marker of the battle lines among liberals, a far more important issue in the South was how one stood on racial issues. The debate about the South’s future had been raging since the end of the Civil War, but the Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II highlighted the role of the federal government in race relations. Roosevelt did not overtly challenge the South on its racially segregated practices during his presidency, but he did make many enemies in the region with his harsh words toward those congressmen who opposed his reforms. He was not anti-southern, but he did want the region’s political class to acknowledge its most pressing economic and social problems and confront them. Northern liberals agreed with Roosevelt, laying down a clear challenge to their

\textsuperscript{15} Kevin Mattson, \textit{When America Was Great: The Fighting Faith of Postwar Liberalism} (New York, 2004), 50-51, 65.
southern brethren and imploring them to solve these problems before outside pressures forced change upon the region.\footnote{Morton J. Sosna, \textit{In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue} (New York, 1977), 88.}

Southern liberals wanted to show their support for New Deal reforms in the South. As a result, in November 1938, a group of these liberals attended a political conference in Birmingham, Alabama that acted as the opening meeting for the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW). A flyer urging people to attend the Birmingham meeting advertised the existence of a liberal South, but it argued that “[liberal] leaders have heretofore been isolated and scattered, the effectiveness of their work limited by their lack of coordination. The Conference, by providing a meeting ground for all Southern progressives, will promote mutual trust and cooperation between them for greater service to the South.”\footnote{Sosna, \textit{In Search of the Silent South}, 90.} The conference also vowed to challenge the South’s laws against integration, though SCHW’s leaders did not intend to flout the segregationist customs of Birmingham during the meeting itself.

The Birmingham meeting attracted over 1,200 participants, 20 percent of whom were black. The liberal star power present at the meeting was impressive: Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black, University of North Carolina President Frank Porter Graham, and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt each addressed the convention.\footnote{While Graham and Roosevelt certainly qualified as racial liberals, it should be noted that other attendees, including Senator Lister Hill and Governor Bibb Graves of Alabama, did not share the liberal views of many at the conference. Their attendance stemmed primarily from their reputations as good New Deal liberals on non-racial issues. Sosna, \textit{In Search of the Silent South}, 91-92.} Few remembered what these attendees said, but most attendees remembered Mrs. Roosevelt’s actions on this occasion. When Birmingham police reminded conference organizers that their meeting was to be strictly segregated, the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Sosna, \textit{In Search of the Silent South}, 90.
\item While Graham and Roosevelt certainly qualified as racial liberals, it should be noted that other attendees, including Senator Lister Hill and Governor Bibb Graves of Alabama, did not share the liberal views of many at the conference. Their attendance stemmed primarily from their reputations as good New Deal liberals on non-racial issues. Sosna, \textit{In Search of the Silent South}, 91-92.
\end{thebibliography}
organizers complied, but Mrs. Roosevelt refused to move from her seat among the black participants even after police ordered her to move. After the confrontation, organizers placed themselves on the side of the First Lady by resolving never to hold another segregated meeting. This was an important symbolic confrontation with the conservative power structure that signaled at least some liberals were willing to cast aside their customary caution in challenging the status quo. This cost SCHW some members in the short term, but many liberals throughout the country praised the stand the Southern Conference took in Birmingham.\textsuperscript{19}

It was more difficult for many liberals to accept that SCHW welcomed the assistance of Communists in their work. At least six known members of the Communist Party attended the Birmingham conference. Conservative southerners seized upon this fact, and the anti-segregation resolution passed at the end of the conference, to confuse the two issues, implying that all racial liberals were Communists and vice versa. The issue of Communism in America (and in the Southern Conference) did not take center stage in the country for some time, especially after the outbreak of war and the creation of a tenuous alliance with the Soviet Union for the duration of that war. Graham, for one, refused to allow this talk to dissuade him from participating in SCHW, maintaining that Communist influence in the organization was insignificant.\textsuperscript{20} Nonetheless, the SCHW’s willingness to accept Communists into the fold before the war caused the group serious problems after the war ended.

While the war raged, liberal southerners on the home front focused on ending voting restrictions that prevented thousands of blacks and poor whites from going to the polls. They reasoned that a true majority of southern voters would reject the racially poisonous politics of


\textsuperscript{20} Sosna, \textit{In Search of the Silent South}, 97-98.
elected leaders such as Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi and Governor Eugene Talmadge of Georgia. There was an important strain of optimism in this logic that colored the thinking of liberals throughout the era. Liberals worked and organized in the South under the assumption that the region was not as politically reactionary as most Americans made it out to be. They disagreed when it came to determining why southerners continued to elect conservatives to public office, however. Some argued that the true voice of the South was never really heard, since thousands of potential voters had never cast their ballots. Others argued that the political class that ruled the South had misled the voters, keeping them focused on relatively unimportant racial issues while failing to address the economic and social problems that had plagued the region for decades. Either way, liberals were convinced that a systematic, sustained campaign to register voters and educate them on the issues would result in a change in liberal electoral fortunes.  

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Another trend in the fight for southern liberalism was that liberals in the region needed to continually remind southerners of their own southern roots. They wanted to defuse the notion that the real impetus behind southern liberalism came from outside the South. Florida Senator Claude Pepper made such an argument in 1942, when he introduced a bill that would have outlawed poll taxes in all federal elections. Responding to criticism from Alabama Governor Frank Dixon that implied he was not a true southerner, Pepper retorted, “my people have been southerners as long as Governor Dixon’s, and since 1600 I have not had a direct ancestor who did not fight for and did not die for the South.”  

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This declaration of loyalty to the South did not prevent reactionaries from labeling him a Communist or integrationist, but Pepper vowed that

21 Sosna, In Search of the Silent South, 98.
22 Sosna, In Search of the Silent South, 101.
these slanders would not prevent him from fighting for what he thought was right, and thousands of southern liberals made similar arguments during and after World War II.

In the end, liberals were unable to force large-scale reforms to the poll tax system in the South. Anti-poll tax bills introduced into Congress died quickly, and states refused to budge on the issue. Despite these failures, however, the transformations of the war years had heartened liberal reformers, especially in 1944, when the Supreme Court declared the all-white Democratic primary in Texas to be unconstitutional in *Smith v. Allwright*. The decision did not prevent southern states from placing legal barriers between black voters and the polls, but it did signal that practices that had not been challenged for decades were coming under fire.\(^{23}\)

Liberals also benefited from wartime changes to the southern economy. Southerners had eagerly sought defense contracts and welcomed the creation of large new factories to fill them. Along with these economic opportunities, however, southerners had also accepted increased scrutiny of their way of life. Labor leaders, for example, had long lamented the manner in which southern factory owners prevented them from organizing workers, and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) had failed to establish a foothold in the South despite its aggressive approach to organization. During the war, however, CIO leaders vehemently argued that the southern status quo resulted in wasted manpower and production delays that hurt the war effort.\(^{24}\)

Most of these “occupational patterns” had an important racial component, and the CIO was committed to integrationist unionism. Labor’s challenges to the southern racial order also helped southern liberals in their quest for reform. The most significant victory won on this front during the war was won by A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters,

\(^{23}\) Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 380-381.
\(^{24}\) Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 135.
who had threatened President Roosevelt with a march on Washington in the summer of 1941 if
the government did not end discriminatory practices in defense industries. Roosevelt responded
to the pressure with Executive Order 8802, which established a Fair Employment Practices
Committee (FEPC) to investigate hiring and labor practices, as well as racial discrimination
against workers in defense and government. The creation of the FEPC did not stop racial
discrimination, nor did it prevent reactionaries from stalling change to the status quo in the
South. Nevertheless, it showed that the federal government was willing to investigate what was
really going on in the South.  

As these events unfolded, SCHW continued to grow under the leadership of executive
secretary James Dombrowski. He was a native of Tampa, a student at Reinhold Niebuhr’s Union
Theological Seminary, and the co-founder of the Highlander Folk School in rural Tennessee.
During the 1930s, Dombrowski’s focus had been getting white workers in the South to look
beyond racial differences and toward common economic interests. In this regard, Dombrowski’s
ideas conflicted with the policies of the CIO, which financed Highlander and wanted to avoid
any direct confrontation with segregation that might have hurt the CIO’s membership numbers.
In December 1941, this issue caused Dombrowski to resign from Highlander and join SCHW.
He focused SCHW’s efforts on how racial prejudice and economic backwardness hindered the
effort to defeat fascism. He also blocked changes in SCHW bylaws, proposed by board member
Frank McAllister in 1943, that would have barred Communists from the group, arguing that such
a change would have hindered the campaign to promote democracy and liberal values.  

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25 Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, 213-216; Michael S. Sherry, In the Shadow of War: The
United States Since the 1930s (New Haven, 1995), 50, 145-146.  

26 Sullivan, Days of Hope, 150-155; Sosna, In Search of the Silent South, 142-144.
policy battle attracted little attention during the war, but it would cause serious problems for the Southern Conference after the war.

The other major organization for southern liberals, the Southern Regional Council (SRC), was a product of the war itself. It differed from the Southern Conference in several key respects. It kept membership rolls small, as opposed to SCHW, which sought to attract as many members as possible. SRC cultivated ties to middle-class Southerners, while the Southern Conference concentrated on the working classes. Most importantly, SRC projected a relatively conservative public image, excluding not only Communists and Socialists but members of the NAACP as well. Certainly NAACP members were not pleased at being associated with political radicals, but SRC members wanted to eliminate any hint of “radicalism,” as they saw it. Most SRC members agreed that reform was needed. Its resolutions supported FEPC and condemned the white primary and the poll tax. However, the organization did not endorse an immediate end to racial segregation. Some individual members did advocate desegregation, either as a practical reallocation of human resources or as a needed moral reform. Most, however, were either against desegregation entirely or wanted to avoid a confrontation that would provoke the wrath of reactionaries. Throughout the 1940s, SRC and SCHW were rivals for the affections of southern liberals, though many people, including SCHW President Clark Foreman and Fisk University president Charles S. Johnson, became members of both.²⁷ In 1947, the rivalry between the two groups continued.

Other reports out of the South during the war were more ominous. They showed that the problems of the region went far beyond the failure to hire or train black workers for jobs in southern defense plants. Southern blacks began to challenge segregationist practices in the

military, on public transportation, and in education, and white reactionaries responded violently. Lynchings, which had been declining for years, increased throughout the South, and white mobs often targeted decorated black soldiers as a sign that military bravery was no protection against entrenched white supremacy.\textsuperscript{28}

Politicians seized on the fears of whites, both during and after the war, though the results of such fear-mongering were mixed. Georgia’s Eugene Talmadge was the face of this intimidation for many, particularly in the 1942 Democratic gubernatorial primary. Ironically, Talmadge’s unsuccessful campaign turned on a matter that was unrelated to racial issues. The governor’s decision to purge the state’s universities of liberal faculty members caused the universities to lose their national accreditation. The public embarrassment the scandal generated caused voters to turn to his opponent, former state attorney general Ellis Arnall, as a credible alternative. Arnall won the election, and his term as governor included successful efforts to end the poll tax, end rebates for railroads, and destroy the Klan in Georgia. His governorship seemed to indicate that liberal political change was possible in the South.\textsuperscript{29}

However, reactionaries and conservatives still held a great deal of political power in the South. Many observers concluded that the fate of the South was uncertain, since both sides could claim successes. For example, while Arnall was able to push through liberal reforms in Georgia, Talmadge did not fade away. He spent the four years of Arnall’s administration opposing the governor’s reforms. In 1946, he survived the changes brought about by Georgia’s compliance with \textit{Smith v. Allwright} to win the governorship back from Arnall.\textsuperscript{30} Talmadge’s

\textsuperscript{28} Egerton, \textit{Speak Now Against the Day}, 358-375; Sosna, \textit{In Search of the Silent South}, 34-36.

\textsuperscript{29} Egerton, \textit{Speak Now Against the Day}, 378-379.

\textsuperscript{30} Egerton, \textit{Speak Now Against the Day}, 385-386.
victory served as a reminder to liberals that success was often temporary, and that permanent realignment in favor of liberalism was going to be difficult to achieve.

In short, the South appeared to be up for grabs in the wake of the changes brought on by World War II. Liberals and conservatives alike were eager for the opportunity to take advantage of this situation. Nowhere was the battle for the region more noticeable than in Georgia, where Talmadge’s 1946 election turned into a free-for-all when the governor-elect died of cancer before he could assume the office. Because Talmadge was such a polarizing figure, and because Arnall’s administration had been so good to liberals and moderates, anti-Talmadge forces were determined to prevent the governor’s son Herman from taking over for his father. The controversy over the governorship of Georgia lasted several months, with Arnall and Talmadge supporters literally fighting one another outside the capitol when Talmadge attempted to claim the office. Pro-Talmadge men changed the locks on Arnall’s office with the connivance of state troopers, and Talmadge’s forces made extra-legal attempts to overturn Arnall’s changes to the state’s electoral system. The state’s Supreme Court eventually threw Herman Talmadge out of office, but his supporters had shown that they were willing to do almost anything to stop liberal reform.31

In this highly charged atmosphere, it was difficult for the Southern Conference and its allies to find solid footing. The problem for SCHW was its close association with known Communists and fellow-travelers, which became a problem once the bitterness of the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union became clear. In March 1946, when Winston Churchill warned the world of an “iron curtain” descending upon Eastern Europe (with President Truman in attendance), Americans believed him, and they blamed Communists for this. As the

31 Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, 386-389.
political realignment that resulted from the Cold War became clear, people associated with Communism became targets, whether or not their associations had national security implications. No one could reasonably claim that James Dombrowski posed a threat to the United States, but his conservative opponents claimed that he did, and this hurt SCHW’s organizing efforts.

SCHW and its liberal allies began to feel immense pressure, in part because their organization had never been more successful than at the end of World War II. By the end of 1945, SCHW had three thousand members, including most of the prominent southerners who had been present at the Birmingham meeting, and it boasted a budget of $85,000, augmented by fund-raising events held throughout the country. Dombrowski and Foreman looked forward to continued growth in the post-war years. However, the success it enjoyed during this period did not last. The powerlessness of the Southern Conference became clear in 1947, when SCHW’s Georgia chapter refused to take a public stand on the Arnall-Talmadge “civil war,” despite its private sympathy for Arnall. Political observers had long thought Georgia had the best-financed, most organized state committee for the Southern Conference. The group’s refusal to help Arnall, either because it did not want to associate with what they saw as a losing cause or because it did not want to hurt Arnall’s chances at victory with their endorsement, was difficult for fellow liberals to understand.32

That same year, SCHW suffered a more significant blow to its effectiveness when the CIO, its main financial backer, withdrew most of its support. The roots of CIO disaffection with SCHW dated from the end of the war, when postwar “re-conversion” caused large scale short-term unemployment, particularly in the South. CIO leaders wanted to organize these workers, but to do that meant that the federation needed to significantly expand its presence in the region.

32 Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*, 440-441; Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 144-145.
To that end, in May 1946 they launched “Operation Dixie,” aiming to add one million southern workers to their ranks by the end of the decade and using a war chest of one million dollars to underwrite the effort. One key to the campaign was its determination to avoid discussion of racial segregation in southern factories. Conservatives in the CIO argued that challenging white racism was futile and would distract the federation from its stated goal of attracting southern workers. At the press conference announcing the program, Operation Dixie director Van Bittner also announced that he wanted no help from Communists, Socialists, or their allies, which included SCHW. As a result, CIO support for the Southern Conference gradually declined, falling to almost nothing by the end of 1947. The decision devastated Foreman and Dombrowski, but they could do little to stop it.\textsuperscript{33}

They also saw dozens of SCHW members come to the conclusion that the organization no longer represented them, primarily because of their personal anti-Communism. Frank Graham, Eleanor Roosevelt, and novelist Lillian Smith were among those who cut their ties to the Southern Conference after the war over this issue. Smith, a native Floridian who had lived most of her life in Georgia, had always suspected that political radicals had played too prominent a role in SCHW, and it had taken years of persuasion from friends before she agreed to a position on the board in 1942. When she resigned in May 1945, she told Foreman and Dombrowski that she did not like that board members associated openly with Communists. Moreover, she did not like the way the board had excluded her from its decision-making processes, complaining, “SCHW was actually being run in a grossly undemocratic fashion.”\textsuperscript{34} She still believed in racial

\textsuperscript{33} Sullivan, Days of Hope, 208; Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, 442-443.

\textsuperscript{34} Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, 442.
equality and political reform, but she did not believe that these goals could be achieved through
the Southern Conference, and this conclusion lead to her resignation.

The tension within southern liberalism was palpable. It mirrored a similar split among liberals at the national level in which the question of what to do about Communism was pivotal. Many liberals had agreed with Churchill’s “Iron Curtain” speech, but many others had grave reservations about a tough stance toward the Soviet Union, especially because of the wartime alliance. The most vocal critic of Truman’s anti-Communist policies was a member of his own cabinet, Secretary of Commerce Wallace, who would have become president himself had Franklin Roosevelt died during his third term. In September 1946, Wallace’s disagreements with Truman about the dangers of Communism became public knowledge when the secretary gave a speech at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Wallace warned that a great-power rivalry with the Soviets would lead to an expensive, dangerous arms race that neither side would truly win. To forestall this rivalry, he recommended that the United States recognize the Soviets’ right to control certain areas of Eastern Europe. He also lamented the tendency of some Americans to use Communism to demonize fellow citizens and play upon their fears of subversion.35

He enjoyed support in this fight from Florida Senator Claude Pepper, who also spoke at Madison Square Garden. Pepper had first been elected to the Senate in a special election in 1936. In 1938 and 1944, he had won re-election campaigning as a committed New Dealer and an early critic of Hitler. Near the end of World War II, Pepper had traveled to the Soviet Union, where he met with Stalin and expressed his admiration for the Russian people and the Soviet leader. On March 20, 1946, he had spoken on the Senate floor urging the United States to destroy its nuclear arsenal as a sign to the Communist bloc that it had no intention of starting

another world war. Pepper’s relentless attacks on Truman’s foreign policy attracted attention from the American press and from fellow politicians, most of it negative. His decision to cast his lot with Wallace had important consequences for his political career and for ADA.\(^{36}\)

For the time being, Wallace, Pepper, and the Southern Conference challenged those Americans who supported Truman’s toughness toward the Soviet Union. The organizational and political challenges these pro-Soviet “progressives” posed was especially difficult for anti-Communist liberals. American liberalism was in trouble without Roosevelt, and Truman did not appear to be the strong leader liberals wanted. Conservatives were more united and had as their goal a return to power after nearly two decades without it. Liberals were fighting to hold on to what they had, a difficult task in the best of times. Ironically, progressives and anti-Communist liberals agreed on a great deal, including the general outlines of the New Deal and the need for racial justice in the South. Could these two factions afford a fight with each other over foreign policy and domestic Communism when other issues demanded that they cooperate?

Labor unions faced the same problem, as organizers debated whether they wanted the assistance of Communists or fellow travelers. On the one hand, Communists had proven in the past that they could reach workers and swell union ranks. However, the leaders of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and United Steel Workers (USW) knew that attracting a few thousand new members with Communist assistance would mean little if their opponents were able to discredit them by portraying them as Communists. As a result, the leaders of many AFL and CIO unions, including UAW President Walter Reuther, worked to convince their members that a purge was necessary. Reuther argued that unions needed political purity in order to tackle the

challenges of the post-war world, especially since Republicans and conservative Democrats were giving every indication that they wanted to roll back the power of the unions.  

In 1946, the tension between progressives and anti-Communist liberals caused a formal split as a result of Truman’s decision to fire Wallace for his Madison Square Garden speech. Wallace used his immense personal popularity to create a new liberal coalition which included Clark Foreman and NAACP President Walter White. In December 1946, these liberals founded the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA), explicitly committing themselves to a New Deal platform at home and a desire to revive the wartime Allied coalition abroad. One of Wallace’s main liberal rivals was the Union for Democratic Action (UDA), which had been founded in 1941 by disgruntled Socialists and liberals who disagreed with the prevailing “Popular Front” ideology of the war period. They appealed to educated, politically-minded northerners who wanted to join a liberal organization free of ties to Communism, but throughout the war UDA remained small compared to its progressive counterparts.  

The stakes for liberals were never higher, and not just because of the PCA-UDA rivalry. Conservatives had taken advantage of divisions within liberal ranks, suspicions of Communist influence in the Democratic Party and labor unions, and a national desire for political change to make significant gains in the 1946 mid-term elections. Republicans captured a majority of seats in the House and Senate and strengthened their alliance with conservative southern Democrats on labor and anti-Communism. A now formally-divided liberal coalition now had to reckon with a conservative resurgence in American politics.


The conventional wisdom among liberal politicians and strategists was that the Communism issue had been decisive in the 1946 Republican victory, affecting liberals regardless of their stance on international affairs. Conservatives had been able to convince voters that liberal candidates who accepted the support of the unions, the NAACP, or other liberal organizations were under Moscow’s control, and enough tangible evidence existed to lend credence to this idea among a crucial part of the electorate. Certain Communists, after all, made no secret of the fact that they were members of the party, and that meant any organization which accepted their help appeared to be “infested” with “Reds.” This was a particular problem in the South, where the Southern Conference remained committed to the “Popular Front” mentality of the late 1930s and the war period. James Dombrowski and Clark Foreman did not think that accepting Communist support was a problem, but voters and politicians did, and this hurt the public perception of all liberals.\(^39\)

One group of liberals, however, presented itself as a viable alternative to the PCA and the Southern Conference. On May 13, 1946, in a letter to *The New Republic*, James A. Loeb, UDA’s national director, spelled out liberalism’s problems and offered potential solutions to those problems. He attacked “progressives” for turning a blind eye to Soviet violations of human rights and economically stagnant policies. He asked whether people who were enthusiastic supporters of the Soviet Union, taking direct orders from Moscow, should be welcomed into progressive organizations. He also warned that Communists had a long track record of subverting those groups that they joined, warning that it would happen again to the Wallace coalition if it was not pro-active in preventing it. Anti-Communist liberals who wanted to avoid

\(^{39}\) Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 145-146.
these problems were welcomed in UDA, and Loeb made an explicit plea for new membership at the end of the letter.\footnote{Sosna, \textit{In Search of the Silent South}, 231; Gillon, \textit{Politics and Vision}, 11.}

Another prominent UDA member, Arthur Schlesinger, also spoke out, writing an article for \textit{Life} magazine in July 1946 that attempted to unmask the Communist movement in the United States. In preparing his article, Schlesinger spoke with former Communist Party leader Earl Browder and \textit{Time} magazine’s Whittaker Chambers, a former Communist who was determined to reveal the scope of the Communist conspiracy. The product of that research was a stinging indictment of American Communism, which Schlesinger asserted had more in common with religions such as the Mormons or Jesuits than other political parties. He did not think the Communist Party posed a threat to the internal stability of the United States, at least not at that moment. Instead, he criticized the dishonesty that was central to Communist political tactics, and he warned that their organizing talents could appeal to Americans if the American economy suffered through a second depression in the postwar years.\footnote{Schlesinger, \textit{Life}, 398-400.}

The conclusions Loeb and Schlesinger drew about Communism created controversy, but they reflected a growing consensus about which political philosophies American voters would accept in the postwar period. If liberals wanted to compete in this new political environment, they would have to purge Communists and their sympathizers from their ranks. This would make liberalism more appealing in the long term, which would allow liberal ideas to have a better chance at political success. Subsequent legislative successes would, in turn, make the United States a better place to live, thereby decreasing the appeal of radical ideologies. This was the plan UDA liberals wanted to implement, and they thought that as the only liberal
organization that had never accepted Communism, they would be able to attract non-Communist liberals, academics, labor leaders, and independents into the fold.

In January 1947, UDA leaders convened a conference to plan for the future of liberalism in America. The Washington conference attracted numerous dignitaries, including Eleanor Roosevelt and her son Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., Reinhold Niebuhr, New York Post editor James Weschler (a former Communist himself), and lawyer Joseph Rauh, who had served as a law clerk to two Supreme Court justices and served on Douglas MacArthur’s staff in the Pacific theater before opening a private practice in Washington after the war. Others included Walter Reuther of the UAW, David Dubinsky of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), and Minneapolis mayor Hubert H. Humphrey. This became the founding meeting for Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), and this group announced its opposition to the progressive coalition now under the leadership of Henry Wallace.42

What was also clear at the time of ADA’s creation was that it would work to change the political culture of the South. The Southern Conference had attempted to attract southern liberals, but its unwillingness to adapt to America’s changing views on Communism caused problems, and it appeared that the Southern Conference would be nothing more than a fringe group. The Southern Regional Council had fewer problems with the Communist issue (though conservatives would often accuse SRC of being in league with Communists anyway), but its membership was so small and so politically diverse that agreement on key issues was difficult.

ADA liberals wanted to avoid the problems both had suffered, openly rejecting the assistance of Communists and refusing to accept them as members while offering a platform that championed the New Deal and sought to expand it. ADA would work closely with some SRC

42 Schlesinger, Life: 410.
members, but they wanted independence from all groups, including the existing Democratic power structure. This was particularly important in the South, where elected Democrats could be counted upon to oppose ADA at every turn. They wanted to prove that social and economic reform was possible without radical ideology. The numerous problems of the South presented a perfect opportunity to agitate for that change, especially since southern politics were in such a state of transition.
In January 1947, when a group of anti-Communist liberals formed Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), the political situation in the South was not their primary focus. The threat posed by the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) and the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA), led by former Vice President Henry A. Wallace, was the main impetus behind the creation of ADA. The South’s continued resistance to economic and social change was important to liberals, but the region’s intransigence had comparatively little to do with the decision to form ADA.

However, ADA’s founders did include prominent southerners in their initial discussions. Wilson W. Wyatt, former mayor of Louisville, was one of ADA’s cofounders and its first president. They also asked several well-known southerners to join ADA, including Delta-Democrat Times editor Hodding Carter of Greenville, Mississippi; Dr. Rufus Clement, president of Atlanta University; Representative Estes Kefauver of Tennessee; novelist Lillian Smith of Clayton, Georgia; and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) organizer Franz Daniel of Spartanburg, South Carolina. The liberals who founded ADA wanted their organization to be truly national, and the way in which they reached out to these distinguished southerners showed that they did not want to ignore the South.

Several events in the years following the end of World War II indicated liberalism had a fighting chance in the South following the social and political upheaval of the Second World

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2 Inclusion on this list did not mean that the chosen individual would become an integral part of the ADA’s plans. Some, including Smith, raised funds and wrote mass-mailed appeals for ADA; others, including Carter, wanted little to do with ADA.
War. Reform-minded liberal and moderate governors had been elected in the mid-1940s, including James “Big Jim” Folsom in Alabama and Ellis Arnall in Georgia, whose criticism of the Ku Klux Klan and promises to restore academic freedom to Georgia’s university system seemed to be a refreshing change from politics as usual. The Southern Regional Council (SRC), religious leaders, university professors, and liberal politicians had joined forces with labor unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the CIO to form a loose coalition of liberal southerners that hoped to disrupt pre-war patterns of political and economic life in the South. CIO leaders had already shown a commitment to changing the South with the launch of its southern organizing campaign in March 1946. The CIO hoped that “Operation Dixie” would add one million southern workers to membership rolls by the end of the 1940s.

ADA leaders, including Executive Secretary James Loeb, corresponded with southerners of all races and economic backgrounds in an attempt to determine how best to deal with the region. Their advice was varied. David Burgess, executive director of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, declared himself ecstatic that “some of the ideologically homeless can find an abode with the like-minded.” He recommended that ADA create a “youth movement” to counter Communist success in attracting young people, fashion a detailed platform that went beyond “uncritical praise for FDR,” and keep an open mind about the formation of a third party. Burgess also pledged his organization’s support for ADA. He claimed that unless something was done, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW)

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3 John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 378-383. Arnall’s 1946 defeat, and the spectacle in which Arnall locked himself in the governor’s office to protest the legislature’s decision to throw him out of office, destroyed his political reputation.

would create trouble for “non-commies” in places such as Atlanta. The Southern Conference maintained an unsavory reputation because of its acceptance of Communists and other radicals as members. Loeb needed no prompting to keep an eye on SCHW, having campaigned against it for years prior to the founding of ADA.

He also communicated with Barney Taylor, the Memphis-based director of organization for the National Farm Labor Union (NFLU). Taylor was a native of Belton, Texas and a graduate of Texas A&M. He had served in World War II and participated in Operation Overlord, suffering combat wounds that caused him to lose one eye and the use of his right leg. He received a Purple Heart and the Distinguished Service Cross for his service. In 1946, he joined the NFLU and moved to Memphis with his wife Laura, a former first lieutenant in the Women’s Air Corps. He became an ADA member in 1947. He also joined the SRC, NAACP, American Veterans’ Committee (AVC), and the American Newspaper Guild. Taylor was a bona fide war hero and a committed liberal with experience in dealing with southern liberals, and his input shaped the thinking of Loeb and other ADA leaders.

Loeb used Taylor as an informal ADA adviser, and he saw an opportunity to use Taylor’s skills when Taylor began a leave of absence from NFLU in late January 1947. Loeb wanted to know how the bitterness between the AFL and CIO would affect ADA organization, what ADA should do about SCHW, and whether or not a regional conference in and about the South would serve any useful purpose. Taylor saw no reason why labor leaders would not assist ADA unless

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7 Loeb to Taylor, January 24, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
“top leadership” in their federations forbade it, an unlikely development since many had helped to found ADA. He advised Loeb to “forget” SCHW, except insofar as they might be able to convince some “good” liberals, including Frank Porter Graham and Eleanor Roosevelt, to leave the organization. Finally, Taylor agreed that a regional conference was an important step and offered his services as a part-time assistant to organize it.⁸

However, two factors tempered Taylor’s enthusiasm for the project. First, he wondered about “the interracial aspects of the situation.” Specifically, he thought ADA needed to make any conference multi-racial so that it could address the political, economic, and social problems black southerners faced. He also referred to the logistical nightmare an interracial conference would entail, since finding a hotel or meeting space that would allow such a conference to take place would be difficult at best.⁹

Second, Taylor brought up the subject of Atlanta Constitution editor Ralph McGill, whom Loeb had mentioned as a potential ADA member. Others had objected, saying McGill was not “liberal enough” for ADA because, while he favored the New Deal and a tough stance toward the Soviet Union, many southern liberals believed his racial views were troubling and inconsistent.¹⁰ Taylor understood Loeb’s trepidation in approaching McGill, but he warned that “I wonder how liberal we can afford to be and still attract the maximum.”¹¹ Would ADA force its potential members to take a racial litmus test before joining? Would ADA accept members who fell short of the agreeing to its entire platform? If it did require southerners to agree with each plank of the platform before joining, how many members could ADA possibly attract?

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⁸ Taylor to Loeb, February 1, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
⁹ Taylor to Loeb, February 1, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
¹⁰ Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, 256-258.
¹¹ Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, 256-258.
These are questions that ADA leaders would have to answer as they organized in the South, and opinions would vary widely on what needed to be done.

Loeb also wanted to know how ADA would fit into the liberal political picture in the South. In late April 1947, Taylor and Rev. Samuel F. Freeman, Jr. of Pulaski Heights Christian Church in Little Rock, Arkansas discussed this very issue. Taylor wrote to Freeman in an unofficial capacity, but he was already singing ADA’s praises, and he pressed Freeman to disassociate himself from the Southern Conference. Taylor noted that the NFLU and CIO had cut off support for SCHW and that several of its most prominent members had resigned, and he recommended ADA “as a more effective and reliable substitute,” especially on the issue of Communism. Freeman disagreed. He chided Taylor for giving him “great concern that the liberal forces of our Southland and the nation are so much divided and separated from one another.” Freeman was “not greatly interested in labels. I am convicted with ideals, issues and men.” He declined Taylor’s offer to join ADA because he did not want to divide his energies between two liberal organizations. Many southern liberals shared Freeman’s caution about ADA, wondering what it could do that SCHW or SRC were not already doing. If Taylor and ADA were going to succeed in the South, they need to tell people about what made them different from other liberal groups.

This issue notwithstanding, Taylor was eager to get ADA off the ground in the South, and in February 1947 he outlined the prospects of a regional conference to be held in Atlanta or Birmingham in March or April. Liberals would be invited from Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. Taylor recommended that southern ADA members submit lists of people they should consider for membership in the

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12 Taylor to Rev. Samuel F. Freeman, Jr., April 25, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers; Freeman to Taylor, May 1, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
organization; each person on the lists would then receive a letter from the national office in Washington inviting them to the conference. This was a decentralized approach to organization, which made financial sense to Taylor. He also expressed some trepidation about organizing the region by himself, and he wanted to solicit advice from long-time liberal activists. Taylor cast his lot with those in ADA who wanted no compromise on its platform. “Only those who have accepted the policies and principles laid down by the Committee of the whole should attend,” he declared, and he recommended that “no time be wasted in appeasing race-baiters.”

As Taylor made these recommendations, Loeb disseminated information from Washington to prospective members everywhere, including the South. When dealing with southern contacts, he assured them that the South was a priority. For example, he assured Nelle Morton, general secretary for the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, “we are very anxious to do some work in the South, but we realize that the South presents a special problem which much be handled separately and with considerable delicacy.” Morton was optimistic, calling ADA “the most hopeful sign in the political horizon I have seen.”

Many liberals thought the South desperately needed political change, and they thought even an “outsider group” such as ADA had a unique opportunity to foster that change. Such was the perspective attorney Moss A. Plunkett of Roanoke, Virginia, president of the Southern Electoral Reform League, who had made unsuccessful runs for Congress in 1942 and governor in 1945. Plunkett was determined to break the Harry F. Byrd machine that controlled Democratic politics in Virginia, and he saw a chance to do that in a 1948 referendum on ending

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14 Loeb to Nelle Morton, February 20, 1947; reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.

15 Morton to Loeb, March 14, 1947, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
the state’s poll tax. Plunkett’s focus on ending the poll tax, and the precarious state of his personal finances, would not permit him to assist ADA at that time, he wrote Loeb, but he did express his support for ADA’s objectives. “One of the reasons why the United States [cannot] make a greater contribution to world government than she is now making is that we do not have democracy in the South. . . . Virginia should take the lead in correcting this situation,” he insisted.16

For his part, Loeb knew that the South was going to present special problems for ADA. He discussed with Franz Daniel the possibility of seven or eight regional conferences throughout the country, including one in the South. He listed three major problems he thought ADA would have in the South: “the race question,” rivalry between the AFL and CIO, and the manner in which the Southern Conference and “liberalism” in general had become synonymous in southern minds. While Loeb could not come up with a solution to the first two problems, he had one for the latter. He wanted to get Frank Porter Graham on board with ADA and to get him away from the influence of SCHW and its secretary, Clark Foreman.17 Graham had been intimately involved with SCHW since 1938, when he had attended its inaugural conference in Birmingham and joined the majority that had defied the city’s ban on integrated meetings. He remained active in SCHW for several more years, “adamant in the belief that if the genuine liberals stuck by the Southern Conference, they could defeat any Communists or fellow travelers in any fair and open fight.”18

16 Moss A. Plunkett to Loeb, March 24, 1947, reel 78, no. 100, ADA Papers.

17 Loeb to Franz Daniel, February 1, 1947, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.

While ADA leaders worked on Graham, in May 1947 Loeb and other ADA officials approached Taylor with an offer made possible by Taylor’s leave of absence from NFLU. Taylor had been working for ADA on a part-time, volunteer basis as an informal liaison between southern liberals and the ADA leadership in Washington, but Loeb wanted to make Taylor a permanent ADA employee. For his part, Taylor acknowledged that “on several other questions, I have a completely open (or blank) mind; and will need guidance by better brains.” He also made a concession to the national office on policy matters. As he put it, “be assured that I am organizationally minded enough to carry out policy thoughtfully arrived at, whether it represents my own thinking or not.”

In return, Taylor wanted a three-month commitment from ADA, beginning in May 1947, which would coincide with his NFLU leave. He wanted to postpone any regional conference, arguing that “we will work on actual organization of community and campus chapters at the same time. I wouldn’t expect big dough from such efforts, but there will be some dues and contribution income to the National Office. That policy will also make toward a more representative subsequent conference by having chapter delegates as well as prominent liberal-labor leaders among those present.” Finally, Taylor wanted the title of Southern Organizer to supersede any local responsibilities, saying, “I feel that I must avoid being regarded as a paid local executive secretary, and plan to form working organizing committees in each state, city and community.”

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19 There is no indication that Taylor’s parting from NFLU was anything but amicable. In fact, Taylor made an important gesture to his former employer when he resigned from ADA’s Executive Board in mid-May 1947. He suggested that H.L. Mitchell, president of NFLU, serve in his place. Taylor to Loeb, May 16, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.

20 Taylor to Loeb, April 17, 1947, reel 78, no. 94, ADA Papers.

21 Taylor to Loeb, April 17, 1947, reel 78, no. 94, ADA Papers.
Loeb agreed to each of Taylor’s requests, and he also agreed to set up ADA’s southern headquarters in Memphis, where Taylor had been working since the end of World War II. This was important for personal reasons, as Taylor’s wife was now expecting their first child. He also thought it would help in getting the project up and running quickly, as “I can at least have the physical setup in readiness to begin fulltime operations May 1—the office rented, necessary equipment purchased, telephone installed, . . . and secretary hired.”22 National headquarters budgeted $5,200 for Taylor’s salary over the next three months and an additional $3,000 for expenses, including rent, telephone and telegraph service, office supplies, postage, and printing costs. There was every indication that if Taylor succeeded, he might be rewarded with an extended ADA contract or with reduced responsibilities that might make his job easier. Loeb justified the expense of Taylor’s project to the ADA Executive Committee at their May 1947 meeting, calling the need for additional organizers ADA’s “greatest need at the moment.” He also assured those worried about money that “the $30,000 proposed budget will permit several additional organizers. This [budget] item covers not only the salary of the organizers but also their travel, office equipment and all other expense.”23 The South had become a part of the larger ADA organizational strategy that focused on putting maximum pressure on southern liberals. The more noise ADA could make the better for attracting new members, and Loeb hoped the incoming money would eventually cover all of Taylor’s activities.

The desire to get ADA going in the South animated a meeting Taylor convened in Atlanta on May 9. Participants included Lillian Smith, Dorothy R. Tilly from the President’s Commission on Civil Rights, Guy John of the Southern Regional Council, and Frank McAllister

22 Taylor to Loeb, April 17, 1947, reel 78, no. 94, ADA Papers.
23 ADA Executive Committee meeting minutes, May 3, 1947, reel 33, no. 63, ADA Papers.
of the Georgia Workers Education Service. These Georgians wanted to create an Atlanta chapter of ADA, but they also wanted to assist Taylor in his larger southern project. They concluded that, “[ADA] should not attempt to get an impressive [regional] gathering until September. . . . They believe that chapter organization, plus an intensive mail and personal campaign should precede the meeting—and they do not believe that two months is sufficient time.” However, Taylor also considered the revised date a case of “[shoving] the date forward,” which makes little sense until one considers Tilly’s presence in the meeting.24 As a member of the commission that was due to submit its comprehensive report on civil rights to the President before the end of the year (it was submitted in late October), Tilly knew that ADA had to position itself to take advantage of the publicity the report was bound to generate. These southerners knew they were fighting an uphill battle, but good timing would help Taylor maximize the impact of the regional meeting he wanted to convene.

On May 26, Taylor told ADA headquarters about the energetic schedule he planned to keep. “[The third week of May] has been spent in the formation of an organizing committee for Memphis, in compiling card files of liberals throughout the South, in forming a southwide ‘Southern Committee’ and in initiating correspondence with every lead or contact in my possession.” In June, he planned to visit Little Rock, Arkansas for private meetings with liberal contacts and attend the state AFL convention, as well as travel to Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama for more meetings.25

Despite Taylor’s desire to work across the South, he also committed to work with Memphis liberals in forming their ADA chapter. In a confidential memorandum to the national

24 Taylor, memo to Tucker, May 13, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.
office written in late May, he referred to developments in west Tennessee as “stupendous.” His enthusiasm resulted from the local unions’ decision to put their organizational differences aside and form a “United Labor Committee” to foster liberal political action. The unions wanted to create mailing lists down to the block level in the city and submit recommendations during elections, “[supporting] candidates put forward by a broad cross-section citizen’s group—namely ADA.” Taylor had formed an organizing committee earlier that month. Members included B. R. Allen of the Memphis Industrial Union Council (CIO) and Frank Miles of the Tennessee State Federation of Labor (AFL), as well as several local attorneys, two journalists (including John Rodgers of the Memphis Press-Scimitar, a past president of the Newspaper Guild of Memphis), and two local Episcopal ministers.26

The time seemed ripe for a challenge to the political authority of Edward H. “Boss” Crump, a former mayor of Memphis and congressman who had run the city politically for more than three decades, primarily through proxies he controlled. He had a reputation for clean government, but liberals detested the way in which his machine anointed governors and senators without consulting liberal elements in the city or state.27 Crump had been able to keep most liberals in line, but World War II’s social and political dislocations presented an opportunity to liberals who had been searching for a way to break the Boss’s grip. Taylor and the organizing committee were convinced that a determined effort over the next year would, Taylor said, “at least cut down the customary machine majority [in Memphis] to the point where [Representative] Estes Kefauver can be elected to the Senate.” Taylor suggested that one way to get liberals excited, and simultaneously drive Crump insane, would be to invite Kefauver’s

26 Taylor, confidential memo to Loeb, May 29, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.
27 Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day, 225.
House colleague Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. of New York to “come down and install our chapter one evening and to speak at an open mass meeting the following evening. Mr. Crump, bless his heart, has helped considerably in making the name Roosevelt a magic one in this area” with his constant criticism of the New Deal and Truman. Taylor sensed that the 1948 election would be important for liberals in their efforts to preserve the Tennessee Valley Authority, repeal the poll tax, and make changes to the state’s legislative apportionment procedures.28

In order to make this plan work, Tennessee liberals had to engage in some political maneuvering of their own. Kefauver was reluctant to leave his relatively safe seat in the House for a Senate run, and former governor and World War II veteran Gordon Browning wanted to run for the Senate on the anti-Crump slate. Taylor thought Kefauver’s relationship with ADA’s Washington leadership would help their plans. If Loeb could convince Kefauver to run for the Senate, they could then convince Browning to make another run for the governorship.29

The 1948 congressional elections were important to Tennessee liberals, but Taylor had other issues with the Memphis chapter that needed his attention. He was concerned about the heavy union representation in the Memphis chapter, which would cause critics to call ADA little more than a labor front organization. Taylor tried to counter that impression by keeping the “non-labor liberals” in most of the main leadership positions. He also had to deal with Memphis’s black population, which had always had an important place in the Crump machine. Taylor met with Hollis Price, president of historically black LeMoyne College, to get his advice. Before the meeting, he had told Loeb that he suspected Price and “the Negro leaders will advise [liaison] rather than integration.” He hoped that ADA leaders would “agree that it would be well

29 Taylor, confidential memo to Loeb, May 29, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.
for me to accept their advice. . . . We seem to have the choice of being a principled but futile liberal inter-racial outpost or a successful political movement.” Taylor thought a segregated chapter was a small price to pay for success, but such a decision meant compromising ADA’s membership standards, and he was unsure how his employers in Washington would react.\(^{30}\)

Loeb chose to trust Taylor’s judgment, especially concerning black participation in southern chapters. “I think we would all agree that we want to be a successful political movement. If you accept advice from the progressive Negro leaders of the South, I am sure that that advice would be acceptable to us and to our Negro leaders here.”\(^{31}\) This was not ideal for ADA, but Loeb also realized that problems in the South were different from those in other parts of the country, and so he hoped that a cautious initial approach would allow them to be more aggressive in the future.

Conditions also varied state by state, and Taylor saw this at the end of May when he took his scheduled trip to Arkansas. Publicly, Taylor would not go into details, saying only that “Arkansas, by its very nature will function more effectively with a statewide unit than with city chapters. Little Rock is practically the only thing resembling a city in the state.” He expressed mild concern at the fact that “Rev. Freeman feels that he must continue with organization of SCHW. Since he knows most of the liberals in Arkansas, his attitude will present a distinct handicap.”\(^{32}\) Privately, Taylor was far less restrained in his criticism of the Southern Conference. He had conversed extensively with Freeman in person and in writing, and he thought he had struck up a friendly rapport with him, only to find out that Freeman was still

\(^{30}\) Taylor, confidential memo to Loeb, May 29, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.

\(^{31}\) Loeb, memo to Taylor, June 5, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.

continuing with SCHW work. Taylor also continued his feud with SCHW leaders Clark
Foreman and James Dombrowski, who found themselves under siege for their associations with
Communists and criticized anti-Communist liberals, including Taylor, as being responsible for
their organizational and financial problems. According to Taylor, the two men “wrote letters
teeming with indignation, containing such phrases as ‘vile slander,’ ‘insidious whispering
campaign,’ and other such juicy pleasantries. In Dombrowski’s letter, the closing bit of rhetoric
was ‘What is Barney Taylor up to anyhow? Is he trying to create his own little organization? Or
is he trying to help the common man in his fight against reaction?’”

While dealing with criticism from the left, Taylor tried to set regional policy on matters
such as anti-lynching legislation. Most southern liberals wanted to end lynching, but many
agreed with southern conservatives that this was an issue that southern legislatures, not
Congress, should handle. However, by 1947 several failed attempts at federal legislation and a
new wave of violence against southern blacks, including some decorated World War II veterans,
was changing the political climate, or so Taylor thought. In discussions with Frank McCallister,
Taylor mentioned that Loeb had told him ADA would endorse new efforts at national anti-
lynching legislation and told McCallister that “most thoughtful southerners now believed that
federal legislation is necessary.” He did not attempt to convince McCallister that federal
intervention was the right course of action; in fact, he sought the Georgian’s advice on the
matter. However, Taylor’s willingness to consider federal anti-lynching legislation showed his
frustration at the South’s intransigence on this most basic of civil rights issues. He believed this
frustration was something that ADA could use to appeal to pro-civil rights southerners.

33 Taylor, confidential memo to Loeb, May 31, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.
34 Taylor to Frank McCallister, May 29, 1947, reel 50, no. 275, ADA Papers.
Another positive for the ADA effort in the South was their enlistment of novelist Lillian Smith to their cause. The Florida native first came to public attention with her 1944 novel *Strange Fruit*, whose indictment of the racial status quo in the South and unspARING depiction of an interracial romance caused a sensation. The Boston Public Library banned the book, and the Postal Service would not allow it to be mailed in the United States. Smith was a loud voice for liberalism in the South, and she had no problem helping anyone who was willing to address the injustices about which she wrote.

She had joined ADA’s Committee of the Whole, attended its first convention, and offered her services for ADA speaking engagements, including one in Boston after the city’s libraries banned her book. In late May, Loeb talked to Smith about assisting in ADA’s recruitment efforts in the South, and she was “prepared to do anything the ADA asks her to do, including the signing of an appeal letter.” Loeb’s plan was to “send her a draft; she will rewrite it in her own style; we will then have the letters, envelopes and everything prepared and stamped, and send them to Memphis to be dropped in the mailbox so that the postmark is Memphis. The return envelopes, with the money, will be addressed to [Taylor’s] office.” The hope was that Smith’s passion would be especially powerful given her southern roots, which would hopefully overcome some southerners’ wariness of a group that seemed “foreign.” These liberals would then join the group, contribute money, and contribute to a liberal revival in the region.

Smith’s mass mailing, dated June 20, 1947, was a stinging indictment of “the sad and tragic events that have piled up so tall a monument to racial hate this past year,” including

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35 For more information on the controversy surrounding *Strange Fruit* and an analysis of what made it so provocative, see Louise Blackwell and Frances Clay, *Lillian Smith* (New York, 1971), 37-41.

36 Loeb to Taylor, May 29, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
several lynchings that had occurred in Georgia and the Carolinas in the first six months of 1947. There was nothing especially unique about these murders, as thousands of them had occurred in the past several decades across the South. However, Smith now had a platform from which to criticize these crimes, and ADA gave her a chance to spread that message throughout the country. “Our people’s prejudice has overflowed the bounds of reason. Increased by world tensions, whipped on by a loose-floating hate that is sweeping across the minds of men everywhere, it has reached proportions so destructive of law and order and justice and human values that only the fool, or the sick, can now say, ‘Leave us alone and we’ll handle it.’”

Rejecting the old philosophies of states’ rights, Smith appealed to northern liberals, writing, “We are asking our own people to help us now, Americans like ourselves, whose concern it is and who should share in this responsibility. Only by our securing a Federal bill against lynching can we draw fully upon the resources of our government and our Federal courts to help us meet this cultural disaster.” She touted ADA as an organization that “in democratic ways, [is] trying to make democracy work in this country and throughout the world,” and she urged supporters to “give them your money and your support; do it now while we have the chance to stop this infamy.” Taylor sent this letter to 5,000 ADA supporters out of the Memphis office, and the response to her appeal encouraged people in Memphis and Washington. Assistant Executive Secretary John F. P. Tucker told Smith he had received over 230 responses to the letter and contributions to the southern office totaling over $1,100.

37 Lillian Smith, mass mailing, June 20, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
38 Lillian Smith, mass mailing, June 20, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
While Taylor worked with Smith, he continued to travel the South. In early June, he traveled to Birmingham and met with Charles Fiedelson, a former regional director for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) and current associate editor and columnist for the *Birmingham News*, as well as local United Mine Workers (UMW) leader William Mitch. Taylor “secured” their “cooperation” with ADA, and he thought this was especially important because the personalities of Birmingham’s liberals did not mesh as well as they had in Memphis. He wrote, “I talked with some 25 people there, almost all of whom expressed resentment against at least one or two others. However, [Fiedelson] and Mitch appear to have the approval of all.” With these two men on board, Taylor hoped to have an organizational meeting by the end of June. He had also wanted to meet with enigmatic *Southern Farmer* editor Aubrey Williams while in town, but Williams’ public support of Henry Wallace forestalled any productive contact with Taylor.40

Taylor also returned to Little Rock in mid-June, which seems surprising given the generally negative reception he had received from local liberals earlier in the year. However, an Arkansas-born architecture student at Cornell, Scott D. Hamilton, Jr., was firmly convinced that “Little Rock needs ADA, and ADA needs Little Rock!” Hamilton expressed frustration with the political scene in Arkansas in his discussions with Taylor. He wrote, “in the past, liberals have never been outstanding locally. A union endorsement has been the kiss of death to leaders running for office. To the average Arkansan anything to the left of status quo arch-conservatism resembles ‘communism.’ Therefore people like our pride and joy, Bill Fulbright in the senate [sic], talk little and do much cautiously.” This was nothing new to an experienced organizer such as Taylor. However, Hamilton’s insistence that “there are many businessmen and leaders

who will find a means of independent political expression in a Little Rock ADA,” and his willingness to work with liberal college students at state universities won Taylor over, and he made plans to meet with Hamilton.41 Taylor also thought things were looking up in Arkansas because of the disintegration of the local SCHW chapter, though he cautioned that “this . . . hurts us more than it helps [in the short term], since the SCHW has a good many of the Arkansas liberals somewhat gun-shy.”42

Taylor saw numerous positive signs for organizing the South, but there was one looming negative on the horizon that ADA could not ignore. Lillian Smith’s anti-lynching appeal had brought in some money, but ADA remained chronically short of financial support, and Taylor’s office was no exception. These problems became the subject of a rather testy exchange between Taylor and the national office in late June, as Taylor had used much of his mailing budget on the Smith letter. John Tucker chided Taylor because “all items of the Southern Office costs are exceeding its approved budget. This is impossible both because this office cannot authorize such excesses, but also because the financial receipts during the summer months are reduced to a point that makes it essential to scrutinize carefully the most modest expenditures.” Tucker and his superiors were particularly upset at Taylor’s purchase of a fluorescent desk lamp without first consulting Washington about the purchase. They did not appreciate that Taylor had made this purchase without considering the fact that the national office was sacrificing similar creature comforts for the benefit of the field offices. The budget ADA approved for Taylor had not allowed for such extravagance, and Tucker wanted him to bring the situation under control.43

41 Scott D. Hamilton, Jr. to Taylor, June 9, 1947, reel 50, no. 274, ADA Papers.
43 Tucker to Taylor, June 25, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
Taylor was not willing to admit he had been wrong. He wrote, “a close examination of expenditures of this office fails to support your initial statement that ‘All the Southern Office costs are exceeding its approved budget.’” He contended that his travel expenses had been well within reason, even though Tucker had not questioned them; he had paid two months’ advance rent on their office space; and sixty dollars remained from the initial ADA appropriation. As for the lamp, Taylor noted that his secretary had indicated that she would “be glad to pay for it herself in case the national office disapproved,” which they clearly did. Taylor acknowledged the concern about individual expenditures over ten dollars, asking only, “in return that your office expedite, better than it has in the past, approval or disapproval of such requests.”

The tension between the local and national offices concerning financial matters was quite clear. Despite this tension over finances, ADA could not claim that Taylor was not working hard to organize chapters in the South. At the end of June, Taylor summed up his early activities in his weekly report to Loeb. He had finally started a chapter in Memphis, and in early July he planned to head to Birmingham to chair an organizational meeting headed by Fiedelson and Mitch, though their participation was not yet official or public knowledge. He touted “the next most likely spots” for organization as being Nashville and Chattanooga. “My most extensive list of names, however, are [sic] from North Carolina, where I should make an extensive trip as soon as possible. Chapters, I believe, can be rather easily established at Chapel Hill, Greensboro, Raleigh and Charlotte.”

Taylor’s approach to organization was to be involved at the very beginning of a city’s chapter formation, providing literature about ADA’s liberal platform and reassuring residents who were concerned about the group’s stances on civil rights, Communism,

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44 Taylor to Tucker, June 27, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.

or anything else. Once the requisite number (usually 25) of liberals had signed on and crafted a charter, Taylor generally left them alone, concerning himself with repeating the process in other cities. The chapters, with the exception of Memphis, would be forced to sink or swim on their own, through the time and effort of the local leadership.

Considering the time and financial pressures Taylor faced, as well as the physical limitations his war wounds had caused, this was a sound, prudent strategy. However, the timing of this southern campaign had some problems. No major local or national elections were taking place in 1947. That is not to say that there were no important issues for politically-conscious Americans. The year featured debates over the Truman Doctrine, anti-lynching legislation, the creation of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, the Taft-Hartley Act, and hearings that began to probe into the extent of Communist influence on American life, particularly in the entertainment industry. While politicians and strategists were gearing up for elections the following year and ADA prepared itself to be fully functioning when the campaigns began, the general public was often focused on other things, and Taylor could do little to interest people not already engaged by local or national politics.

He also had to deal with summer weather, a problem that he should have expected to face having been a labor organizer in the South for some time before coming to ADA. Taylor began his work during May and June, and southerners knew that those who could escape the heat, in an era of minimal air conditioning, would do so. That is not to say that Memphis or Birmingham were completely empty, but many of the people who might have been interested in joining ADA had left for vacation homes in other parts of the country. It was unusual to have someone such as Scott Hamilton come from upstate New York to Arkansas for the summer. As a result, Taylor had to deal with local organizers such as Frances Schulter of Birmingham, whose husband John
worked with the local UMW, telling him that a July meeting had “a very small attendance.” This forced Taylor to follow Schulter’s suggestion “that we just sort of nurse [the chapter] along until after the summer was over before trying to hold a mass meeting.”

In a situation where momentum was so important, having local chapters stop their organizing activities for months at a time was a bad blow to Taylor’s project.

Moreover, bureaucratic snafus plagued his campaign, especially since Taylor only had the assistance of one or two other people in Memphis. For example, in late May Taylor inadvertently sent ADA membership appeals to several individuals who were already members, including Arthur C. Joy of Atlanta, a local NLRB field examiner. Joy chided Taylor for the mistake, telling him to “‘leave us’ not waste our funds in soliciting those who are already members. There is too much need of both the funds and the energy.” However, at around the same time Joy had caused a similar problem, saying, “I was getting set to slightly bawl [Taylor] out for not answering my letter of May 24th—but when I opened my file I found both the original and carbon copy of said letter. Consequently I must admit that you have the best of reasons for not answering the letter [you] never received.” The whole affair had a Keystone Kops feel to it. Ironically, the failure of these two men to communicate did not prevent Joy from being enthusiastic about ADA’s prospects. He offered his assistance in starting an Atlanta chapter (and was named secretary for its organizing committee in early August), and he endorsed Taylor’s organizing strategy, urging quick action “to build ADA chapters in as many cities and towns as possible. . . . I am convinced that there is a surprisingly large number of real liberals in the South,

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but they need to be dug up and coordinated. To do this is going to require a substantial amount of work and cooperation from the members.  

Buoyed by Joy’s advice and enthusiasm, Taylor continued his organizing activities. However, his correspondence began to betray a lack of confidence in the results he was achieving. In July, for example, he traveled to Nashville and Chattanooga, Tennessee; Charlotte, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Rock Hill and Spartanburg, South Carolina; and back through Birmingham. Publicly, he urged ADA’s publicity department to announce the formation of organizing committees in Nashville, Chattanooga, and Chapel Hill.

Privately, he expressed frustration toward circumstances and individuals he thought were hindering his activities. His trip through the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Alabama had convinced him that “the principal obstacle to ADA organization in the south [sic] is the virtually complete lack of publicity. Many otherwise intelligent and well informed people had never heard of ADA, and those that had knew only the barest facts.” Taylor found himself doing a door-to-door sales job, and while he thought he could make the sale given enough time, he wrote, “It is only too apparent that there is no wave of enthusiasm sweeping the south [sic].” He almost felt guilty for accomplishing so little, “but if the organization can stand it, I am certain that ADA will grow to potency in the south in another 6 months.” This optimism stemmed in part from letters of interest he continued to receive from people such as Harold L. Trigg, newly elected president of St. Augustine’s College in Raleigh, North Carolina (and an Associate Executive Director with

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48 Taylor, memo to Loeb, July 30, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.
the SRC); H.C. Nixon of the Vanderbilt University Press; and William L. Kolb, a professor of sociology at Tulane’s Newcomb College in New Orleans.49

Taylor was not sure that ADA was viable in the South, but he refused to give up. He wrote, “generally, people I meet everywhere are inclined to delay things until after Labor Day. We, too, are enjoying (?) the record heat wave. The fall, however, should see excellent results from this summer’s groundwork.” As of early August, chapters or organizing committees existed in Memphis (where the focus that summer was on registering voters for the 1948 Democratic primaries), Birmingham, Chapel Hill, Nashville, and Atlanta, where 340 people had responded to Arthur Joy’s initial ADA mailing. Prospects were bright for New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and cities in Tennessee and the Carolinas. Taylor was “very much encouraged by recent progress in all areas and believe that a regional meeting for the late fall would be a good idea.”50

Despite these encouraging signs, in late August Taylor cautioned the national office about several continuing problems. He wrote, “We are still lacking in publicity all over the south and need to do something slightly sensational in order to get ADA before the public.” As Taylor saw it, “what is done this fall will be indicative of ADA’s future both in the south and elsewhere.” In addition, more mundane problems provided an important reminder of the financial constraints under which he was operating. For example, Taylor did not have his own letterhead; he was forced to use the national office’s letterhead and attach a crude addendum to it. He also received

49 Letters to Taylor written between August 4 and August 8, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers. Kolb’s letter of August 8 was especially interesting to Taylor because Kolb expressed his dissatisfaction with the fact that “many of the liberal faculty are dissatisfied with the only possibly liberal organization in the field, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. I say possibly liberal because there are many of us who suspect this organization of being Communist infiltrated.” Given Taylor’s dislike for SCHW, Kolb’s expression of disgust with the group likely found a sympathetic ear.

50 Taylor, memo to Loeb, August 8, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.
a notice from Memphis’ telephone company saying that if ADA did not pay their bill by the end of the month, their service would be cut off. Taylor’s response was exasperated and comical. He told Loeb, “O.K., so be it. If it gets cut off, it gets cut off—the hell with it.”

Taylor’s exasperation carried over to the situation in Arkansas, where Rev. Samuel Freeman continued to resist moving away from the Southern Conference in favor of ADA. Before returning to Cornell for the fall semester, Scott Hamilton provided one more update on the rivalry. Taylor, because of his respect for Freeman’s efforts in Arkansas, did not want to upstage Freeman, which is why he told Hamilton, “I do not want to give the appearance of being competitive with their efforts. If the Southern Conference is now a more or less dead issue, then I want to come down as soon as possible and get an ADA organizing committee started.”

Hamilton consulted Freeman on the future of SCHW, and Freeman remained adamant about wanting to stick with the Southern Conference. Hamilton wrote, “[Freeman] is still sticking by SCHW, for he feels he cannot run away. It seems that a great deal of pressure was applied to his board members.” Freeman explained himself directly to Taylor, saying, “I cannot appear completely enthusiastic either for A.D.A. or S.C.H.W. Neither of them has yet sufficiently recognized the fundamental change which must come in our Society for Human Welfare—therefore, both talk of working within two morally dead parties each competing with reaction against the other.” Freeman sounded like a beaten man under the pressure of liberal factions pulling him in different directions.

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51 Taylor, memo to Loeb, August 27, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.
52 Taylor to Hamilton, August 13, 1947, reel 50, no. 274, ADA Papers.
53 Hamilton to Taylor, August 17, 1947, reel 50, no. 274, ADA Papers.
54 Freeman to Taylor, August 19, 1947, reel 50, no. 274, ADA Papers.
Hamilton could not understand Freeman’s decision, especially in the wake of a report from the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) that had criticized SCHW for soliciting the help of Communists for organizing and fund-raising activities. The bigger problem for SCHW, however, was that it never created a base of support in the South. It depended far too heavily for financial support from outside sources, including CIO unions.\(^55\) Taylor and his allies in the South may have claimed that their true motivation for fighting SCHW was to free southern liberalism from the taint of Communism in a time of Cold War, but the situation was more complicated. ADA’s position in the South was just as precarious as that of the Southern Conference, and perhaps even more so. Taylor and Loeb were fearful of following in the failed footsteps of Clark Foreman and James Dombrowski. SCHW’s experience was a cautionary tale for ADA. There was always a chance that the support they expected to find was not there.

Therefore, Taylor was after one of two things: either confirmation that ADA could be organized in the South, or confirmation that his efforts would prove useless in the end. Either way, he wanted to know so he could plan accordingly, and the national office acknowledged Taylor’s impatience. At the end of August, Tucker broached the subject. He wrote, “I am sure it is warm and uncomfortable in Memphis as it is in Washington, if not more so, but nevertheless, I am constrained to ask for a little more patience with us from you.” Tucker then provided some reasons, or “excuses” from Taylor’s point of view, detailing why he had neglected Taylor’s correspondence, including a heavily reduced staff during the summer months and the national office’s own financial problems during the summer. Tucker reassured Taylor that “one of the

chief reasons for the existence of this office is to service our people in the field and believe me, we are anxious to do it with the maximum disposition.”

Taylor’s reply did not apologize for his impatience with matters in Washington. In fact, he wrote, “I count impatience among my principal virtues. From long experience with liberals and laborites I have discovered that little gets done without prodding, needling, agitating, importuning and threatening. If I am to remain on ADA’s staff, you and the rest of the national office personnel may continue to expect prompt reaction on my part to any delay or mistake on your part,” including delays in reimbursement for expenses or troubles with delivery of the ADA World newsletter to ADA members. He went further, asking, “why the hell any part of the staff of an organization just beginning to get under way should be on vacation at a time as crucial as this. I suppose, however, it would cause riot and revolution if anyone was asked to forego vacation, since all you Yankees are vacation-mad anyhow.” In fact, he wondered if he should be taking a vacation and ignoring his desire to “do big things in as short a time as possible.” Taylor closed on an ominous note, telling Tucker, “Ye may ask for patience, John, but ye shall not receive.”

Taylor’s frustration with a lack of support from the national level did not stop him from organizing, however. In the late summer of 1947, Taylor worked harder than ever to enhance ADA’s chances at survival in the South. He received regular reports from southern chapters, as well as newcomers such as Dr. Kolb at Tulane. On September 1, Dr. Kolb told Taylor about the political situation in New Orleans, breaking down the city’s liberals into several distinct groups. He dismissed the Communists in SCHW and student organizations at Tulane as keepers of a

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56 Tucker to Taylor, August 25, 1947, reel 52, no. 304, ADA Papers.

57 Taylor to Tucker, August 28, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
“spurious liberalism,” urging Taylor to focus instead on “genuine liberals, who are unconcerned about the problems of cooperating with communists (or who feel that they can outwit them in the struggle for power).” The “genuine liberals’” naïveté, and their numbers compared with the larger liberal community of New Orleans, would pose major problems, according to Kolb. This report did not buoy Taylor’s spirits, and Taylor acknowledged that “[Kolb’s] picture of the general groups is generally typical of liberals throughout the south, although not to the extent that your letter indicated. . . . ADA has offered me a means of implementing my liberal views with leaders and members in whom I have full confidence. There were no such means previously available. In short, realistic non-communistic liberals have ‘found a home.’”  

Taylor was attempting to stay positive, but these statements must be examined in the context of his frustrated tirades against Tucker which he wrote at approximately the same time.

Taylor was frustrated, but he nevertheless continued his exhausting travel schedule, which included stops in Birmingham, Atlanta, and Chattanooga during the month of September. He also saw major promise in his home base of Memphis, where an organizational meeting at the end of September promised what Taylor cryptically referred to as “a few bombshells,” as well as a “substantial” increase in the number of local ADA members.

On September 20, James Loeb made a report to the ADA Executive Committee about Taylor that glossed over the problems of the Southern Office and gave the impression that Taylor

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58 Dr. William Kolb to Taylor, September 1, 1947, reel 50, no. 277, ADA Papers.
59 Taylor to Kolb, September 4, 1947, reel 50, no. 277, ADA Papers.
60 Taylor, memo to Loeb, September 5, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
was making progress.\textsuperscript{61} According to Loeb, Tennessee looked most promising, with chapters or organizing committees established in Memphis, Nashville, and Chattanooga. Their success was especially vital because of the need to help Kefauver and Browning in 1948. Loeb also mentioned several communities in North Carolina and Louisiana where work was just beginning or would begin shortly, arguing that ADA had more work to do in the South and that funding for Taylor’s project should continue.\textsuperscript{62}

In addition, Atlanta seemed to be coming around, though this development barely received a mention in Loeb’s report. In September, Taylor’s meeting with Atlanta liberals had suffered from a “relatively light turn-out,” according to one attendee, but the group they had assembled seemed committed to making ADA work, and they had established good relations with people like Tilly, who now worked for the SRC.\textsuperscript{63} As Director of Organization Evelyn Dubrow told Vice President Carmen Lucia of the United Hatters, Cap and Millinery Workers International Union (AFL), “we are delighted to see ADA going so well in Atlanta because we think of your city as a stronghold of liberal ideas where our organization should flourish.”\textsuperscript{64} The key, according to Arthur Joy, was continued effort at the local and regional level to get people interested in ADA liberalism and keep them interested while the chapter got started. “The very fact that we had only between 45 and 50 at the meeting in response to 340 invitations; the rather apathetic reaction of the gathering; and the fact that only 14 of those present signed applications

\textsuperscript{61} The report was based on a “long, rambling letter” Taylor wrote to ADA’s Washington office in early September detailing his work and the backgrounds of the people he had brought into the fold. Taylor to Violet Megrath, September 5, 1947, reel 52, no. 305, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{62} Loeb, “Executive Secretary’s Report to ADA National Board,” September 20, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{63} Phillip G. Hammer to Taylor, September 17, 1947, reel 50, no. 275, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{64} Evelyn Dubrow to Carmen Lucia, September 25, 1947, reel 61, no. 33, ADA Papers.
(of course, some were already members) are all indicative of the fact that there is a real job to be done.” Joy thought “Brother Taylor” should be “induce[d]” to spend more time in Atlanta instead of attempting to start chapters in Chapel Hill or New Orleans. 65 Taylor moved quickly to dispel the notion that he had considered his work “finished,” reiterating his commitment to Atlanta. 66

One way in which Atlanta’s chapter hoped to make noise was through the quick production and distribution of “An Action Program for Atlanta,” which it began circulating in early November. Their six-point program called for a new approach to the public housing problem, based on a “balanced program of demolition and replacement, financed by public funds if necessary.” It called for increased regulation of children’s boarding homes to prevent abuses by caretakers, new programs to increase the number of public parks and playgrounds, changes in school curricula to “give adequate and fair attention to social, racial and economic problems,” an increase in the number of black officers on the police force, and progressive taxation to pay for new social programs. 67

Local politicians in Atlanta never took the “Action Program” seriously, but the production of this pamphlet was an important act. As Taylor noted, one of his main goals in working with ADA was “convincing a large number of people that ADA does not propose to be a dilletantish ‘paper’ organization of intellectuals.” 68 He hoped to do so in Memphis as well by leading the fight against the Crump machine, which was already in trouble thanks to a new wave of political activity by soldiers freshly home from the Second World War.

66 Taylor to Hammer, September 25, 1947, reel 50, no. 275, ADA Papers.
68 Taylor, memo to Loeb, October 1, 1947, reel 52, no. 305, ADA Papers.
The executive committee of the Memphis chapter sought to capitalize on discontent with Crump. On September 30, the committee blasted a “failure of democracy to function in Memphis and Shelby County, [which] has given rise to a form of political methods which has the dangers of dictatorship and the eventual loss of freedom of the ballot.” Their resolution called upon members of Memphis ADA to “stir up interest in real elections in the democratic tradition of the nation, encourage unbossed candidates with proper qualifications, real integrity and moral honesty to run for office, and to do all that it can to see that real competition exists in all races for public office.” Most importantly, the committee wanted to encourage voters to choose “the candidate of [their] choice without being told by any political boss, corporation executive, labor leader or anyone else for whom to vote.”

The local chapters of ADA were showing signs of moving beyond talking and toward action. Any hope of changing the political climate in the South had to include large gestures and a “few bombshells,” and Taylor was proud of the Memphis chapter for its willingness to take a public stand against the Crump machine.

Despite the promise of success, by late September and early October 1947, the job was beginning to take a toll on Taylor. As he said to Evelyn Dubrow at the time, “it will be nice having you to work with; but look out for all sorts of bitching and complaints from the impatient individual who does your southern organizing. You have probably already been warned that chewing the staff is my personal pastime.” For example, he wrote, “for God’s sake get the damn CIO situation cleared up so that all of these local southern CIO people understand that membership and participation in ADA on local and state levels is not forbidden by the national body.” He believed that “most of them seem to have the impression that [CIO president] Phil

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Murray definitely disapproves of us and has pronounced a plague on the houses of both ADA and PCA [Progressive Citizens of America] with fine impartiality.”^{70}

Taylor knew this because he was regularly receiving communications from southern union leaders such as Paul R. Christopher of the CIO Organizing Committee in Knoxville, who declined Taylor’s request for assistance in starting ADA chapters in East Tennessee. According to Christopher, “CIO’s position is that we will stick to our own Political Action Committee program, and both PCA and ADA are left off the recommended list of political organizations to join. So I would not be able to join ADA however sympathetic I may be toward it or how much I might prefer ADA over PCA.”^{71} Confusion and poor communication were hindering Taylor’s efforts to get labor on board with ADA, and his frustration was palpable.

Other southern liberals disagreed with Taylor’s public optimism about the South, ironically agreeing with his private pessimism about the job. In September, for example, Atlanta attorney (and local organizing committee member) Joseph Jacobs had written Loeb on this issue. Unlike Taylor, Jacobs had not been impressed with the diversity of the initial Atlanta gathering. He wrote, “there were no particularly outstanding people in the community; there was a dearth of what might be called New Dealers and college people.” Most of those interested were members of labor unions, and ADA had always tried to avoid the impression that it was not just an extension of the AFL or CIO. Non-affiliated liberals had stayed away in Atlanta, and Taylor could not earn their allegiance in a week or ten days. Jacobs concluded, “It was the feeling of a

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^{70} Taylor to Dubrow, September 23, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.

^{71} Paul R. Christopher to Taylor, December 22, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
number of us that if Barney would be able to spend some time in here that he might be able to persuade some of these so-called ‘Big Names’ to participate and work with us.”

Loeb tried to persuade Jacobs that Taylor was not foolishly optimistic about ADA in Atlanta, writing, “it is true that Barney’s reports with regard to Atlanta have been encouraging, and perhaps slightly optimistic, but I don’t think that they have indicated that the Atlanta ADA was going to sweep the community over night.” However, Loeb then acknowledged something that was becoming clear about the entire southern project. “The South is a big area. Barney’s territory is really too big for one person.” ADA’s finances prevented them from hiring organizers to work on a state-by-state basis, so Taylor was forced to solve the problems he encountered as best he could, with no guarantee of additional support from Washington. In fact, Taylor had complained about this issue in one of his reports. In early October 1947, he asked, “Why don’t you people let me hear from you once in a while? I haven’t had a communication from [Loeb or Tucker] in weeks. I’d like to know whether the job I am doing in your view is good, bad or indifferent.”

Loeb’s excuses for not corresponding with Taylor included his required presence at ADA National Board meetings and the fact that “my correspondence is piled so high at the moment that it looks as if it will be impossible to get through it.” As for Taylor’s performance, Loeb pronounced himself generally satisfied, though he cautioned, “I was very much impressed that you had assembled all of the labor element in the Memphis group; but, of course, there is a

72 Joseph Jacobs to Loeb, September 18, 1947, reel 61, no. 33, ADA Papers.
73 Loeb to Jacobs, October 2, 1947, reel 61, no. 33, ADA Papers.
74 Taylor to Loeb, October 1, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
danger they will become just a unified labor committee.” The withdrawal of the local chapter chairman, attorney C. Rudolph Johnson, from ADA activity did not help this impression. Loeb then lamented his inability to honor Taylor’s request to have prominent liberals come south on behalf of the local chapters. He wrote, “This problem has us completely floored. There are only a few people the Chapters want, and we have worked these people to death. Most of them will do two or three meetings for ADA and then will beg off.” Arthur Schlesinger and Eleanor Roosevelt could only be asked to do so much. Despite this problem, and continuing financial hardships, Loeb believed, “our Chapters have become increasingly active, are taking the leadership on many issues, and are doing a pretty good job. We are not at all discouraged. Quite the contrary. ADA is growing both in size and in guts.”

Taylor continued to work into October and November 1947, traveling to New Orleans to supervise the creation of that city’s chapter, which formally started on October 14 with forty members, including several “persons of considerable means.” He continued to answer inquiries from Tennessee, the Carolinas, and Virginia about the progress of chapters in those

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75 The irony of such a statement was that, as ADA historian Steve Gillon notes, “labor was crucial to any attempts to build a sustained liberal movement in America.” In addition, much of ADA’s financial support came from AFL- and CIO-affiliated unions, even if certain labor leaders (like CIO president Phillip Murray) were cool to ADA’s efforts. Steven M. Gillon, Politics and Vision: The ADA and American Liberalism, 1947-1985 (New York, 1987), 13.

76 Even when prominent speakers were in areas where their presence would be a positive, Taylor’s problems concerning communication with Washington would often be most acute. For example, Taylor lamented the fact that he had not been told that ADA National Chairman (and former Louisville mayor) Wilson W. Wyatt was in Nashville in early November, while Taylor had been in Nashville meeting with local liberals (including H.C. Nixon of the Vanderbilt University Press, who headed the city’s organizing committee). As he put it, “It seems that I am usually finding out that national leaders of ADA are in the South by accident, and always too late to get them to do anything for ADA.” Taylor, memo to Dubrow, November 12, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.

77 Loeb to Taylor, October 4, 1947, Reel 50, No. 264, ADA Papers.

78 Taylor, memo to Dubrow, October 24, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
cities, and he continued to request assistance from national headquarters as questions arose. Finally, he supervised a campaign by the Memphis chapter urging quick congressional action on President Truman’s package of military and economic assistance to Greece and Turkey under the Truman Doctrine.\textsuperscript{79}

The Memphis chapter also fought to ensure that the “Freedom Train” would stop in their city. It criticized the city government after the American Heritage Foundation pulled Memphis off the Freedom Train schedule when the city refused to modify its segregationist laws to accommodate its January 1948 arrival. In response to Crump’s criticism of ADA as a “Red” organization, the Freedom Train resolution declared, “The Communist Party has ridiculed the Freedom Train and has put pickets around it at several stops. Totalitarian communism, they realize, cannot compete with Americanism as exemplified by the documents the Train carries [which included the Declaration of Independence and Constitution]. Nor can any other form of totalitarianism.”\textsuperscript{80}

All of this was merely a prelude, however, to a discussion of Taylor’s future at ADA, which he previewed during a late October conversation with ADA Political Director Andrew Biemiller. In it, Taylor broke down the political climate in each state where he had been active, and he previewed what he wanted to do in the year leading up to the Democratic primaries of 1948. For example, Taylor was optimistic about the chances of Sidney McMath, the populist district attorney of Hot Springs, to become governor of Arkansas, and urged ADA to assist McMath. He thought ADA could have a major impact in Tennessee, where Gordon Browning

\textsuperscript{79} The letters from Memphis to southern members of Congress came at the behest of the ADA Executive Committee, which was coordinating a national campaign to support what became known as the Truman Doctrine. Hollis Reid, mass mailing to members of Congress, October 13, 1947, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{80} Memphis ADA resolution, November 25, 1947, reel 50, no. 289, ADA Papers.
and Estes Kefauver had a good chance of upsetting the plans of the Crump machine. However, the Atlanta chapter was in a bad spot because both major candidates in the 1948 governor’s race, incumbent M.E. Thompson and challenger Herman Talmadge, were reactionaries. Taylor believed “that we should stay out of the governor’s race in Georgia and concentrate entirely on [the] election of a liberal from the Atlanta Congressional District,” though the identity of said liberal was not yet clear.  

The battle over the future of the ADA southern project came to a head with Biemiller’s pessimistic reply to Taylor’s suggestions. Biemiller led off with bad news for Taylor, writing, “I am still of the opinion that political action in the south, outside of Tennessee, is not worthwhile in view of our limited budget.” This was in spite of the fact that Biemiller agreed with Taylor’s assessment of southern politics. Concerning Arkansas, he believed liberal prospects “were taking a turn for the better,” assuming McMath was a solid candidate. He thought Kefauver was an excellent anti-Crump candidate in Tennessee, adding that he had met with the Congressman recently to “[work] out certain plans concerning support from the National Office. This involves both financial aid and the planting of stories with columnists.” In short, Biemiller thought liberals had a very good chance of earning some key electoral victories in the South in 1948. However, he did not think Taylor could have an impact on those chances.  

Biemiller’s pessimism did not stop Taylor from continuing his travels. He concentrated on Birmingham, Nashville, and Atlanta, places where he believed that chapters with 75 to 100 members could be built during the first three months of 1948. Limiting his travels to larger cities would allow these chapters to work for liberal candidates during the primaries. He refused to

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81 Taylor, memo to Andrew Biemiller, October 28, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.

82 Biemiller, memo to Taylor, December 8, 1947, reel 50, no. 269, ADA Papers.
abandon the Carolinas, telling his superiors, “in addition to [numerous contacts in] Durham, Greensboro, Chapel Hill and Charlotte—a recheck of my correspondence files show equally good prospects for Raleigh, Asheville and Winston-Salem.”

83 Taylor was impressed with the work that CIO State Director William Smith was doing in Charlotte, planning a series of meetings in early January that would feature Jim Loeb as a dinner speaker in Durham, Raleigh, and Charlotte. However, Taylor was not in a position to exploit those contacts at the beginning of 1948, when Alabama and Tennessee consumed his attention.

In February, Taylor came down with what he described as a “rather severe appendicitis attack.” While he recovered from his illness, he was sidelined for a few weeks as chapter leaders across the region looked to him for assistance. In addition, the Nashville chapter Taylor had hoped would be organized by the end of February had collapsed. The acting secretary of the Nashville group, Adele R. Schweid, had told Taylor that a late February meeting would signal the start of a membership drive, but the meeting never took place because of scheduling conflicts. Over the next few weeks, some of the Nashville liberals who had taken an early interest in ADA concluded that, as Schweid told Taylor, “the outlook for an active, energetic Nashville chapter was so gloomy that we felt it would be wiser, not only from our own standpoint, but for ADA, to give up the idea and urge those interested to be members at large of the National.” Anti-Communist liberals in Nashville were tired of giving their time and effort to

83 Taylor to Dubrow, January 15, 1948, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
84 Smith, letters to ADA Washington office, n.d., reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
85 Taylor to Dubrow, March 2, 1948, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
“just another small gathering of the few Nashville liberals” that they knew already, and so they abandoned the idea of a Nashville chapter for the foreseeable future.⁸⁶

Taylor had come to similar conclusions about the entire southern project, and he tendered his resignation to the national office on March 21, 1948, with his last day scheduled for April 24. It was an unusual decision, given that important election campaigns were getting underway. In his letter of resignation to Loeb, Taylor told him that his decision “does not offer any discouragement as to ADA’s future in the South. Things look as good as ever.” If that was the case, why was he leaving? He wrote, “I believe I have made clear to you and to others on the staff, that I am totally without any personal funds—no savings, no bonds and nothing much that a pawnbroker would have. It has therefore been almost impossible for me to work to the best advantage without regular and prompt payments of expenses. I have been repeatedly embarrassed by long delays in payment of rent and telephone bills.” Taylor spoke of “other irritations” that he refused to go into at that moment, but the financial burden of the Southern Office had finally brought Taylor to the breaking point.⁸⁷

Loeb expressed thanks for Taylor’s service to ADA in what he called “the toughest assignment of all, covering the enormous area in the South.” Nevertheless, he thought it was important to set the record straight regarding Taylor’s financial complaints. Loeb wrote, “I must confess that it has been our impression from time to time that you considered our financial difficulties as applying only to yourself. I have been at work in the liberal movement for seven years, and finances have always been the biggest headache.” He also criticized Taylor for failing to hold up his end of the financial bargain. “When we originally discussed this job, you were

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⁸⁶ Adele R. Schweid to Taylor, March 12, 1948, reel 50, no. 290, ADA Papers.

⁸⁷ Taylor to Loeb, March 21, 1948, reel 52, no. 304, ADA Papers.
quite convinced that some considerable funds could be raised in certain states of the South. During this year, our receipts from our Southern Chapters have amounted only to minimum membership requirements [$1.00 per member per year] and nothing more.”

As to the possibility of finding a successor to Taylor, Loeb was of the opinion that hiring a new southern organizer would not be prudent in 1948 because of the possibility that President Truman would win the Democratic presidential nomination. ADA was hoping to organize a movement to draft NATO commander Dwight D. Eisenhower or Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas at the Democratic convention that summer. However, if Truman fended off those challenges, ADA’s problems would be even worse, and “it wouldn’t be fair to put someone on our staff and then find in three months that we could not go on.”

On April 22, 1948, Taylor continued to profess his “esteem” for Loeb and denied he was “quitting in a ‘huff’,” but he also saw an opportunity to “[get] all our bitches out of our system.” Taylor chided the Washington staff for failing to keep him abreast of the unexpected problems they were having with raising money, which affected Taylor’s travel schedule and office expenditures. He disputed Loeb’s assertions that the national office was reimbursing him for expenses and petty cash outflow in a timely fashion. In short, Taylor thought that he was not “given adequate opportunity to earn [his] salary.” Despite his dissatisfaction with how matters were ending with ADA, he wrote, “I don’t think it will serve any useful purpose to let it be known that unhappiness had anything to with my resignation. I’m informing my friends and associates that I’m simply returning to fields I know best—organized labor and public relations.”

88 Loeb to Taylor, April 19, 1948, reel 52, no. 304, ADA Papers.

89 Loeb to Taylor, April 19, 1948, reel 52, no. 304, ADA Papers.
He would do so with the United Auto Workers, working as a top public relations lieutenant for UAW president Walter Reuther.90

Loeb honored Taylor’s wishes and kept any negativity between the two from becoming public. In a letter to the southern chapters on the day Taylor’s resignation was to take effect, Loeb said that he had accepted Taylor’s decision with “disappointment and reluctance,” and he praised the “fine work Barney has done for ADA throughout the South.” Loeb vowed that this work would continue. He wrote “to assure [the chapters] that while waiting to name his successor, the National Office will do everything to preserve and develop an effective movement. We shall give direct supervision and service to the established chapters and organizing committees as well as undertake the setting up of new groups in as many Southern communities as possible.” Loeb’s rhetoric was designed to make southern members think that things would go on as they had while Taylor had been in Memphis. He did not tell them that ADA leaders had no intention of naming a new southern organizer until after the 1948 general election, if at all.91

In many ways, this was an appropriate end to Taylor’s year as an ADA employee. No one had ever drafted a comprehensive, coherent plan for what Taylor was supposed to accomplish in the South, beyond the creation of chapters in the region’s major cities. Because ADA leaders expected its members and chapter leaders to follow Washington’s lead on national issues, no one in the national office considered how local issues would affect recruitment, counting on Taylor and local liberals to be their eyes and ears on these matters. The approach made some sense, given ADA’s financial difficulties. However, ADA officials ended up depending almost entirely

90 Taylor to Loeb, April 22, 1948, reel 52, no. 304, ADA Papers.

91 Loeb to southern ADA chapters, April 24, 1948, reel 42, no. 162, ADA Papers.
on the energies of individuals on the ground in those cities where chapters had formed. Because of Taylor’s personal involvement with the Memphis chapter, west Tennessee was the most fruitful ground for fund-raising and membership. This allowed the chapter to campaign against segregationist practices, host panel discussions on hot-button issues like the role of the government in the national economy, create lists of the city’s registered voters (at a cost of over $1,000 to the chapter), and become a small thorn in the side of the already-embattled Boss Crump.92

However, Memphis was the only chapter that could point to any significant accomplishments during Taylor’s tenure with ADA. Most other chapters did not progress beyond initial organizing efforts, largely because they depended so heavily upon Taylor’s presence at their meetings. One thing they did accomplish was adding to the Washington office’s already overflowing piles of correspondence, mainly with requests for prominent speakers that would drum up interest in local liberal activity. The problem was that local leaders had no other ideas for how to get people interested in ADA, which did not help Taylor’s cause.

However, the most important problem Taylor faced when attempting to organize liberals in the South was money. When the southern project began in May 1947, ADA budgeted thousands of dollars to Taylor’s office for his salary and business expenses, a significant commitment for an organization that had several field organizers already in place, an office in Washington with numerous salaried employees, and a total annual budget of less than $200,000.93 This budget

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92 Minutes of Memphis ADA Executive Committee meetings, December 15, 1947 and January 13, 1948, reel 50, no. 289, ADA Papers.

was contingent on the staff’s ability to raise money, and when those efforts began to falter, field operations had to be rethought.

The problems ADA experienced nationally during its first months were especially acute in Taylor’s office, about which many staffers in ADA had been skeptical from the start. When financial troubles combined with bureaucratic snafus, Taylor began to express frustration at Washington for failing to support his efforts, which led to resentment on both sides because Loeb, Tucker and others thought Taylor did not understand *their* problems. The ad hoc nature of ADA’s activities and the group’s inability to formulate long-term organizational plans doomed their chances at effective action in the South, a place where long-term planning was crucial. The failure of ADA’s Southern Office in Memphis also ensured that when future operations were planned, more thought would be put into where to organize and how organization would be attempted. However, the question of whether the South would accept ADA liberalism had yet to be answered definitively in the late 1940s.
CHAPTER 4
JOHN THOMASON, THE ATLANTA CONFERENCE OF FEBRUARY 1949, AND A REASSESSMENT OF ADA’S FUTURE IN THE SOUTH

In the wake of the startling Democratic victory in the 1948 elections, ADA leaders renewed their efforts to create a viable presence in the South. Encouraged by the election of southern liberals such as Estes Kefauver in Tennessee and by Truman’s ability to carry seven southern states despite the challenge of the insurgent Dixiecrats, they organized a conference to meet in Atlanta in February 1949. There southern liberals reviewed the prospects and challenges for ADA in a South undergoing rapid political and economic transformation. Those attending the conference, which resulted in a new ADA-funded effort to build local organizations in several southern states, discussed at length such topics as the role of race and civil rights, the condescending attitudes toward the South held by northern liberals, and the distinctive problems facing liberals in the various southern states.

Indeed, the frank and free-ranging discussions brought forth a number of difficulties facing a southern liberal initiative. Probably the most contentious issue related to race relations, with even prominent liberals such as North Carolina’s Frank Graham urging ADA to exercise caution. Others outlined the distinctive dilemmas of the various southern states, the problematic relations between organized labor and other activists, and the need to reassure even liberal southerners of ADA’s respect for states rights and local customs. Although all of these matters were potentially crippling for the liberal organization, the Atlanta conference did result in the appointment of a new southern organizer and a renewed commitment, one everyone hoped would benefit from knowledge of the mistakes made during Barney Taylor’s tenure, to create a vigorous ADA presence in the heart of Dixie.

In that sense, Taylor’s abrupt resignation in April 1948 was a blessing in disguise, since it forced ADA to reassess its efforts in the South. This was particularly true considering the
importance of the South on the national stage in this presidential election year. ADA liberals had been convinced that Harry Truman, who had not yet been elected president in his own right, had little to no chance of winning in 1948. Former Vice President Henry Wallace, at the head of the Progressive ticket, seemed certain to take votes away from the Democrats in the fall, weakening Truman’s position still further. With these considerations in mind, ADA descended on the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia in July spoiling for a fight. James Loeb, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and others campaigned to remove Truman from the ticket entirely and supported either NATO Commander Dwight Eisenhower or Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas in his place. When those campaigns failed to rouse any significant support, ADA activists turned their attention to the Democratic platform, determined to force the Democrats to adopt liberal positions.¹

Taylor was not part of the ADA team in Philadelphia, having left the organization for a job with the United Auto Workers in Detroit. His stint in Memphis, however, did have an important long-term impact on ADA. Over a period of eighteen months, its leaders had tried to accommodate themselves to the peculiarities of the South and work within the system. The end result of this effort was disappointing at best, and liberals were now convinced that if real political change was going to come to the South, they had to confront the system. In July 1948, the confrontation came over a proposed amendment to the Democratic platform plank on civil rights. President Truman and his allies had written the plank as an innocuous call for legislation to “assure that due process, the right to vote, the right to live and the right to work shall not turn on any consideration of race, religion, color or national origin.” Such language had been part of the Democratic platform for decades, and pro-civil rights Democrats had not added stronger

language because of the influence of the southern caucus within the party. These southerners did not want the Democrats to commit to specific legislation in their platform, and the threat of a walkout by southern Democrats had hung over previous party gatherings.²

Establishment Democrats feared that states’ rights southerners would bolt the convention. ADA functionaries, on the other hand, wanted to call the bluff that southerners had been playing for years. President Truman himself, writing in his diary during the convention, believed that these ADA “crackpots hope the South will bolt.”³ The “crackpots” did indeed want that, and they also wanted to expose the two-faced nature of politicians who wanted to remain in good standing with the party during election cycles while denouncing most of what the party stood for at all other times. The best way to do that was to change the platform on which the Democratic candidate would be forced to stand, most notably on civil rights. Thus, ADA and CIO leaders worked to craft an alternative plank. Their final product also denounced discrimination in general terms, but it differed dramatically in that it offered concrete proposals to be submitted to the next Congress. The liberal alternative called for anti-lynching legislation, an end to segregation in the armed forces, and the creation of a permanent fair employment practices commission, based on the wartime Federal Employment Practices Commission (FEPC).⁴ President Truman’s own Civil Rights Committee had made these recommendations the previous year, and Truman had endorsed them in the State of the Union message at the beginning of 1948, meaning that liberals believed their modifications could succeed.

³ Gillon, Politics and Vision, 49.
When the Democratic platform committee rejected the liberal draft, liberal delegates were happy to make its case before the full convention and a national radio and television audience on July 14. They had wanted to force a dramatic showdown on the issue. Former Wisconsin congressman (and ADA National Board member) Andrew Biemiller placed the plank before the convention. The most dramatic moment, however, came when Minneapolis mayor and Minnesota Senate candidate Hubert H. Humphrey, an ADA member, implored the convention to ignore states’ rights southerners and “walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights,” concluding that the country was “one hundred seventy-two years too late” in ensuring equal rights for all citizens.5

This was an open challenge to southern Democrats who had been threatening to walk out of any convention that adopted such a platform, and liberals had thrown down the gauntlet. The challenge became even more apparent when the convention adopted the ADA-supported civil rights plank, 651½ to 581½, and rejected a southern attempt to include a commitment to states’ rights into the platform. The southern Democrats reacted angrily to this defeat, though many delegates did not follow through on their threat to publicly bolt from the convention. Alabama and Mississippi led the way for those delegates who did walk out of the convention, following the lead of Alabama’s Handy Ellis. In a speech to the convention, he lamented that “we are faced with the necessity of carrying out our pledges to the people of Alabama,” which included not supporting Truman if he was re-nominated and not supporting the civil rights plank as written. Other southerners were extremely unhappy with the 1948 convention, but they did not walk out, choosing instead to support Georgia Senator Richard B. Russell as a protest presidential candidate and casting 263 votes for him. The public-relations effect of the

5 Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 129.
convention as a whole was all that liberals could have hoped for. Press reports stressed their
strength while casting the southerners as “rather small, shrunken-looking men” (in the words of
one observer) who had looked like children who had taken their ball and gone home when they
did not get their way.⁶

In the aftermath of the 1948 convention, the Truman Democrats and their liberal allies,
including ADA, essentially wrote off the South in terms of campaigning and fund-raising. In
August, the states’ rights “Dixiecrats” had traveled to Houston for their own convention,
nominating South Carolina governor Strom Thurmond and Mississippi governor Fielding Wright
as their presidential ticket. This presented obvious problems to a Democratic party that had
always counted on the “solid South” in presidential elections, but Truman and the loyal
Democrats gambled. They believed that the South had been solid for so long that states’ rights
dissidents would be unable to break those bonds in most of the southern states. In the end,
Dixiecrats were unable to supplant Truman on the ballot in many states, despite their best
efforts.⁷ Even if the Dixiecrats were to succeed in capturing a majority of the region’s electoral
votes, however, the Democrats thought they had a chance to win the election anyway. Their
growing strength in large metropolitan areas and among black voters outside the South, who
reacted favorably to the new civil rights plank, would more than counter expected southern white
defections.⁸

ADA was not an official arm of the Democratic Party, but few in the organization’s
leadership questioned Truman’s decision to campaign almost exclusively outside the South.

They were already receiving signals that indicated their actions in Philadelphia were not playing well in many parts of the region. Forrest F. Reed, the owner of the Tennessee Book Company in Nashville, was one such angry southerner. He claimed to be a supporter of civil rights, but he thought ADA had gone about forcing changes in the wrong way. As he put it, “I believe in civil rights for every citizen of America regardless of race or creed, and that includes the right to vote, but I do not believe in unconstitutional and dictatorial methods of guaranteeing those rights. It is historically clear that mistaken laws do more harm than good.” He believed that “the race problem in America has not yet approached solution for the simple reason that for more than one hundred years the wrong methods have been used to solve it.” If ADA people did not think states’ rights and federalism mattered, Reed declared, they should work to repeal the Tenth Amendment to the Constitution, which expressly granted states certain rights. Of course, more southerners were angry with ADA because of the way in which they had committed the Democrats to specific civil rights proposals in the platform.

Nevertheless, ADA had cast its lot with Truman and the Democrats, and its leaders saw the 1948 campaign as an opportunity to force voters to make real choices. A policy statement from ADA’s first National Board meeting following the convention made the point clear: “... the successful outcome of ADA’s battle for a strong civil rights plank in the platform marked a turning point in the Party’s history. In large part, this victory justified our hope that the Democratic Party could prove the most effective instrument for the achievement of ADA’s objectives.”

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10 “Draft of Political Statement for ADA National Board meeting,” August 29, 1948, reel 45, no. 188, ADA Papers.
rights and other important liberal issues, then they would be left behind. The practical experience they had gained through Barney Taylor’s efforts influenced the tough, uncompromising rhetoric on display here.

Even so, ADA leaders did not abandon all efforts to start chapters in the South during 1948. For his part, Jim Loeb wanted to encourage small groups of liberals to organize whenever possible, and he even took time out of the fall campaign season to take a short trip to Charlotte, North Carolina, where several local people had expressed an interest in forming a chapter. Ten people met Loeb on a Saturday in late October to “have a full and free discussion of all of our common problems in terms of the possibility of an ADA in Charlotte.” Loeb, in essence, was doing the job Taylor had been doing while in Memphis, traveling to promising locations and encouraging committed liberals to join ADA.

The Charlotte group made no formal plans to start a chapter during Loeb’s October visit in light of the upcoming election. However, Loeb’s after-hours meeting with William Smith, the CIO Regional Director based in Charlotte who had been his primary contact, was significant because it concerned John Thomason. Thomason had come to the meeting from Greensboro, where he had been working with the World Federalist movement to reform the United Nations and make the UN the basis for a single world government. Thomason expressed an interest in working for ADA during the meeting, but his commitment to world federalism seemed much too strong for Loeb’s taste. As Loeb would later write, “What concerned me was the rather absolute quality of John’s mind. His insistence on immediate world government as a panacea tends to show a kind of inflexibility which might be a severe handicap in organizational work for

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ADA."\textsuperscript{12} In a subsequent letter, Loeb said as much to Thomason, though he conceded that “there are a good many people in ADA, I suspect, who accept your viewpoint on world government and on international affairs generally.”\textsuperscript{13}

At the time, Thomason’s interest in working for ADA on political projects in the South seemed to be of minor importance in light of the upcoming election. The fate of the Dixiecrats had been sealed long before Election Day, since they had been unable to get their candidates on the ballots in many southern states as replacements for the regular Democratic ticket. Their victories in four states (South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana) took 39 electoral votes away from the Democrats, but Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, and several others voted for Truman. Their support helped put Truman over the top in the electoral count with 303 votes compared with 189 for Thomas Dewey, the Republican governor of New York whom most observers had expected to win.

The Truman upset in 1948 pleased most liberals, even those who had wanted him off the Democratic ticket just a few months earlier. Indeed, there were signs that the liberal trend was not confined to north of the Mason-Dixon Line. In Arkansas, World War II veteran Sidney McMath, returning from the Pacific theater committed to liberal political reform, capped his rise to prominence with a narrow victory in the Democratic gubernatorial primary (which guaranteed victory in the general election at this time). W. Kerr Scott, a former dairy farmer and the North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture, won the governor’s race with a progressive platform that urged vast improvements in the state’s infrastructure and educational system. Scott even expressed support for some aspects of President Truman’s civil rights program. Finally, 

\textsuperscript{12} Loeb to William Smith, October 25, 1948, reel 42, no. 162, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{13} Loeb to John Thomason, October 25, 1948, reel 42, no. 162, ADA Papers.
Chattanooga’s Estes Kefauver, a five-term congressman who had supported the Tennessee Valley Authority and repeal of state poll taxes that prevented most blacks (and many poor whites) from voting, won election to the U.S. Senate. His win defied the machinations of Memphis’ “Boss” Ed Crump, who had exercised near dictatorial control over the state’s Democratic Party since the early 1930s. None of these men were completely satisfactory to ADA, but their victories were significant steps toward liberal reform in the South.\textsuperscript{14}

Hard work would be needed, however, to translate this apparent surge in liberal sentiment and translate it into organizational achievements for ADA. In December 1948, the ADA position was that “in these formerly one-party states, the whole political situation is chaotic at the moment. It is precisely at this point that the liberal-labor coalition can and should make itself felt.”\textsuperscript{15} ADA liberals, most of whom were based in the Northeast and around Washington, knew that they ran the risk of being too “national” in their perspective on political issues. To rectify that imbalance, the Subcommittee on Public Policy argued that since “the South represents a special problem which the members of the subcommission feel incompetent to discuss[,] we urge the national office to appoint a special subcommission to consider political policy in the South.”\textsuperscript{16} While the national Executive Committee did not act on that proposal at their December 1948 meeting, the committee did endorse a second wave of organization and activism in the South, including “a systematic attempt to organize chapters in the South, both in cities and, where possible, in rural areas,” and “the addition of new Southern members to the National


\textsuperscript{15} “American Liberals in Politics (A Suggested Outline for a Political Four-Year Plan: November 1948–November 1952),” October 30, 1948, reel 33, no. 63, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{16} Minutes for meeting of Subcommission on Political Policy, November 7, 1948, reel 33, no. 63, ADA Papers.
Board of ADA.” Finally, the subcommittee decided that “ADA should [call] a conference of Southern liberals to consider the immediate prospects of liberals there and the special problems which confront them in connection with the civil rights program.”

If national officials needed any further convincing that southern liberals wanted ADA to play a role in the South, some new voices began to provide it. William Billingsley, who was attempting to start a chapter in Greensboro, North Carolina, agreed that “the results of the election last month seem to me to make it clearer than ever that a great deal of intensive work by labor and liberal forces must be concentrated in this region if we hope to re-mold the Democratic Party closer to our heart’s desire.” However, existing chapters had neither the finances nor the manpower to sustain a long campaign. Therefore, he wrote, “the National ADA is going to have to subsidize the South for several years. It would appear to me that there should be several ADA representatives in this region.” Billingsley added that these organizers “should not have to be worrying about where the hell next week’s pay check is coming from. . . .” Support also came from Dr. Frank Porter Graham, president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who telegraphed ADA National Director Leon Henderson “urging consideration of the South for your new fund allocation,” citing the importance of the South in the Democratic victories of 1948.

Loeb’s inclination was to be cautious about any sustained campaign to organize liberals in the South, primarily because of financial considerations. As he told Billingsley, “I wish the

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18 William Billingsley to Loeb, December 1, 1948, reel 42, no. 162, ADA Papers.
19 Frank Porter Graham, telegram to Leon Henderson, December 9, 1948, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
ADA had the kind of finances your letter suggests. You indicate that there should be several representatives of ADA in the South alone. Unfortunately, we do not have the finances of the CIO at our disposal. We would be glad to undertake our own ‘Operation Dixie’ on the scale you suggest, if you could figure out how to finance it.”

At the moment, Loeb declared, the more pressing need was to explore ADA’s role in the South, and that meant acting on the Executive Committee recommendation for convening a regional conference to explore that role.

Loeb enlisted John Thomason to organize the conference, to be held in Atlanta on February 19-20, 1949, and enlist prominent southern liberals to participate. In the end, Thomason’s passionate commitment to world federalism did not disqualify him from working on this project. He negotiated a fee of one hundred and fifty dollars per week with the national office plus expenses, and he began to compile a list of southerners with whom he wished to talk. His initial list included journalists, politicians, lawyers, businessmen, clergymen and labor leaders, with names like Ralph McGill, Douglas Southall Freeman, Estes Kefauver, Florida Governor Fuller Warren, and even incoming Vice President Alben Barkley scattered throughout.

It was obvious at this juncture that Thomason was aiming high in his effort to solicit opinions about the viability of southern liberalism.

Loeb was also clear about the purposes of the conference, especially when he thought Thomason would attempt to downplay the organizational value of the meeting in Thomason’s correspondence. As Loeb stressed to Thomason, “I want to be completely institutional, and I would therefore emphasize your first objective, ‘to hammer out a role for ADA in the South.’”

He did not want to conference to turn into a meeting where the participants discussed politics.

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20 Loeb to Billingsley, December 7, 1948, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
21 Thomason to Loeb, December 16, 1948, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
only in the most general terms. “This conference is being called on the premise that the ADA has a role in the South. The purpose of the conference is to decide what that role is. . . . [and] it is our general concept that the ADA can, and should, be the agency in which, and through which, the good, solid non-Communist liberals find means of communicating with each other and working out their common strategy.”

That common strategy would also have to take into account a vital question Thomason asked Loeb about the proposed conference. He wanted to know whether the national office wanted “to include Negroes in the conference and, if so, [as] what percentage of the total?” In asking the question, Thomason acknowledged the thorny nature of the entire enterprise and returned to a question that had dogged Taylor throughout his tenure in Memphis. Loeb’s answer reflected his own uneasiness with the matter, not out of any personal animosity toward black participation but over the organizational problems ADA had to overcome. “On the one hand, we do not want, nor can we afford, a Jim Crow ADA in the South. On the other hand, it is of no advantage to our Negro friends to build an organization which will work exclusively on race relations and which will therefore accomplish little, either for the South generally or for Southern Negroes.” Loeb was thinking specifically of the example of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW), founded in 1938 as an integrationist (and fully integrated) liberal organization that had run into trouble in recent years because of its suspected ties to Communists. Loeb’s solution was a compromise where “if all of you consider it feasible, one or two of the more knowledgeable and realistic Negro leaders should definitely be invited” to “[thrash] out” the

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22 Loeb to Thomason, December 18, 1948, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.

23 Thomason to Loeb, December 16, 1948, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
problem. “Remember that this is an off-the-record meeting with no publicity purposes at all.”24 National leaders would defer to locals for their opinion on how closely they would want to be associated with black churchmen or newspaper editors, several of whom were included on Thomason’s list.

Loeb also had some misgivings about the viability of some of the individuals Thomason had wanted to invite. He thought, for instance, that Kefauver “might want to stay away from ADA publicly,” and he doubted “whether Ralph McGill would touch ADA with a 10-foot pole.” He thought it would be a terrible idea to invite Florida Senator Claude Pepper because of his public support of Henry Wallace’s presidential bid. Alabama Senators Lister Hill and John Sparkman were “friendly on economic and some labor matters” but would “tend to discourage ADA organization in the South. After all, Sparkman is the national spokesman for the anti-civil rights people.” Finally, “Barkley is obviously a bad idea. After all, you can’t have an off-the-record conference with the Vice President of the United States in Atlanta.”25 It is obvious that Thomason wanted to hold a conference that, though off-the-record, would attract some political star power to Atlanta, while Loeb wanted to focus on building the organization through contacts that had already been established.

The people Loeb had in mind were not nearly as prominent as those on Thomason’s list, but they were all committed to ADA. Instead of the two senators from Alabama, for instance, Loeb suggested inviting John and Frances Schulte of Birmingham. Frances had tried unsuccessfully to start a chapter there, and John had numerous labor contacts deriving from his work with the local CIO. Writer Lillian Smith would add some star power as a potential invitee

24 Loeb to Thomason, December 18, 1948, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
25 Loeb to Thomason, December 18, 1948, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
from Georgia, but Loeb also recommended Kenneth Douty of the Textile Workers (CIO) and Frank McAllister of the Georgia Workers’ Education Service as participants. Instead of newspaper editor and author Hodding Carter, Loeb wanted Charles G. Hamilton, who was chairman of the Young Democrats of Mississippi (“about as powerful as the Mississippi ADA, which in turn is non-existent”) and, on several occasions, an unsuccessful congressional candidate.26 These men and women were not nearly as famous as the people Thomason suggested, but they had shown a commitment to ADA that Thomason’s list lacked.

With Loeb’s suggestions in mind, Thomason spent the last weeks of 1948 preparing for a tour of the South that included visits with prominent elected officials, journalists, and several long-standing ADA members. In Thomason’s view, “the convention prospects in Atlanta look good. . . If the interest continues all over the South at the high level I have so far found it, I have no fears on the success of the meeting and the prospects for a good follow-up throughout the Southern states.” He also noted that, “practically every one I have talked to agrees that several Negroes should be invited and that their support will be valuable. It is pretty generally recognized now,” he added, that “in most Southern states that Negro support politically is no longer the kiss of death.”27 Thomason’s optimism on the subject of race stemmed in part from the positive results of the recent elections, in which southern whites had rejected what liberals considered to be the poisonous racial politics of the Dixiecrats and stayed loyal to a Democratic party that had committed itself to racial reform. This was “one more golden opportunity—in retrospect, [the South’s] last best chance—to take control of its own social reformation,” and

26 Loeb to Thomason, December 18, 1948, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.

27 Thomason to Loeb, December 22, 1948, reel 51, no. 301, ADA Papers.
men like Thomason wanted to be at the head of the fight against the conservatives who still politically controlled most southern states.\textsuperscript{28}

Any resolution of the “civil rights controversy” would have to involve some sort of compromise, at least according to Thomason, and he wanted part of the Atlanta meeting to be devoted to working out a package of reforms that ADA leaders could present to politicians. These reforms would include repealing poll taxes and providing stronger protections against lynching while eschewing mention of the creation of a permanent FEPC or a movement to end segregation in public accommodations or education. Loeb was uneasy about the idea of the southerners creating their own platform, since he did not want the southerners’ solutions to contradict the positions of the national office. He knew that this was “a very delicate problem,” but he forcefully asserted the national office’s right to overrule local chapters if their policy positions contradict the national office.\textsuperscript{29}

Nevertheless, it was an encouraging sign that matters of political policy were taking center stage for the Atlanta meeting. One of the things that had made Taylor’s tenure in Memphis unsuccessful was that he had devoted nearly all of his energy to organizational and bureaucratic minutia. He spent comparatively little time on substantive matters. His decision to do so was understandable, particularly in light of the need to attract new members who might have fled an overly doctrinaire organization. On the other hand, Thomason’s goal was to promote coherence and a comprehensive approach to political matters and policy proposals.

Thomason’s trip around the South during the last weeks of 1948 and the first weeks of 1949 tempered his optimism about the prospects for the Atlanta conference. He made a

\textsuperscript{28} Egerton, \textit{Speak Now Against the Day}, 513.

\textsuperscript{29} Loeb to Thomason, December 29, 1948, reel 51, no. 301, ADA Papers.
systematic analysis of the realistic prospects for existing and future chapters in the region, on the basis of the assessments long-time ADA members gave him. For example, he reported that Atlanta “has the best of intentions but is too much dominated by labor leaders. These persons have statewide interests, which will be helpful to our conference, but cuts its effectiveness in the Fulton County area.” The Schulters of Birmingham were “defeated by their estimate of the city,” in part because they wanted to emphasize civil rights to the detriment of the rest of the liberal agenda. He could not even arrange a meeting with his contacts in Memphis, despite having spent days putting together an itinerary that would allow such a meeting. Thomason could not hide his disappointment with what he learned during the trip, writing, “my conclusions after this trip are the task before us is much bigger than even the most pessimistic had imagined.” He also rejected the notion that “one man for the South aided only by voluntary supporters” could undertake the task, noting that “Barney Taylor’s experience seems to prove this point.” Finally, as always, there was the financial situation. He wrote, “Money is naturally the principal problem and I must confess that there is little hope that the South can provide enough to do the job.”

Despite the pessimism with which Thomason now regarded organizing southern liberals, plans for the Atlanta conference went forward. Loeb drafted the formal letters inviting important southern politicians, educators, labor leaders, and private citizens to the February meeting. In it, he pointed to the success liberals had enjoyed in the November elections and reiterated that this success presented a unique opportunity to liberals in upcoming legislative battles. He declared, “Americans for Democratic Action—which, as you know, has become an effective focal point for non-Communist liberal activity nationally—can be the agency in which,

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30 Thomason to Loeb, January 12, 1949, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
and through which, liberals in the South can communicate with each other, and work out common plans for action.” The letter was sent to dozens of potential participants, but Loeb informed them that a maximum of thirty people would be at the meeting. He also noted that “since ADA has no desire to exploit the meeting in publicity, no press releases will be issued before or after the conference.” He knew that a large meeting would attract attention, and he wanted to reassure people who did not want public association with ADA’s “radical” politics that their participation would not be a matter for public discussion.

Despite these repeated assurances, many southern liberals avoided the Atlanta conference. Most respondents who declined invitations did so because of financial constraints or prior engagements, but these excuses may have been hiding other political or social considerations. The truth was that many southerners, even liberals who shared ADA’s views on civil rights, labor, and health care, were skittish about cooperating with ADA, even in the most indirect way. This reluctance was partly due to the general southern unwillingness to acknowledge northern criticism of their society and economic structure. Even committed liberals such as Frank Graham and Dorothy Tilly of the Southern Regional Council, the two southern members of the President’s late Commission on Civil Rights, argued for softening that group’s recommendations and deplored the “bias” they detected in *To Secure These Rights*, the report the group submitted to Truman in October 1947. Virginius Dabney, editor of the *Richmond (VA) Times-Dispatch* and one of the “notables” Thomason had named as a potential participant in Atlanta, had publicly declared that criticism from Americans outside of the South was “delusionary and self-defeating.”

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31 Loeb to W. Harold Flowers et al., January 25, 1949, reel 57, no. 4, ADA Papers.

These criticisms struck a chord among many southern moderates and liberals. However, another factor was at work with regard to the timing of the Atlanta conference and the organization that hosted it. Though none of the negative responses to the invitation mentioned the previous summer’s Democratic convention, events in Philadelphia may have weighed on their decisions as well. ADA had taken a very public lead in the fight to commit the Democrats to a stronger position on civil rights and southern reform, and they now wanted to take that fight into the South itself, even though their initial steps were tentative and low-key. ADA and its leaders, particularly Senator Humphrey, had taken a great deal of heat from southern politicians and journalists for their actions in Philadelphia. Many liberals who might have been inclined to join the Atlanta meeting declined with their reputations in mind. At a moment when being labeled as an ADA liberal was a potential political liability, even the most informal meeting could have severe negative consequences for participants.

Despite the logistical and political problems the Atlanta conference posed, a strong list of participants eventually emerged. Skittishness about being associated with ADA did not prevent Frank Graham or Dorothy Tilly from being present, and Hodding Carter came from Greenville, Mississippi along with his wife Betty, his partner in running the Delta Democrat-Times. Several residents of Atlanta attended, as did representatives from chapters in New Orleans and Chattanooga, Moss Plunkett from Virginia, and Charles Hamilton from Mississippi. The delegates represented eight of the eleven states mentioned as possible targets for ADA growth. Loeb acted as the group’s moderator and as the main voice for the national organization.33

The conference also included Thomason, who had announced that he would be leaving his post with ADA after the conference ended. He had accepted a publishing job in northern

Virginia two weeks before the meeting. He lamented the fact that he would be leaving what he called the “the most challenging opportunity I have ever known.” However, his close proximity to the nation’s capital would allow him to “work in every way possible with the national D.C. chapter offices to further the liberal program we support.” At the same time, his base in northern Virginia would allow him to work against that state’s Democratic machine, controlled by Senator Harry F. Byrd. He also told Loeb that he would be keeping an eye out for potential successors.34

Despite the fact that Thomason would be leaving ADA in February, his final correspondence with Loeb continued to think the problems ADA would face in the South. In his mind, “there [were] many dangers and there [were] many opportunities to contribute to an improvement in the politics of the South. ADA’s course must be courageous and it must acknowledge the force of ingrained social habits.” ADA had to guard against becoming “the special pleader for any particular group,” since the NAACP and labor organizations already existed for that purpose. What it could do in the evolving political environment of the late 1940s was “fill the aching need for a spokesman for the not inconsiderable group of people who oppose the ownership of the Democratic Party by traditional rulers.” The “surest weapons” ADA leaders could use in filling this need were “court rulings, [and] appeals to reason and education,” which would put them in direct opposition to the “headline methods” Wallace and the Southern Conference typically used in pursuit of liberal reform.35

Thomason thought that there was another aspect of the political situation in the South that needed to be addressed, both at the Atlanta conference and in subsequent campaigns. He questioned “whether Southern representatives misrepresent or truly reflect the desires of their

34 Thomason to Loeb, February 6, 1949, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
35 Thomason to Loeb, February 6, 1949, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
constituents. If they are misrepresentatives, the job will be much simpler (certainly such a tag should be placed upon them). If our national representatives are gauges of our wishes, education remains the sole method of replacing them.”

Thomason believed that many of the region’s most reactionary politicians had begun their careers portraying themselves to the voters as “liberals.” Even someone as notorious as Strom Thurmond had begun his political life as a “progressive outsider” campaigning for education reform and muting attacks on racial integration. It might not be the voters’ fault that they had elected someone such as Thurmond in South Carolina, or Eugene Talmadge in Georgia, if they had presented a false face to the voters. Thomason was a lifelong southerner himself and even he could not be sure of the true political leanings of most southerners.

There was also the matter of where the working class and the “Negro” fit into their plans. Thomason criticized mainstream black organizations (though not by name), saying that they were “infamously reactionary except on the race question.” He even believed that “political freedom for Negroes could result in even worse representation” for liberals in the South. As for labor organizations, Thomason noted that “the primary objective of a labor group is to organize workers. There is no requirement that the workers be liberal. A real danger is that a strong, reactionary labor movement will develop in the South.”

Conservative unionists had seized upon the issue of Communism in CIO locals to draw strength away from their left-wing counterparts. At its 1949 convention, the CIO countered the conservative backlash by expelling more than one million workers who belonged to Communist-backed locals. The South was

36 Thomason to Loeb, February 6, 1949, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.


38 Thomason to Loeb, February 6, 1949, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
becoming a significant battleground for the labor movement after the war, as thousands of jobs in textiles and heavy industry were moving south, in part because the business climate was largely anti-union. 39  Thomason hoped that unions would attract liberal members, but there was no guarantee that workers who joined ADA-affiliated unions would share ADA’s politics, and Thomason wanted to make sure Loeb understood that.

Thomason saw the “clannishness” of Southern politics as the biggest hurdle ADA was going to have to overcome to organize the region. He thought characterizations of the South as “clannish” were valid, if overdrawn. “There is some justification for this united front against outside interference,” he declared, adding that “the South has been the colonial province of Eastern banking and industrial interests for a long time.” He believed that southern liberal defensiveness on political matters, especially race, was understandable. “They are made to appear narrow and partisan because they point out that there is just as much race hatred in New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Los Angeles as can be found in the South. They see growing tensions in the North whil [sic] the problem in the South has been steadily declining.”40 Indeed, the “clannishness” of the North was just as much of a problem as that of the South, but the default representation of the North as the “normal” region of the country immediately placed the southern liberal in a defensive posture. This was nothing new to the social and political history of the United States. While southerners claimed to a distinctive regional identity in contrast to northerners, northerners have often characterized themselves as “true Americans” and defined


40 Thomason to Loeb, February 6, 1949, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
their identity in contrast with the South. Thomason’s defense of his home region, even as he tries to push it toward a more liberal posture, exemplified this recurrent theme.

Given the problems southern liberals faced, the question remained: what should they advocate, and how should they go about getting what they wanted? Thomason argued that while “the South needs federal aid in the areas of health, education, [and] housing[,] it would be more healthy to make it possible for the South to take a fairer share of the load.” Specifically, he wanted the Atlanta conference to advocate expanding social security benefits, repeal or reform of the anti-labor Taft-Hartley Act, raising the federal minimum wage, national health insurance, and legislation against lynching and the poll tax. As for how to achieve these goals, Thomason thought it important to avoid the appearance of the “paternalism” that he thought was a constant in relations between North and South. He wanted the Atlanta meeting to present a united front on the issues that mattered to those attending, showing that southern liberals truly wanted these things and that they advocated these policies without northern pressure or influence. He knew that conservative politicians would “[criticize] all programs they oppose as projects of Northern and Eastern interests,” and that such a strategy usually worked, but he was willing to go ahead with the effort anyway because liberal ideas were worth the fight.

It was in this atmosphere of cautious hope that the ADA and its southern allies gathered in Atlanta on Saturday morning, February 19, 1949, to discuss the possible future of their organization in the South. Interestingly, one of the first decisions taken that morning was to ignore the original intent of having no press coverage. The conference’s participants prepared a brief statement for release to the wire services, the two Atlanta newspapers, and John Popham of

42 Thomason to Loeb, February 6, 1949, reel 59, no. 18, ADA Papers.
the Chattanooga Times, who had requested the statement in the first place. Loeb was the first to speak. He lauded ADA’s achievements and stressed the prominence of many of its members. He then insisted that ADA’s position was that the South “is still a part of the nation,” and that the national leadership “wants to know what southern liberals are thinking and doing, particularly in view of the change in the South since the last election.” The meeting’s goal was to serve this purpose, as well as to put southerners who might otherwise have been isolated in contact with information and support that would help them in their struggles.43

The next to speak was Frank Graham, who declared that the conference would be a positive experience because “I think it is good for us once in a while to get together to just sit down and talk.” His contribution to the conversation focused on policies that he thought were possible in the near-future, including increased federal aid to education (which he regarded as “a matter of national welfare”), introduction of state minimum wages that would exceed the federal wage, and continued implementation of the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. The issue of education was of particular importance to this university president, especially since the United States could no longer rely on recruiting intellectuals from European institutions; most of whom were already in the United States. Graham argued that “if we could unite—North and South, East and West . . . , this could be a great Congress. Or else it can bog down because of extremists on both sides.”44

Graham thought any national liberal program might founder over the civil rights issue, which was interesting given his position on the President’s Commission on Civil Rights (and his endorsement, however qualified, of the commission’s conclusions). He reiterated that “I stand

by that report,” but he took issue with the notion that “every meeting of southerners should just let that matter take over, when there are other things that are important.” Attention to civil rights to the exclusion of everything else would be impractical, in part because “nobody knows what Truman’s civil rights program is,” despite the President’s public endorsement of the Philadelphia platform. Above all, he did not want too much attention, financial and political, to go to black southerners at the expense of the problems white southerners faced. Graham believed that liberal pressure against segregation could not proceed until liberals were able to implement broader economic and social reform, which was a reflection of the “popular-front” liberalism that he had advocated during his time with SCHW.45 He wanted ADA to keep these considerations in mind when coming up with its program, saying, “The thing that appeals to me about ADA is that it doesn’t compromise its principles, but it is also willing [to] fight for things that are possible.”46

Despite Graham’s plea to not devote all of the conference to civil rights, the first topic covered after Graham’s speech was the prospect for the creation of a permanent FEPC by the 81st Congress. Loeb thought it would be tough to get FEPC through in 1949, and he dissuaded the participants from making it their top organizational and political priority, since most of the votes for FEPC would come from outside the South regardless of how hard they worked to earn votes from southern congressmen. The conferees believed that most civil rights measures, especially FEPC, would provoke an almost uniformly negative reaction in the southern political class. Chattanooga’s Stanton Smith agreed with Graham and Loeb, saying that “our problem is not one of finding compromises and substitute measures [on race], but a problem of keeping ADA from being solely a civil rights organization.” Loeb’s solution was the sort of compromise Smith


wanted. “As far as ADA nationally is concerned, it continues its own program on civil rights. As far as any program in the South is concerned, strategy and tactics would be taken into account by local groups.” Loeb was serious in his commitment to an understanding of the peculiar problems southern liberals faced on several fronts, and his willingness to allow southern members to go their own way on civil rights was one example of this commitment.

On Sunday, South Carolina county court judge Richard Foster, an SRC member, asked another important, narrower civil rights question. He wanted to know whether or not southern ADA chapters should hold meetings and receptions that were fully integrated. The minutes recorded that “several persons . . . said they had found it best not to make an issue of Negro membership and attendance,” while others cautioned that “If you start without Negroes, you never get them in…Try to get in the beginning at least some representative Negro leaders.” Martha Ragland of Chattanooga offered a compromise on black membership, saying that “you’ve got to remember the local customs and yet not sacrifice the principle of non-segregation.” The willingness of the participants to at least temporarily accept this type of solution shows how distasteful the whole question was for so many of them. No one had the stomach to tackle the question in any depth.

Loeb also wanted to discuss the constraints under which ADA was working and how that would affect the South. He reiterated ADA’s financial problems, warning those assembled not to expect organizers who would concentrate on single states. At best, southerners could expect “one full-time organizer plus his expenses,” something similar to Taylor’s “Southern Office” in Memphis. This was a risk, since Taylor’s tenure had ended without much tangible success, but

there was no way around the money issue. There was also the matter of attracting speakers who could (a) draw large crowds to ADA events and (b) not alienate a significant percentage of potential ADA members. This was one of the reasons Loeb had vetoed the idea of bringing Hubert Humphrey to the conference. Humphrey close association with the civil rights issue meant that any ADA event he headlined would be controversial from the start, and ADA would come off badly under this scenario. Nancy Smith, Stanton Smith’s husband and the driving force behind ADA’s Chattanooga chapter, thought this would not be a problem. She proposed bringing in Illinois Senator Paul Douglas, Connecticut Governor Chester Bowles, and others, insisting that “Southern people are ready to hear” them.⁴⁹

There was also the question of how many new members chapters should be looking to attract. Stanton Smith asked Loeb about this, and Loeb cautioned that ADA “is not a mass organization…It has to be in the first sense the conscience of the community…a ‘meeting-ground’ for action.” What this meant, practically speaking, was that the chapters would not merely gear up for certain candidates or campaigns. Chapters would instead focus on issues, and they would “[have] constantly in mind the question of the structure and control of the political parties.” Others agreed that “it is better to start as a small group and then, if we find we can become a larger group, we can do that.”⁵⁰

Some of these southerners, however, objected to Loeb’s description of this role as “coordinating.” The consensus was that “if you use the term ‘coordinating’ it suggests

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⁴⁹ Taylor, “Notes on Atlanta Meeting,” 26. Loeb’s worries about bringing speakers to the South ran in both directions. While worrying about whether southerners would listen to what someone like Douglas or Bowles had to say, he wondered whether these speakers would agree to go south without some assurance that their speeches would be well-attended, thus making it worth their while.

dominating,” and no one in the room wanted to give the impression that they wanted ADA to dictate policy positions from above. Instead of “coordinating,” there was some thought given to ADA as “the yeast or the conscience of a community,” whether that community was a single city or an entire state. Stanton Smith did not think this description went far enough, and he did not see how ADA was going to function effectively without either casting its lot with a political party or even forming one of its own. After all, Smith said, “You have to remember that the labor groups are going to retain their own separate identity in the political field,” and ADA was going to have a tough time overcoming that separateness without a clear plan of its own.51

However, attorney Jim Hart of Roanoke, Virginia cautioned that ADA faced an even more basic problem. He said, “I have been impressed by the lack in each southern state of the people in one town knowing who in other towns in the state is with them [i.e. liberal].” Any organizer ADA sent to the South would have to introduce the various liberal elements in a given community to each other. Therefore, Hart wanted “to see in each congressional district representatives making up an over-all coordinating group—with some representatives from labor, from the Negro groups, and so on.” Harriet Doar, the Women’s Editor for the Raleigh (NC) News and Observer, agreed, adding that it “is terribly important to have that state set-up. It would give encouragement to the local groups, particularly in the South where your cities are small and your people are scattered.” State organizations would allow individuals, who had previously seen themselves as “scattered [and] lonesome,” to “get a certain amount of confidence behind their ideas.”52

51 Taylor, “Notes on Atlanta Meeting,” 27.
There was the question, however, of just how much encouragement these “local groups” really wanted from ADA. Specifically, Loeb “raised the question of whether a local independent organization is better than a local division of a national organization.” Richard Foster thought the former was better in a place like South Carolina, explaining that liberals in the state had formed a Democratic Voters League that used ADA literature. This allowed South Carolina liberals to “not identify itself with ADA because it was not expedient for them to come out for FEPC.” In other words, liberals could express their support for most of the points on the liberal agenda, including public housing, increased spending on education, and the Marshall Plan, while still being on the “right” side of the segregation issue in the state politically.\(^53\)

The Atlanta conference came to no definitive conclusions on any of these issues, primarily because the majority of the time allotted to the conference was devoted to what Loeb called the “political realities of the situation” in each southern state. Loeb wanted the delegates to discuss “the present political climate,” the effect of the Dixiecrat split on that climate, and the “controlling forces” liberals had to deal with in the one-party South. Loeb decided to tackle these questions on a state-by-state basis, recognizing that a consideration of local conditions was vital.

The first state to be considered was Tennessee, a bright spot given Kefauver’s victory over the Crump machine in 1948. Martha Ragland, who had chaired the Women’s Division for both the Kefauver campaign and the Democratic Party overall, lauded this “great liberal victory,” but she cautioned that “it would be unwise to assume that Tennessee is a liberal state.”\(^54\) The real issue in Tennessee, she insisted, was dissatisfaction with Crump, particularly in his home base of

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\(^{53}\) Taylor, “Notes on Atlanta Meeting,” 28.

\(^{54}\) Taylor, “Notes on Atlanta Meeting,” 7.
Memphis. Kefauver benefited from the fact that he had faced two opponents in the Democratic primary, incumbent Senator Tom Stewart and Judge John Mitchell, Crump’s candidate (who finished third in a humiliating repudiation of the machine).\textsuperscript{55}

Indeed, despite the anti-machine victories the previous year, Ragland was not at all optimistic about liberalism in the short-term. Crump was giving no indication of fading away. Ragland’s solution was to educate the public about ADA’s close ties to the Democrats. “It seems to me,” she argued, “we should emphasize as much as we can the point that we are implementing the platform of the [D]emocratic party.” She also thought that liberals could take heart from Kefauver’s passionate defense of liberalism during the campaign, noting that “Kefauver emphasized world peace and TVA. He was for federal aid to education, [and] anti-poll tax. . . .” The trick now, according to Mrs. Ragland, was to “[make] it politically possible for him to continue to be as good, as senator, as he has been a congressman.”\textsuperscript{56}

Virginia attorney Moss Plunkett was next with a discussion of his home state. The Old Dominion “has a national reputation of being a liberal state,” but in fact “it is the most conservative I know of.” He was hopeful that the black vote (which in 1948 had reached 50,000) and new emphasis on southern organizing by the labor federations would tilt the state’s politics away from the Byrd machine. Nevertheless, there were practical problems to keep in mind. Most of the important positions in state government were appointed; the state’s voters elected only the governor, lieutenant governor, and attorney general. Jim Hart added that the state’s opposition to Byrd in the state was scattered and ineffective, which hurt liberals and labor because “it is a thousand times harder to be elected to an office at the local level than to the U.S.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} For a breakdown of the 1948 Tennessee Democratic primary, see William D. Miller, \textit{Mr. Crump of Memphis} (Baton Rouge, 1964), 322-333.

\textsuperscript{56} Taylor, “Notes on Atlanta Meeting,” 8-10.
Senate. Any program we have must start at the local level.”

Moreover, there was also little chance of help for liberals through the media, since most newspapers and radio stations sided with the machine. As with Tennessee, the climb for liberals in Virginia would be tough.

Mississippi presented its own peculiar problems. Rev. Charles G. Hamilton spoke for his state’s tiny liberal contingent. In 1948, he had run for lieutenant governor on a loyal Democratic ticket and received 80,000 votes. Despite his relatively strong showing, Hamilton was not expecting improvement in his state. “We are the poorest state in the union. As a result, we depend for everything from the outside. We have to depend on outside money for elections. The corporations, of course, are the only donators of outside money.” In order to stop what he called a Dixiecrat “reign of terror,” Hamilton had some specific requests. First, “we need for the public to learn about the corporation backing of Dixiecrats. We need it in magazines, in newspapers. We need a book on it.” He named Mississippi Power, Pure Oil Company, and several New Orleans businesses as large contributors to the Dixiecrats. Hamilton thought this activity would be relatively easy to publicize and would play into the natural resentment Mississippians had toward outsiders. Second, liberals had to “get someone on the problem of starting to educate Negroes in voting.” If 20,000 or 30,000 voted in the next election, blacks would become a potential swing vote in the next campaign cycle, and liberals needed to make sure they voted for liberals. He was already sure that the next generation of Mississippi Democrats would be better than the last, particularly on civil rights, declaring them to be “liberal on all of the issues we have raised today.” He even believed that “one-tenth [of white Mississippians] would be in favor of abolishing segregation.”

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57 Taylor, “Notes on Atlanta Meeting,” 11-12.

Graham was more optimistic about North Carolina, where Kerr Scott’s unexpected win in the governor’s race lent credence to the notion that a liberal revival was possible. He also praised Scott’s predecessor, J. Melville Broughton, as “a very progressive governor,” particularly on education, having taken a “position for equalization of school teachers’ pay and [a] 9-month state-supported school system.” William Billingsley, who worked with the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA) local in Greensboro, lauded the political power labor had wielded in the election, especially as it the unions had helped Scott win in November. Billingsley also thought the elections were interesting in terms of the black vote, noting that “the Progressive party had counted on a lot of support from the Negro community but did not get it.” When Graham asked why that had been the case, Billingsley chalked it up to “the innate good sense of the Negroes,” many of whom he hoped would join the small but “fairly decent” ADA chapters that had formed in Greensboro, Chapel Hill, and Durham. ⁵⁹

The SRC’s George Mitchell then spoke on the political situation in Georgia, whose quirks highlighted the importance of the state-by-state approach ADA wanted to follow in this meeting. ⁶⁰ Liberalism had dimmer prospects in Georgia than in Tennessee or North Carolina, he said. The election of Herman Talmadge as governor in 1948 only highlighted the problems

⁵⁹ Taylor, “Notes on Atlanta Meeting,” 15-16.

⁶⁰ Mitchell’s participation in the conference, along with that of Dorothy Tilly, also highlighted an important shift in SRC’s attitude toward the “problem” of “outside agitation,” or northern interest in southern problems. As Robert J. Norrell has noted in his study of the SRC, “By 1948 the Council had come to embrace the notion that change in southern race relations would probably be imposed from outside,” with the wartime expansion of the federal government and the President’s Committee on Civil Rights (in which Tilly participated) each playing a role in that conclusion. Robert J. Norrell, “Triangles of Change: The Southern Regional Council in the Civil Rights Movement,” paper delivered at the conference “The Southern Regional Council and the Civil Rights Movement,” University of Florida, Gainesville, October 23-26, 2003 (in Douglas S. Gallagher’s possession).
Mitchell reiterated that the most important problem for liberals was Georgia’s county unit apportionment system, which allowed conservative rural areas to exert power far beyond their numbers, while “in the city of Atlanta a vote counts about 1/200 as much as it does in some of the rural counties.” This was “the big obstacle toward getting a democracy,” and the relative strength of the Ku Klux Klan in the state “intimidated” liberals during political campaigns.

Kenneth Douty, who worked with the TWUA local in Atlanta, thought liberalism’s chances in Georgia hinged on the potential strength of labor. He said, “the liberal forces are split. If the labor groups could have some sort of effective working relationships, it could be a tremendous force.” He believed there were “200 to 250 thousand organized workers” in the state, and that “there are places . . . where local unions have done magnificent jobs, are completely organized and completely active. They have the balance of power in those counties.” Unfortunately for liberals, according to Douty, “the only real leadership against the Talmadge administration is the Atlanta Journal,” while Ellis Arnall had distanced himself from local and national liberals after his term as governor. As Douty put it, “he became increasingly bitter as he came out of office. The farther he traveled from home, the more liberal he became, and this worked to his discredit here.”

Without a popular and effective leader to unite liberals, they stood little chance of overturning the county unit system and, thus, little chance at winning political power except at the local level.

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Florida was another state in which liberals believed there was potential that ADA could exploit, and Jerry Carter, the state’s Railroad Commissioner and Democratic Committeeman, told the attendees how he thought they could do that. He sang the praises of Senator Pepper, who was up for reelection in 1950. He then talked about the need for “somebody that can think in the language of the people,” which in a practical sense meant politically savvy operatives who could reach “crackers” like himself. He contrasted these people with the “intellectuals,” who would “write a book” if they found out the people did not agree with them. He also spoke of the need for “tolerance,” both for those who were “left of center” and among them. Others had spoken of the need for liberals to unite around a common platform, but Carter was most explicit. As he saw it, “all the disgruntleds, soreheads [and] free-thinkers, rally and fight each other, until the common enemy looms into sight.” One potential bright spot in the state was Governor Fuller Warren, who Carter called “very amenable to his friends” and a good governor.64

Liberals were less sure about prospects in Alabama, and former Montgomery Advertiser editor Charles Dobbins reflected this confusion. Dobbins’ opinion was “perhaps paradoxical,” for he said he was “hopeful about Alabama, the only state in the union that would not let its citizens vote for the President of the United States.” He could not figure out Governor “Big Jim” Folsom’s “dual character.” Dobbins believed that Folsom “stands for the right things, but he has compromised himself in some ways that have shaken the real liberal leadership in Alabama—for example, putting a candidate out against Sparkman.” In the same vein, Dobbins said, “he has, to his credit, absolutely refused to make any use of the Negro issue. Unfortunately he has surrounded himself with men of second and third-rate quality.” Dobbins also praised members of the state’s congressional delegation, including Senators Hill and Sparkman, each of whom had

64 Taylor, “Notes on Atlanta Meeting,” 18-19.
worked hard for the Truman ticket. With good people in national and statewide offices, he recommended a renewed focus on the “minor offices” and less attention “just on the congressional and gubernatorial offices.”

The problem with the latter approach, according to Dobbins, was that local officials controlled the Democratic machinery in Alabama, which meant that when liberals attempted to fight Dixiecrats and conservatives, they were starting with a tremendous disadvantage. Another Alabaman, John Schulter of the CIO’s Birmingham office, thought the best way to win those battles was through conscientious work on building a coalition in the state “marrying labor to the Tuscaloosa and Auburn [university] intellectuals who refuse taking a stand…plus a marriage with Folsom’s [small] farmers,” who were prominent in Folsom’s governing coalition.

The final two states covered were Louisiana and South Carolina, two states that voted for the Dixiecrats in 1948. Dr. E. Terry Prothero, an assistant professor of psychology at Louisiana State University, led the discussion on his “reactionary” state, where the most important political issue was “absentee ownership” of land and industrial enterprises. Prothero, like his colleagues in Mississippi, thought Louisiana liberals could make an issue of “outsiders” controlling the state politically and economically. ADA leaders would also have to reckon with the divide between New Orleans and the rest of Louisiana.

In South Carolina, Judge Foster talked about the deep split in Democratic ranks that had resulted from the Dixiecrat schism, to the point where there were now two Democratic parties in the state. ADA’s task was to build up the “real” Democrats so that they could challenge

Thurmond’s Dixiecrats when the former presidential candidate ran against incumbent Senator Olin Johnston in 1950 in a campaign that was “no secret” to political observers in South Carolina. One big problem for loyal Democrats, as another participant noted, was that “no person in South Carolina could run on the platform of the national democratic party [sic] and get elected,” and not even a comprehensive political education program would help that cause.  

These reports took a lot of time, but they gave the participants had a great deal to ponder, as Loeb had undoubtedly hoped they would. The reports had served two main purposes. First, national ADA wanted to introduce these liberals to each other in a politically safe environment for an open discussion of the problems they faced in organizing the South. Second, Loeb wanted to get a sense of the relative difficulties each southern state presented. Even if those outside the South did not see it, southerners themselves were well aware that Tennessee and North Carolina were very different from South Carolina and Mississippi. Loeb said, “This group was brought together in a hit-or-miss fashion. Yet there was a common approach, while there were differences in strategy and tactics.” It would be now much easier to determine where and when effort and money would be expended most effectively.

Before adjourning, Loeb asked for short-term suggestions that would allow ADA to act on the advice they had been given quickly. Some of these suggestions included a series of large-scale mailing campaigns, contacting local labor federations to inquire about office space, and enlisting people who were already traveling to certain locations for volunteer work while they were in those communities. Plunkett suggested, to widespread agreement, that the first membership drive after Atlanta begin in Tennessee. Loeb offered $400-500 to states for 30-day

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68 Taylor, “Notes on Atlanta Meeting,” 22-23.

organizing drives, with the idea that a full-time organizer would be on board after that period. Hart asked Loeb for help with the national news outlets, hoping to get news concerning liberal activities in the South into national publications. As he noted, “it would be of great value to us to get something in the New York Times, in Time, Newsweek, and so on.” On that note, the Atlanta conference came to a close, with mutual promises to provide whatever assistance would be needed in making the recommendations of the conference a reality.

The press release ADA sent to media outlets after the conference talked about the subjects participants had discussed, saying, “the discussion was devoted to those [parts] of a liberal program which have to do with building up the South in the broader fields of education, health, housing, citizenship, industrial and agricultural development and race relations.” It also emphasized that the conference was a decidedly informal affair that was not meant to draw up a detailed program for action. As informal as the discussion may have been, it was vitally important to the future activities of Americans for Democratic Action in the South. The national office may not have known who would be their next southern organizer, but they had a better idea of what that spokesman should be saying and where he or she should be saying it.

The liberals who gathered in Atlanta were optimistic that many of the ideas liberal politicians and journalists championed in the rest of the country could become part of the political agenda of the South as well. They saw no reason why southerners would not support public housing, laws to protect unions, and increased funding for education, if they were only given the facts on each of these issues. ADA had already prepared literature and solicited the talents of public speakers that could make the case for them. The election of politicians like

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71 ADA press release, February 19, 1949, reel 61, no. 33, ADA Papers.
Estes Kefauver and Kerr Scott was also an encouraging sign, especially since they made no secret of their stands on the issues. Much was possible for liberals in the South, as long as too much was not made of the civil rights issue. In a surprising development, Jim Loeb, speaking for ADA in Atlanta, had even showed a willingness to back off the harsh anti-southern rhetoric that had marked the Democratic National Convention in 1948 in their deliberations. If a de-emphasis on racial issues would increase ADA membership, this was a risk Loeb wanted to take, at least in the short term.

As for where the organizer was expected to go, the consensus seemed to be that it would not be prudent to send that person into certain states, especially the four states the Dixiecrat ticket had carried the previous year. There was no sense that Mississippi or South Carolina was ripe for a large-scale liberal effort, and so correspondence would be the main tool an organizer would use in these states. The organizer would concentrate on states like Tennessee, North Carolina, and Florida. The election results of 1948 had seen several promising liberals elected to higher office in these states, signaling a potential turn away from reactionary politics. If the South was going to change, it would change first in these states, creating a base from which further campaigns would be possible in more difficult areas. The plan of action was, in this sense, almost military in nature, though no one discussed it in these terms.

This was a marked departure from ADA’s previous course of action, which involved sending an organizer throughout the South, at great expense, with the hope that he would be able to stir up liberal sentiment across a broad area. The end result of his work was a few small southern chapters and no significant financial windfall. If ADA leaders wanted to reignite its southern efforts (and it is clear that they did), the next campaign had to be planned in much more detail. ADA also had to acknowledge that their image had changed since Taylor left his job in
April 1948. Most southerners knew something about ADA, and it was likely that their opinion of ADA was not positive. Despite the fallout from Philadelphia, however, the results of the elections of 1948 offered at least some hope that the South could change politically and socially, and ADA wanted to make these changes possible. The Atlanta conference offered a glimpse of what policies could secure the most support (and which would have trouble), where to organize (and where not to), and how any newly-appointed organizer should go about their duties (and what they should not do). It became an important interim step in ADA’s quest for a voice in the South, and it signaled that the next two years would be a crucial period in its history.
In ADA’s second major effort to establish itself in the South, a new southern director, Alden Hopkins, both learned from the mistakes of her predecessor Barney Taylor and encountered variations of the same problems that had bedeviled him. During her stint, which lasted from April 1949 to February 1950, Hopkins found that three major problems frustrated her efforts in North Carolina and Florida. Too often, she found, the distasteful legacy of the Southern Conference and the failed presidential campaign of Henry Wallace lingered, both dividing liberals and tainting ADA activists with an unearned but tenacious association with allegedly pro-Soviet views. Equally troublesome for her, as was the case with Taylor, was the problem of race and civil rights: African Americans were the most consistent liberal group she encountered, but at the same time no issue was more divisive, even among relatively progressive whites, than civil rights. Finally, Hopkins found that electoral politics simultaneously provided the most significant focal point for liberal initiatives and distracted her and fellow liberals from the difficult task of building a liberal political infrastructure.

By February 1949, when ADA officials convened its informal meeting of southern liberals in Atlanta to discuss the prospects of New Deal liberalism in the South, ADA had existed for more than two years. This meeting was the first moment at which ADA leaders openly discussed the question of whether liberals could win converts in the region. It was also the first time these men and women had raised questions of strategy and tactics. They attempted to determine where ADA’s limited resources could be used effectively in organizing new chapters, strengthening old ones, and backing liberal candidates for state and federal office. The consensus reached in Atlanta centered on an approach far different from Taylor’s. Instead of sending the organizer all over the South, Taylor’s successor would concentrate on two or three
states where liberal candidates had succeeded in the past. He or she would organize the rest of
the South primarily through correspondence and over the telephone. ADA leaders would be
happy to help liberals in Mississippi and Alabama if they wanted to start chapters or join ADA as
individuals, but the new organizer would not be sent these places to invigorate the process.
Liberals would have to show their commitment to political action without someone like Taylor to
hold their hand.

There was already evidence that certain southern cities had committed liberals in place
and would carry on with ADA work with or without the help of a regional organizer. For
example, John Schelter of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (CIO) in
Birmingham, who attended the Atlanta meeting, informed ADA Executive Secretary James Loeb
that he had met with the “lead editorial writer” of the Birmingham News shortly after his return
from Atlanta in mid-February. Schelter wanted to sound out this unnamed editor on the
possibility of “a Liberal-Labor coalition in this state [Alabama] and the possibility of a meeting
to create such a coalition.” The News writer suggested that such a meeting would be most
productive if Schelter could convince Frank Graham, who had just chaired the Atlanta
conference on ADA’s behalf, to attend it. Schelter wanted Loeb to approach Graham about
traveling to Birmingham to speak before about fifty Alabama liberals, while Schelter would
handle Graham’s expenses and travel arrangements. He also wanted representatives of
Alabama’s two Democratic senators, Lister Hill and John Sparkman, to address the group. His
final request reminded everyone involved that the South was far from being a liberal utopia. He
wrote, “At this time it would be better to refrain from inviting any of the leaders of the negro
[sic] community as it might give the opposition the kind of ammunition that they would use to
Indeed, the question of what to do with black southerners remained a vexing one, even for those whites who supported changes to the segregationist status quo.

While Schulter and others forged ahead, ADA concentrated on finding a new southern organizer. One advantage this new organizer would have was time, a luxury that Taylor had never enjoyed. In May 1947, Taylor had been thrown into his ADA job with no real thought as to what he should do, beyond identifying southern liberals and encouraging the formation of ADA chapters. He was also stuck with the task of handling the affairs of the Memphis chapter, by far the most politically and organizationally active during his time with ADA. Most significantly, he had only a few months to focus on these tasks before the 1948 presidential campaign began to monopolize the attention of those in Washington whose help he required to do his job. The attention ADA’s national staff paid to the election helped Harry Truman upset Republican Thomas Dewey in November, but it did little to help Taylor’s aborted efforts to make ADA work in the South. In 1949, however, with no major electoral contests on the horizon, Taylor’s successor would have more energy available to devote to organizational matters.

Even so, Taylor’s successor could count on more attention to the South because of several significant races in the 1950 congressional elections, where liberals with strong ties to ADA faced significant challenges. One such contest in Florida featured incumbent Senator Claude Pepper, whose previous elections to the Senate in 1938 and 1944 had been close, hard-fought affairs. Pepper had always had an uneasy relationship with New Dealers who were also hard-line cold warriors. In 1949, his standing within the Democratic Party was under serious scrutiny, even though he had eventually repudiated Henry Wallace’s third-party run for the

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presidency on the Progressive ticket. Pepper’s opponents maintained that the senator had been too supportive of the Soviet Union in his statements opposing an American nuclear build-up. Florida conservatives had succeeded in blocking Pepper’s efforts to send his hand-picked slate of delegates to the 1948 Democratic Convention in Philadelphia, selecting instead a states’-rights slate pledged to Mississippi Governor Fielding J. Wright. Wright would end up as Strom Thurmond’s running mate on the Dixiecrat ticket, and Pepper’s failure to stop Florida Democrats from supporting Wright showed how vulnerable his political situation was.²

Despite Pepper’s political liabilities and pro-Soviet views, the senator did share some common ground with ADA. For example, once his personal presidential aspirations appeared dead, Pepper had joined with ADA in supporting former Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower as the Democratic nominee in Philadelphia. The fact that Eisenhower expressed no interest in being President and repeatedly declined to run did not stop Pepper, ADA officials, and other disaffected liberals from trying to draft him. When the general finally convinced liberals he was not interested, Pepper revived his own candidacy as an anti-Truman alternative for liberals. He publicly declared himself a candidate on the second day of the convention, describing himself as a New Deal liberal, a supporter of labor, and a “good southerner” on civil rights. The national and state press denounced the effort, calling Pepper’s candidacy “sad” and “preposterous,” and even ADA chairman Leon Henderson distanced himself from the senator. Even before voting began, Pepper withdrew his name from nomination, and he supported the Democratic ticket in the fall, but his presidential aspirations had dire political consequences in

1950. It would be very difficult for the organization to support Pepper in his re-election fight, but liberals had few southerners they could rely on in the Senate, and they could ill afford to lose one, regardless of his views on Communism and the Soviet Union.

The other battleground on which ADA leaders focused in preparation for the 1950 election cycle was North Carolina, where, not long after the Atlanta conference adjourned, an unexpected opportunity presented itself. On March 6, 1949, former governor and newly elected Senator J. Melville Broughton died, leaving Governor Kerr Scott the task of naming a replacement to serve twenty months of Broughton’s term before a special election in November 1950. Scott’s list of potential replacements grew to over fifty names, though some of the governor’s closest confidants, including his wife Mary, urged him to select Frank Graham. When Scott offered Graham the job, Graham balked, protesting that he already had a job as president of the University of North Carolina. It is possible that Graham may have also had political reasons for initially refusing a seat in the Senate. Graham knew that he had potential liabilities as a candidate and that his enemies would use his past as a founding member of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW) to accuse him of Communist sympathies, if not outright membership in the party. Earlier in 1949, he had endured a taste of what his life might be like in Washington. In January, he learned that the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) had been investigating him for more than two years without his knowledge, trying to find reasons not to grant him “complete security clearance” as president of the Oak Ridge Institute for Nuclear Studies. The AEC report found fault with Graham for his alliances with “suspect persons and organizations,” but it eventually found no reason not to trust him with nuclear

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3 Clark, “Road to Defeat,” 119-131; John Egerton, Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South (Chapel Hill, 1995), 479.
Graham was used to people questioning his political associations, but his post at North Carolina offered a safe haven from the troubles he faced. The United States Senate would be a hornet’s nest, and Graham knew it.

In the end, however, Raleigh News and Observer editor (and ADA member) Jonathan Daniels convinced Graham that it was his duty to accept the office. He pointed out that in the coming months Graham’s “yes” vote on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) treaty would be vital to its passage. Scott’s official announcement on March 22 of Graham’s appointment at a UNC faculty dinner stunned everyone, but in fact the reactions were predictable. Liberals were ecstatic, none more so than those in ADA. Jim Loeb sent a telegram to the “great liberal governor” of North Carolina expressing admiration for Graham’s selection and claiming that the decision “confirms our conviction that new liberal leadership in the South will serve to unify America and wipe out anachronistic sectional divisions.”

He told Duke University Law professor Douglas B. Maggs that Graham’s appointment was “the greatest thing that ever happened in North Carolina” and claimed Graham would “certainly give a shot in the arm to all liberal organizational work in the State of North Carolina.” In a radio address delivered on the day Graham was sworn in as a senator, Loeb identified him as one of three southern senators who would “vote with the liberals on all important questions, including most of the civil rights issues.”

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5 Loeb to Kerr Scott, March 23, 1949, reel 17, no. 1, ADA Papers.
6 Loeb to Douglas B. Maggs, March 29, 1949, reel 17, no. 1. ADA Papers.
7 Transcript of Loeb radio address, March 29, 1949, reel 42, no. 163, ADA Papers.
Claude Pepper and Estes Kefauver of Tennessee were the other senators Loeb singled out for praise, and this short list provided the impetus for ADA’s organizing activities in the coming months. Kefauver would not be up for re-election until 1954, but Pepper and Graham would be on the ballot in 1950, and each would face a difficult battle to remain in the Senate. Graham had an indication that certain people would not welcome him to the Senate the day after Scott announced his appointment. On March 23, isolationist Ohio Republican John W. Bricker stood on the floor of the Senate and denounced Graham for his association with the Southern Conference. North Carolina Democrat Clyde Hoey and Oregon Republican Wayne Morse, an ADA board member, each defended Graham’s loyalty and patriotism against Bricker, and Pepper noted that it was highly unusual for a senator to publicly impugn another senator’s character in open debate. Nevertheless, Graham knew this was only the beginning of his political troubles. There were no rules against criticizing a politician’s patriotism during a campaign, and Graham knew such attacks would happen during his re-election bid in 1950.

ADA leaders knew that too, and they wanted to help Graham in any way they could. Loeb’s congratulatory telegram to Graham on March 23 “pledged [ADA’s] fullest possible support for 1950,” and it soon became apparent that the new southern organizer would have to concentrate all of his or her attention on Florida and North Carolina for the next 12-18 months. One additional reason for focusing on these two states was a series of encouraging signs from cities that indicated they would be receptive to the ADA message. In early April, John Schulter traveled to Miami for a meeting with James Crawford. Crawford was a native Miamian with strong ties to ADA through the American Veterans Committee (AVC), an organization of liberal veterans begun as an alternative to the conservative American Legion and Veterans of

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8 Ashby, *Frank Porter Graham*, 244-246.
Foreign Wars. Crawford was positive about possibilities for liberal initiatives in Dade County, since a large contingent of New Yorkers and other northerners had made the area their second home. Sending an organizer to Miami would make sense politically as well, “[s]ince this is the home state of Claude Pepper.”

On April 15, Loeb would contact Crawford directly, but Loeb could do little at that moment because he had failed to hire an organizer as of that date. Indeed, the two months between the February conference in Atlanta and the end of April represented a lost opportunity for ADA, and Loeb’s rhetoric conveyed the sense that he knew it had been lost. “Believe it or not, I still have the same problem that I discussed with you, I don’t know how many months ago,” he told Crawford. John Thomason had been the obvious choice for the position in view of his hard work in setting up the conference, but his commitment to the World Federalist movement precluded him from taking a job with ADA. On the other hand, Loeb did have some good news for Crawford. “We cannot expect one person to do the whole South within a few months. We must therefore concentrate on those areas where we think organization is most possible and also where we think the political situation in 1950 will be most significant.” As a result, Loeb wrote, “From the political point of view, the most important races for liberals in the South will be in North Carolina and in Florida.” Loeb hoped that the re-election of Pepper and Graham, with ADA help, would “disprove once and for all the theory that no one can be elected in the South unless he has racist ideas.” It would also prove that ADA anti-Communist liberalism had a fighting chance at success in the South, which would boost membership and fund-raising efforts significantly.

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9 Schulter to Loeb, April 6, 1949, reel 49, no. 261, ADA Papers.
10 Loeb to James Crawford, April 15, 1949, reel 17, no. 1, ADA Papers.
These chances for success largely depended on finding the right person to handle the task, and Loeb told Crawford cryptically, “I am negotiating with a person who has been highly recommended in Chattanooga and who attended our National Convention.” He did not name this person, but her identity became public knowledge soon enough. Alden Hopkins was a graduate of Goucher College, a small liberal-arts school in Baltimore, and the University of North Carolina. She had been working for the past five years as a field examiner for the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), traveling through Texas, Alabama, the Carolinas, and Florida conducting surveys and examining workplace complaints in factories and mills. At the time of her first contact with Jim Loeb, she was the head of the NLRB field office in Chattanooga and, during her time there, had become an ADA member.

Hopkins was willing to take on the challenge of being ADA’s Southern field representative, but she would not do so without assurances from Washington about her financial security. In her negotiations with Loeb, she requested a $5,000 annual salary plus expenses, though the question of which expenses would be covered could wait. She would work alone out of her home or apartment, though she had not yet decided where she would live. Finally, Hopkins wanted to maintain a post office box for official correspondence, and to hire a stenographer for a few days each month to assist her with answering it. Hopkins had high ambitions for this project, and she wanted all of the tools she needed to be in place as she began her work. She did not want to spend time worrying about office supplies and expense reimbursement, as Taylor had been forced to do in the first incarnation of the southern office.

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11 Loeb to James Crawford, April 15, 1949, reel 17, no. 1, ADA Papers.
12 Alden Hopkins to Loeb, April 18, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
13 Hopkins to Loeb, April 13, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
Loeb readily agreed to her basic salary demands. He also agreed to pay for her meals, hotel costs, and telephone expenses, and to provide twenty dollars minimum per week for her automobile for time spent on behalf of ADA. However, he had one request for Hopkins. Mindful of the importance of North Carolina in the upcoming election cycle, Loeb wanted her to establish her base of operations in the state. He anticipated that North Carolina would be the “permanent headquarters” for ADA in the South, and he knew that for the foreseeable future she would be doing most of her organizing work in the state. Because Loeb and the Washington office wanted this new southern project to be sharply focused, having Hopkins based in North Carolina would cut down on expenses. Loeb was “quite confident that we shall have no difficulty whatsoever,” promised all of the cooperation his office could offer, and expressed confidence in Hopkins’ ability to do the job. He also sounded loftier ambitions for Hopkins’ work, writing, “I feel equally certain that you will receive from your association with the ADA family a real sense of satisfaction in terms of your contribution to the things that are really of importance in this crazy world.”

Hopkins agreed to Loeb’s request and moved to Durham to set up shop. She believed that the close proximity of the state’s three major universities would put her in contact with a large number of liberals, including students, faculty, local union leaders, and other liberals. With that detail settled, she wanted to set up a better communication process between southern chapters, mainly through encouraging each chapter to send copies of its correspondence to the officers of the other chapters. Hopkins wanted the more active southern chapters to motivate those that were less active with news of their successes. News that the Atlanta chapter had helped to elect

14 Loeb to Hopkins, April 29, 1949, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
15 Hopkins to ADA southern chapters, May 20, 1949, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
liberals to the school board or the city council, for example, might motivate the Greensboro chapter to work for liberals running for the city council there. This correspondence network would also remind ADA’s southern members that they were not isolated from each other, which would also serve as a spur to increased activity.

She also undertook an assessment of the chapters in her home base of North Carolina. She wanted to know how committed the officers of these chapters were to the ADA project, and she wanted to know how many members these chapters could count upon. Her first stop was Chapel Hill, where developments were not encouraging. As of May 1948, the chapter’s chairman, UNC political science professor C.B. Robson, had simply “stopped calling meetings” and had failed to restart the chapter when the new school year began in the fall. In the month prior to Hopkins’ arrival in the state, it fell to sociology professor Nick Demirith and history graduate student Charles Sellers to force Robson to call two informal meetings, which had a few dozen interested liberals. This turnout was fairly encouraging, but Hopkins did not expect Robson to translate their interest into any sustained action. She also blamed unidentified “wet blankets” in the town’s liberal community for broadcasting their opinion that “nothing could be done” with ADA in Chapel Hill.16

The good news for Chapel Hill was that Robson was “apologetic” for his leadership failures and was willing to step aside for the good of the chapter. Hopkins wanted Helen Gillin, a former organizer of the city’s League of Women Voters, to take over the chapter, though those who recommended her for the job also thought she would not accept. The bad news was that Chapel Hill’s reputation as a liberal city in North Carolina was, in fact, untrue. Hopkins “was surprised [at] how much conservative element there is in Chapel Hill, and [there was] also

considerable anti-Graham feeling among faculty because of his alleged non-aggressiveness [sic] as a money-raiser and salary-raiser.” She was confident, however, that Graham’s re-election campaign would be a plus for ADA, and she was willing to test that hypothesis in June when Graham returned to UNC to give the school’s commencement address. She hoped that the new senator would be willing to make some appearances on ADA’s behalf in Chapel Hill and a few other cities to help with membership and fund-raising.\textsuperscript{17}

She also stopped in Greensboro, where the roster of thirty-five members was more diverse than the one in Chapel Hill had been. There were some students from the UNC Women’s College in the chapter, but there were also labor organizers, a few local lawyers, and several students and faculty members from the two black colleges in the city. The prospect of expanding the chapter beyond the existing members was poor, however, and much of the blame again fell on a lack of leadership. The chapter chairman was attorney Robert S. Cahoon,\textsuperscript{18} but much of the actual work of running the chapter fell to secretary Anna Seaburg. Seaburg’s attitude toward ADA’s possibilities in Greensboro, however, was not positive. Hopkins thought Seaburg’s “age and long, disappointing experience with liberal organizations” would be a brake on the chapter’s ambitions.\textsuperscript{19}

Getting new leadership for these two chapters became extremely important. Events at the state and local level were accelerating, and ADA needed to work hard to ensure that liberal

\textsuperscript{17} Hopkins to Loeb, “Weekly Report,” May 23, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{18} Cahoon would later become famous as one of the court-appointed lawyers for the Ku Klux Klan members who shot and killed several members of the Communist Workers Party during a Greensboro anti-Klan rally in December 1979. For more on Cahoon’s role in this case, see Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, transcript of “Public Hearing #2 of the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” August 27, 2005, http://www.greensborotrc.org/cahoongreensonwall.doc (accessed January 30, 2008).

causes in North Carolina had an effective champion. For example, the Greensboro chapter of the NAACP was planning to file suit in state court to overturn the city’s segregated school system. Liberals also needed to throw their weight behind Governor Scott’s plan to pressure the legislature into issuing hundreds of millions of dollars in bonds for the state’s schools and highways. In 1948, Scott had campaigned on the issue, which was one of the main reasons liberals had been so excited about his candidacy. Hopkins wanted to show that ADA recognized the opportunity these bonds represented by campaigning hard for their passage.\(^{20}\)

There was also the matter of the U.S. Senate race of 1950, in which Graham was not at all sure whether he would even have an opponent. The state’s other senator, Clyde Hoey, was also up for re-election, which meant any number of scenarios was possible. One of Hopkins’ theories was that “should a good candidate be put up against Hoey, whom Graham would like to support, [North Carolina Democrats] may ask Graham to maintain a hands-off attitude in Hoey’s race, in return for his being unopposed in his race.”\(^{21}\) If he campaigned against Hoey, the state party might decide to draft a viable conservative candidate, making Graham’s chance of re-election more tenuous.

However, as of May 1949 there did not appear to be a serious candidate running against Graham. Graham would remain the focus of ADA’s efforts nevertheless, especially considering the lack of quality liberals in other southern Senate races. Capus Waynick, Scott’s former campaign manager, had considered running against Hoey until President Truman appointed him as U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua. Jonathan Daniels, whose advice to Scott had led to Graham’s appointment, was not appealing as an opponent for Hoey, especially after Hopkins learned of a


conversation he had had with Duke law professor Douglas Maggs. Hopkins had thought of Daniels as a potential ally in the state, but Maggs found Daniels to be much less liberal than some people thought, especially after “three stiff drinks.” According to the Duke professor, Daniels had said, “labor is just trying to use the negro for its own purposes—it is dangerous to have negroes voting—[and he] cussed out ADA, primarily on account of [its] civil rights stand at Philadelphia.” The most likely candidate for Hoey’s seat at that moment appeared to be Greensboro lawyer L. P. McLendon, who had supported Scott in 1948. However, most of his legal work came from corporations. According to Hopkins, “liberals and labor—especially the latter—could not work up much enthusiasm about campaigning for him.”

Hopkins’ assessment of North Carolina politics was harsh, but Graham’s apparent popularity in the state was heartening, and her schedule did not betray any doubts she had about the possibility of succeeding in the state. In late May, she traveled to Wrightsville Beach on the Atlantic coast for the state CIO convention, met with several promising contacts at a dinner for the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen in Greensboro, and found another possible political ally in Congressman Charles Deane of Rockingham. Hopkins called Deane “as fine a liberal as you would find in a Southern state. He is for the public housing bill, federal aid to education, etc. . . . He is against compulsory health insurance, but has entered a bill for aid in hospital and medical school construction.” Hopkins thought he would not need ADA support for his 1950 campaign, but she was heartened to find that someone like Deane was representing North Carolina in the House.

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Hopkins also strengthened her contacts with prominent North Carolina Democrats. For example, she met with Capus Waynick in the weeks before he left the United States for his ambassadorial appointment in Nicaragua. She wrote that many ADA members saw Waynick, who had aspirations of running for governor in 1952, as a politician who was “as liberal as Frank Graham—or at least more effective.” In late May, she saw him in action arguing in favor of Governor Scott’s highway bond issue. Not all liberals in the state were in favor of the bond, believing that the state needed to spend money on education and agriculture instead. Nevertheless, Hopkins thought Waynick was impressive, and she listened closely to his advice.24

When it came to Graham’s chances in 1950, Waynick thought he would face no opposition, and he hoped the same would be true for Senator Hoey. Waynick’s reasoning was that the 73-year-old Hoey would either die in office before his full term expired, allowing for Governor Scott to appoint another liberal in his place. If Hoey survived his six-year term, Waynick believed that liberals would “have someone good to run against him” in 1956. This view reflected Waynick’s optimism about North Carolina politics. He told Hopkins, “there is a progressive, liberal trend running in the State—one evidence of which was Scott’s victory over the [conservative] machine,” adding that, “if adroitly led and handled, this trend will result in the kind of state we would like to see. The people, if properly led, will go along with a liberal program generally—but not with civil rights or spending which would put the State in the red.”25

A bright future for liberalism did not necessarily translate into a bright future for ADA, however. A week after their meeting, Waynick told Hopkins, “I have not yet had time to read [the ADA] material [she had given to Waynick] but I will do so at my first opportunity, in order

to familiarize myself with your cause. As I assured you in Durham, I am not sufficiently acquainted with it to have a very clear notion of its value.” ADA was still an unknown commodity, even to liberal North Carolinians, and no one knew whether they would respond positively to ADA.

If Hopkins needed further proof that ADA faced a tough task in the state, she needed only to look at her home base of Durham. Hopkins was surprised to learn that ADA had not been able to “get off the ground” in Durham considering the population of interested liberals at Duke in the student body and faculty. There was also a tradition of labor activism in the city, making Durham “the best organized city in the state.” The AFL had organized 13,000 workers, over half of whom came from the city’s tobacco plants, and the CIO had attracted an additional 3,000 members. Hopkins did not think all of these workers were candidates for ADA membership, but a good nucleus of liberals would likely be found among union members. Durham also benefited from a tradition of political action through the Voters for Better Government (VBG), founded in January 1948. VBG featured a cross-section of Durham liberals, including several AFL and CIO leaders, two Duke professors, and two prominent “negroes.” It reported on legislative activity at the federal and state level, worked to get its members elected to precinct committees, and helped to elect the city’s mayor, Dan Edwards, and one member of the city council, E.R. Williamson, in 1948.

All of this activity was promising for liberals, but there was one glaring problem that Hopkins would have to address: why would Durham need Hopkins to come in as the representative of an entirely new organization if a group like VBG had already proved its

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26 Capus Waynick to Hopkins, June 7, 1949, reel 50, no. 281, ADA Papers.
27 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, June 6, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
effectiveness? However, VBG had a significant problem in that, once the 1948 campaign ended, its energy had dissipated. According to Hopkins, Councilman Williamson “was disappointed recently by the results of a trial mailing to 500 union members asking them to join for $1; they only got 4 replies.” Hopkins saw an opportunity for ADA to take VBG’s place in Durham as the city’s clearinghouse for liberal activity, and she had quietly recruited Williamson as a member. Williamson wanted a Durham ADA chapter to open a “school for practical politics” that could draw on intellectual talent in the area, and Hopkins wanted the chapter to help the various liberal factions to agree on a candidate to oppose conservative congressman Carl Durham in his re-election campaign in 1950. Most anti-Durham people wanted Mayor Edwards to run against the congressman, but Hopkins was skeptical about liberal influence in labor unions. As a member of the state legislature, Edwards had voted against North Carolina’s version of the Taft-Hartley Act, but he had also voted against an increase in the state’s minimum wage.\textsuperscript{28} Hopkins had no litmus test for political candidates. However, she had enough experience with southern politics to know that liberal candidates had a habit of distancing themselves from liberals once in office.

Another problem that became clear as Hopkins traveled across North Carolina was the legacy of the Southern Conference. During his time in Memphis, Barney Taylor had been forced to deal with SCHW on several occasions. Some SCHW members had been unwilling to join ADA, and conservatives had succeeded in convincing many southerners that SCHW leaders represented all liberal opinion. This was particularly bad for ADA because of SCHW’s past willingness to accept Communists and Socialists as members. This affected Hopkins’ efforts in places such as Asheville, which she called “probably the most liberal city in the state.” SCHW had attracted over one hundred members in Asheville. However, the chapter had fallen apart in May

\textsuperscript{28} Hopkins, memo to Loeb, June 6, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
1947 “over the Communist issue,” according to Hopkins, and anti-Communist liberals “who were active in the Conference [were] very discouraged about the organization of another group composed ‘just of liberals’.” Some Asheville liberals even thought “ADA should not try to organize a chapter but just get together a few individuals to work for liberal ends without any name or organization.” ADA leaders had done all they could to convince people of the organization’s anti-Communist credentials, but they faced an uphill battle in this regard.

Hopkins believed that this controversy was not going to fade quickly, especially in North Carolina. Some of the most notorious incidents of the 1948 campaign had occurred in the state during the southern campaign of Progressive presidential candidate Henry A. Wallace in August of that year. Wallace enjoyed support from several SCHW officers, including chairman Clark Foreman, who served as Wallace’s campaign treasurer. Southern audiences reacted negatively to Wallace’s progressive, anti-segregation message, and North Carolina set the tone. Hundreds of protestors greeted Wallace everywhere he went in the state, waving Confederate flags, heckling his speeches, and throwing tomatoes and eggs at him and his supporters while threatening violence against the candidate. The near-rioting that accompanied Wallace’s campaign was the subject of extensive media coverage, and it tarnished North Carolina’s public image.

The Progressive Party and the Southern Conference collapsed in the wake of the 1948 election, but Hopkins understood that liberals would have to deal with its legacy. As Hopkins told Loeb, “The history of the Southern Conference will have a definite influence on ADA. Just how much I can’t assess at present, but it is in the back of everyone’s mind when you talk about

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ADA. Certainly, for many, the experience was discouraging and dampens their enthusiasm for ADA.”\(^\text{31}\) Even those who remained enthusiastic might not be welcome in ADA because of their association with Wallace or the Southern Conference, which might tar ADA with the Communist label. Hopkins told one ADA member to “[not] let anyone know you ever had anything to do with the Progressive Party. I know you’ll understand the basis for this.” She also instructed him to keep Charlotte attorney Charley Myers out of ADA completely, fearing that his outspoken connections to Wallace would hurt ADA in the long run.\(^\text{32}\)

Hopkins’ concern with letting the “wrong people” into ADA was ironic, considering that one of the most prominent figures associated with the legacy of liberal political action in the South was Frank Graham, who had been present at the 1938 founding of SCHW in Birmingham and had served on its board for several years. Hopkins may have wanted to distance herself from the Southern Conference, but she had no problems working with Graham to support his election to the Senate with ADA help. She kept up a running correspondence with Graham, much of which was designed to encourage his liberal tendencies. For example, she noted that the AFL and CIO appreciated his efforts in support of a bill to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act sponsored by Utah Democrat Elmer Thomas.\(^\text{33}\) She assured Senator Graham that “their appreciation will unquestionably be expressed in more concrete form at the polls next spring.”\(^\text{34}\) North Carolina liberals such as Hopkins wanted Graham to resist the temptation toward conservatism that had

\(^{31}\) Hopkins, memo to Loeb, June 6, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.

\(^{32}\) Hopkins to Bob Sain, July 11, 1949, reel 50, no. 280, ADA Papers.

\(^{33}\) For more on the Thomas bill, see “Dream Bill,” \textit{Time}, February 7, 1949, republished online: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,799744,00.html (accessed online January 31, 2008).

\(^{34}\) Hopkins to Graham, July 2, 1949, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
ensnared so many promising politicians in the past. She wanted Graham to be a candidate worthy of their continued support.

In June, she met personally with the senator in Washington at an informal dinner in his home. Hopkins wanted to work closely with Graham in the 1950 campaign, but Graham’s reaction to her was troubling. As she later told Jim Loeb, “Since it was the first time I’d ever talked to the man, I didn’t feel I could push him at all.” She wanted Loeb to “get a line on how closely he is going to work with us. If his reason for evasiveness is that he doesn’t want himself tied up publicly with ADA down here, that’s fine with me, if he would just come out and say so.” She found it curious that Graham stressed that “an organization which doesn’t want any credit does the best job (I agree, but it made me wonder what his motive was for stressing that fact).”

As a result of their meeting, Hopkins made an important request of Loeb. “If ADA is going to put this kind of money and time into North Carolina primarily for Graham’s sake, I think we are entitled to a clearer understanding of our relationship to him and his campaign.”

In truth, Hopkins likely knew the answer to her question as she asked it. Graham wanted ADA’s help in his campaign, but only if its role was kept as quiet as possible to avoid the risk of embarrassment to the senator.

Graham’s desire to keep ADA at arm’s length was interesting, given that he had no intention of moderating his liberal positions while in the Senate. Old friends were already cautioning him that being a member of the Senate was not the same as being a university president. They wanted him to recognize the value of compromise and appeal to the state’s moderates, who held the key to his election. However, he served notice to friends and critics alike that he would not compromise his deeply-held beliefs. He continued to favor an end to the

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poll tax in federal elections, supported government health insurance and Truman’s full employment proposals, and the rest of what the President was now calling the “Fair Deal.” In short, he was, in all but name, an “Americans for Democratic Action liberal.” However, the ADA label was toxic, especially in southern states where negativity remained from the 1948 election. Graham thought his ties to the group would harm his political fortunes, so he wanted to make the election a referendum on his personality and character, where he believed he would hold an edge over potential opponents. He would keep his associations with groups such as ADA as informal as possible.\footnote{Julian M. Pleasants and Augustus M. Burns III, \textit{Frank Porter Graham and the 1950 Senate Race in North Carolina} (Chapel Hill, 1990), 40, 42, 44-45.}

Graham’s attitude toward ADA frustrated Hopkins, but there was little she could do to change his mind. The disposition of some North Carolina chapters added to her frustration and showed that Graham’s skittishness about associating with ADA had some justification. In Charlotte, for instance, things were so bad in late June that Hopkins indicated she “was ready to quit [the state], and suggest [the chapter’s] charter be revoked. . . . We might as well have no chapter here as what we have now.” Too many of the members that local leadership recruited had been Wallace backers, and the “wideawake liberals” Hopkins wanted to recruit were “scared to death of another Southern Conference,” especially since so many former Socialists had joined the Charlotte chapter. One member, dentist Sam Freedland, told Hopkins he “would join only as a member-at-large, with the understanding that he would not be identified with the local group in any way.”\footnote{Hopkins, memo to Loeb, July 1, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.}

Another problem was that the Charlotte chapter was not representative of the community as a whole. Most of the members were either black or Jewish, and the four Protestant members
were Unitarians. Hopkins wrote, “an ADA chapter will never get anywhere in Charlotte without some good native, Trinitarian leadership and membership. The present members realize this as much as I do.” In other words, the Charlotte chapter was not “southern” enough, and this was bad news in a city that was the center of opposition to Graham. If Hopkins could not create a chapter more in line with ADA’s principles and free of the Communist taint, Graham and other liberal politicians would never work with her.38 In Charlotte, the best Hopkins could do for the time being was to install a new chairman, Charlotte News state government correspondent Robert Sain, and hope that she could convince liberals that ADA was not another SCHW.39

Most of Hopkins’ North Carolina contacts understood her frustration, and the Charlotte leadership was willing to step aside to make her job easier. Not everyone was so pleased with her work, however. William J. Smith, the director of the state CIO organizing committee and a Graham supporter, criticized Hopkins’ approach to organization. Smith thought she unwilling to work with labor leaders such as himself, though he hoped that could be corrected with a few face-to-face meetings. What concerned him more was Hopkins’ “methods of approach in handling individuals,” including candidates for ADA membership.40 Smith did not elaborate, but the tone of her communications with Washington clarifies his meaning. Hopkins was not happy with the North Carolina chapters, and she was not willing to hear excuses from people skeptical of the ADA program. She wanted ADA to campaign hard for Graham in the coming months, and they would not be able to do so if chapters were not yet functioning.

38 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, July 1, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
Hopkins had reason to be careful about the kinds of associations ADA made in the South, especially since the North Carolina media was beginning to take an interest in her organization. One example appeared in the July 21 edition of the *Charlotte Observer*, which published a critical “Dossier on A.D.A.” in its editorial section. The *Observer* referred to ADA as a “pseudo-socialist organization,” labeled its founders as “New Deal lame ducks,” and described its anti-inflation program as “clinging to the old absurdity that prices could be cut back 10 per cent and wages could be raised 15 per cent at the same time.” The paper paid a backhanded compliment to ADA for opposing the Wallace campaign and supporting the Marshall Plan, but declared that ADA’s opposition to Senator Karl Mundt’s bill requiring Communists to register with the State Department was proof that ADA’s anti-Communism did not go far enough.

According to the *Observer*, the final straw was the 1948 presidential campaign, including the civil-rights battle at the Democratic convention and ADA’s decision to endorse Truman after it had campaigned against him at the convention.\(^{41}\) Hopkins sent this editorial to Washington, though the rhetoric of the piece was nothing new to those closely associated with ADA. What was curious about the editorial was its national focus. It said nothing about Hopkins’ activities in the state and gave no indication that the paper knew anything about what she was doing in North Carolina.

One of the reasons the *Observer* said nothing about Hopkins was that she had little to show for her efforts over the previous three months. In late July, her exasperation with the situation boiled over. As she put it, “to be liberal in the South is to endanger your friendships and your capacity to make a good living. This is not to say that I am discouraged, but I have had to readjust my thinking, attitudes and expectations a lot in the last two months.” She was having

trouble finding more than a handful of people outside of the unions and the universities to
“whom one can give [ADA literature] without getting sort of a horror reaction.” Hopkins wrote,
“We are asking a very great deal of southerners, all in one step; to be liberal economically—
possible the hardest person to find is an economic liberal; to be liberal on all other issues; and,
lastly, to join an interracial group.”

Hopkins also thought that Barney Taylor’s unrealistic reports on the South contributed to
her problems. “I do think I can do better than Barney, but I am going to do one thing differently:
I will try to give you all as honest a picture of the situation as I can.” That picture, as things
stood in late July 1949, was rather grim. “Organizing here will be . . . slow, so slow,” but “if the
National office can stand it, so can I.” One advantage to working in North Carolina was that “10
people down here can do as much in politics as 100 up north.” She thought this was the result of
several factors, including “general political apathy, the very poor organization of the Democratic
Party as a result of its having had no serious opposition for decades, the small size of the
electorate and the small number of those registered who vote in elections, etc.” If she could
create the kind of “liaison groups” ADA wanted in the South, her chances of organizational and
electoral success were much greater.

Unfortunately for her, ADA leaders in Washington had not learned an important lesson
from the example of Barney Taylor’s office in Memphis. That lesson was that attempting to do
political work in the South during the summer of a year when no state or national elections were
to be held was futile. Taylor had complained to ADA’s national office in the summer of 1947
about the fact that many of the people he wanted to recruit were vacationing, and their absence

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42 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, July 23, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
43 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, July 23, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
was a drain on ADA’s financial resources. Two years later, Hopkins made a similar complaint, writing, “this is one h--- of a time of year to be organizing. Everybody is on vacation. . . . It has been over 90 in the Carolinas for six weeks; over 95 every day the last two weeks; and hit 100 today.” As a result, “I see little use in trying to do much chapter organizing in August.” She thought it was “useless to sell people in August and then have to come back in September and sell them again. That is bad selling technique anyway—giving people a chance to think things over and change their minds.” Hopkins was not happy with the idea that her hardest organizing push would have to wait a month, but she could not avoid acknowledging the vacation patterns of her North Carolina neighbors.

As Hopkins contemplated the future of ADA in North Carolina, she was hearing interesting things about Florida, the other major liberal battleground of the 1950 campaign. A small group of attorneys, government employees, and college students had been working since May to start an ADA chapter in Miami, and they were looking to Washington for organizational help. They had gathered lists of potentially interested parties, mailed several hundred individuals whom they thought were good candidates, and had spent the summer of 1949 contemplating further action. Loeb attempted to encourage these activities, telling one potential member that “the reelection of Senator Pepper in Florida is . . . important. While some of us have had disagreements with Senator Pepper, particularly on matters of foreign policy in previous years, we all recognize that he has been a stalwart fighter for liberal issues, and his defeat would be disastrous to the whole development of liberalism in the South.”

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44 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, July 23, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.

For now, though, Hopkins continued to focus Senator Graham’s election, understanding that his race was the top priority of the national office. However, it appeared that no one else was taking the job as seriously as she was. For example, she wanted to meet with former Congressman John Folger to get his assessment of the political climate, only to be turned down.\textsuperscript{46} She could not organize a meeting of the Charlotte chapter, since one or more officers were consistently out of town at any given moment. This was important, since it appeared that no one was willing to take the lead in organizing and recruiting new members.\textsuperscript{47} One of the few places where she received any sort of positive response was from labor. In September, she spoke at the annual conference of the North Carolina Federation of Labor and reported that “my speech [on ADA] was well received and generated considerable interest in political action; numerous delegates voluntarily approached me for information and advice.” She encouraged the CIO, the AFL, and its Labor’s League for Political Education (LLPE) to “put someone on in the state if at all possible.” She wrote, “The importance of the Graham race cannot be overemphasized and, in my opinion, is second only to [that of Robert A. Taft, the Ohio Republican running for reelection to the Senate in 1950].” Hopkins concluded that “if we can’t elect Graham, then nothing can be done anywhere to change the complexion of our southern delegation in Congress.”\textsuperscript{48}

Few in North Carolina seemed to have Hopkins’ sense of urgency, though, and in the fall of 1949 she began to echo the frustration Taylor had expressed two years earlier. She told the national office, “things are not going well in the South,” and “this is the toughest job I’ve ever had, from the viewpoint of doing it right.” She could not resist taking a shot at Taylor’s strategy

\textsuperscript{46}Charles M. LaFollette to John Folger, September 14, 1949, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{47}Hopkins to David Wallas, September 11, 1949, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{48}Hopkins to William G. McSorley, Jr., September 25, 1949, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
of gathering people in a room, proclaiming them to be a chapter, and moving on to the next community without subsequently following up on their progress. “Anybody, including myself, could set up chapters down here—like the one in Charlotte or the ones Barney set up. Perhaps I’m too much a perfectionist, but I will not do anything at all unless it is done well and effectively.” She explained her difficulties as a “result of the fact that, in the South, movements are identified with local personalities; personalities are more important than ideals or issues.”

One factor that benefited ADA was the personality of Senator Graham, whom everyone, regardless of their politics, seemed to like. With that in mind, Hopkins vowed to make one more effort in North Carolina. “If I can’t get real results [by the end of October], then I will resign with very real regret, having come to the conclusion that this job can’t be done at this particular moment of history—by me or anyone else I know of.”

She had the full support of Jim Loeb, who had been touring Europe during the summer and meeting with numerous social democratic politicians on the Continent. Loeb returned to the United States with what he referred to as a “real sense of rededication” to the liberal project, which came from European liberals who looked to ADA for reassurance that liberalism had a fighting chance in America. He wrote, “It seems to me that we have to build in as many communities as we can reach groups of understanding American progressives, no matter how small they may be or how difficult the circumstances.” That included the South, which Loeb conceded had always been the most difficult section of the country to organize. He knew that Hopkins never had any illusions about the difficulty of the task, but he assured her that she was “one of those front-line fighters who are tackling the toughest of all American problems, and also the most essential.” Loeb concluded, “Once we admit that the South is hopeless, we give up on

49 Hopkins to Loeb, September 23, 1949, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
the whole country, since we cannot solve the national problem without solving the Southern problem.”

They were not going to fight a losing battle forever, and it was looking more likely that Graham would face opposition in the 1950 Democratic primary, so Hopkins would need to show real progress in recruiting members. Nonetheless, Loeb told her she could count on his continued support.

There was, however, a continued gap between the hopeful and supportive rhetoric of the Washington staff and the practical assistance Hopkins was receiving on the ground. This was another troubling parallel with Taylor’s Memphis experience, as he had regularly complained about a lack of financial support and the staff’s refusal to do anything about it. Hopkins was starting to have the same sorts of problems in the fall of 1949. In mid-September, she complained to staff secretary Olga Tabaka that “for several weeks I have not received any mimeographed directives, pronouncements, legislative news letters, etc. from National ADA. . . . Also, since the end of July, I haven’t received any tissue copies of form letters, acknowledgements of contributions, memberships, etc. from the Southern states.” Many ADA prospects in the South had no contact with Hopkins because they did not know who she was or what she was doing in North Carolina. As a result, they would often join as “members-at-large,” receiving correspondence from, and paying their membership dues to, the national office without joining a chapter. Hopkins wanted to know about these isolated members and where they were so that she could encourage them to start organizing chapters in their communities. However, the national office was not staying on top of these developments, and Hopkins wanted more help from them.

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50 Loeb to Hopkins, September 27, 1949, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
51 Hopkins to Olga Tabaka, September 19, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
Hopkins believed that the national office was doing a poor job of informing “at-large” members of ADA’s organizational activities in the South. For example, E. Terry Prothro had been an assistant professor of psychology at Louisiana State University in December 1948 when he first contacted ADA. When he contacted Washington again in October 1949 to inquire about ADA, he had joined the psychology department at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. What made Prothro unusual was that he knew about the Atlanta conference, but he was under the impression that “at that meeting it was tentatively decided that a new southern field representative would be appointed, and that he should begin his work in the state of Tennessee.”

The Washington office had sent out an announcement to ADA’s southern members about Hopkins’ appointment and her office in North Carolina, but it is clear that some members did not know about this. Postal problems might account for this communications mix-up, but Taylor and Hopkins had experienced similar problems, suggesting that the problems may have originated in the national office and were systematic within ADA.

Another problem that Hopkins faced was Graham’s Senate candidacy, which had been the main reason for her move to North Carolina. In the fall of 1949, the entire ADA enterprise in the state was in limbo, in part because the Graham campaign was itself in limbo. The problem was that no one seemed to know who would run against Graham. Early speculation centered on former U.S. senator William B. Umstead, who had received a raucous welcome from the state’s Young Democrats at their mid-September convention. Graham also spoke before the Young Democrats, but delegates showed little enthusiasm for him, particularly when he spoke in favor of civil rights for racial minorities. Another problem, according to close friend and political advisor Jonathan Daniels, was that Graham “was so modest that he would have to be pushed

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52 E. Terry Prothro to Loeb, October 17, 1949, reel 78, no. 94, ADA Papers.
hard to campaign.” While Daniels and organizations including the NAACP and CIO-PAC supported Graham’s candidacy and worked hard to persuade Umstead and other potential candidates to stay out of the race, Graham stayed in the background. One close advisor claimed that if it had been left up to him, “he probably would never have done anything to organize his campaign.”

It was difficult for Hopkins to get people excited about the Graham candidacy, and liberalism more generally, if the candidate himself appeared indifferent about the whole exercise. This dilemma mirrored one of Hopkins’ most significant problems. Graham expected his personal integrity and his jovial personality to resonate with North Carolina voters, and Hopkins now believed that personal relationships counted for a great deal with potential candidates for ADA membership. For example, when Hopkins met with one potential member in Charlotte, he had lost some of the enthusiasm he had expressed to her at their first meeting. She “finally found out it was because he ‘didn’t want to have anything to do with anything Bill Smith had anything to do with.’” Others expressed similar reservations about the Charlotte group and Smith’s leadership of it.

In an effort to solve her continued recruiting problems, Hopkins sought to enlist a “State Chairman” for ADA, “a liberal with an unimpeachable name.” She thought it was an important step because “people down here (like people everywhere, but much worse) will ‘do it if Mr. Jones done it,’ i.e., join a liberal, non-segregated organization.” She had three people in mind for the job: former Congressman John Folger, Jonathan Daniels, and Mayne Albright, a Raleigh lawyer and Graham supporter who had finished third in the 1948 Democratic gubernatorial primary. Unfortunately for Hopkins, none of them wanted the job. Albright was pessimistic

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54 Hopkins, memo to Tucker, October 24, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
about ADA’s chances to organize in North Carolina, recalling negative experiences with other liberal groups in the state. Daniels could not be convinced even as Hopkins “threw the book at him including, as he said, a ‘roster of his friends’ who are southern liberals and gradualists, and yet allow their names to be used for ADA.” Hopkins knew that ADA’s anti-segregation platform was simply too radical for Daniels, even though she did extract a promise from him that he would not actively campaign against ADA. Folger’s excuse was not political, but medical: he had been in the hospital for some time and unavailable for a meeting with Hopkins.55 In the end, Hopkins could not find a North Carolina liberal who could unite the state’s liberals and convince them ADA would be an effective political force.

Communication problems, Graham’s disinterest in building a campaign structure for 1950, and personality clashes were all hampering Hopkins’ North Carolina efforts. Nevertheless, Hopkins still professed to be optimistic with many correspondents when talking about ADA’s regional and national prospects. For example, when she talked with John O’Hare, president of the Tobacco Workers International Union, she thanked him for his praise of ADA and claimed that “ADA has made a real dent in the political picture in cities and states where it is well organized,” and that the group was “the best way for labor to achieve political unity and liaison with other liberal groups and independent voters in their communities.” She wanted O’Hare to help ADA become a stronger organization by “[writing] your staff members and Local officers in the various cities in North Carolina a short letter endorsing ADA and urging their participation in the formation of chapters.”56 O’Hare provided his North Carolina locals with informational


56 Hopkins to John O’Hare, October 24, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
materials about ADA. This was especially helpful to Hopkins because of the unique importance the tobacco industry had in the state.

It would have been even more helpful to Hopkins had she stayed in North Carolina. However, by the end of 1949 her frustration about the state’s liberals had reached a breaking point. She still thought Graham had a good chance of winning the 1950 Democratic primary despite several political blunders. For example, he encouraged a reputation as a “radical” on civil rights when he agreed to the appointment of a black North Carolinian, Leroy Jones, to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Jones was only a second alternate for the position, but Graham’s consideration of his application caused trouble later in the campaign. For her part, as of late October Hopkins believed that “the reaction seems to have died down [on the Jones issue] and the status quo is restored.”

Graham was only part of her problem. The bigger problem, Hopkins believed, was that “the labor people are awfully dumb about politics and candidates, particularly those staff people who travel and do not have opportunities to keep in touch with other liberal elements and political powers in the community.” For example, the big unions did not know that Graham wanted liberals to keep their support for him low-key, and they were “hurting Graham and helping Hoey when they [kept] announcing support of the former and opposition to the latter.” She did not think ADA should put any pressure on Graham to vote for a permanent FEPC, either. Finally, there was the communication issue, both between the national office and Hopkins, and between Hopkins and North Carolinians. On the former, she pleaded for “a gold engraved

57 O’Hare to Hopkins, November 1, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
58 Ashby, Frank Porter Graham, 262.
59 Hopkins, memo to Tucker, October 24, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
statement signed by the Attorney General that ADA is not a subversive organization and has never been investigated by Congress or the FBI?! I could save about one day a week’s talking time with such a gimmick.” On the latter, she kept losing potential members because they did not want to join an integrated organization. One possible solution to this problem was a change in ADA printed material. She suggested not issuing ADA publications “which over-emphasized civil rights even for the Northern member, and was particularly repulsive to our over-sensitive Southern liberal.” Sensitivity to southern sensibilities would “ease our [recruiting] problem somewhat” without forcing ADA to compromise its principles.60

What made Hopkins’ job even tougher under the circumstances was that the national ADA leadership appeared to be turning a blind eye to Hopkins’ political analysis. For instance, when Loeb reported on Hopkins’ work to the ADA Executive Committee, he painted a fairly positive picture. “It was Miss Hopkins’ feeling that the work was increasingly promising. She felt that there was a good chance of organizing six additional Chapters in North Carolina.” He recommended that “that another three months be given to organizing in North Carolina as a testing ground for organizational work in the South, and that ADA later give consideration to

60 Hopkins, memo to Tucker, October 24, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers. This topic was of particular importance to Hopkins, and she would continue to emphasize it. In late November, she implored Loeb’s assistant, John F. P. Tucker, to pass along a message to those in charge of writing ADA’s platform at its annual convention. “Please move the civil rights plank further down in the draft and in the proof sheets that go to the printers, so it won’t appear on the first page of Where We Stand [the pamphlet ADA distributed to members and interested parties which contained its platform]. I believe I mentioned this in my very 1st report, and that simple little gimmick has made WWS utterly useless to me as organizing material. I bring it up now because in Jerry Carter’s words . . . a Southerner who read everything else and then read our civil rights plank would not mind too much, but when that’s the first thing he reads, he either tears the pamphlet up or reads the remaining material with a closed mind.” Hopkins, memo to Tucker, November 27, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
continuing this work during Senator Graham’s primary campaign if opposition developed.”61 At the same time, Loeb was writing Lillian Smith about her recently published Killers of the Dream and telling the Georgian that he was “certainly anything but an authority on the Southern problem myself” and that “this ADA job is sometimes heartbreaking, very often discouraging.”62

There are two possibilities: either Hopkins was sending mixed messages to Loeb in her correspondence and in their one-on-one meetings, or Hopkins was telling him the bleak truth about North Carolina and Loeb was ignoring her reports. The latter scenario seems more likely. Given the negativity in Hopkins’ written reports, it seems unlikely that she would make false claims about new chapters and fund-raising in face-to-face meetings or correspondence with her superiors.

Another sign of Hopkins’ lack of enthusiasm about North Carolina was her willingness to travel to Miami in early November. Robert Beeler, a part-time employee with the New York Stock Exchange who lived in Miami during the winter, informed Hopkins that “our local group down here [was] about to give birth to a new ADA chapter.”63 The group in Miami had spent much of the year gathering names and raising money for a new chapter, and they wanted to “make [their] debut a gala affair,” possibly including Senator Humphrey or Franklin D. Roosevelt Jr. in a large, heavily advertised banquet to be held in early December.64

The national office thought it would be difficult, if not impossible, to get a nationally-known figure to Miami on such short notice, but Loeb did think it would be a good idea for

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61 Minutes for ADA Executive Committee meeting, October 31, 1949, reel 33, no. 63, ADA Papers.

62 Loeb to Lillian Smith, November 3, 1949, reel 50, no. 262, ADA Papers.

63 Beeler to Tucker, October 26, 1949, reel 61, no. 32, ADA Papers.

64 Beeler to Tucker, November 2, 1949, reel 61, no. 32, ADA Papers.
Hopkins to head south. As he told her, “we have never organized a single Chapter without knowing some of the people involved, and I think that it is well that we not make an exception in this case. Also, Florida might be very important, and it is just as well that the thing get[s] off to a good start.” According to Loeb, her Miami trip on ADA’s behalf was “just another incident which testifies to your devotion to ADA, and we are fully aware of it.” She was also aware of the political situation in Florida. Claude Pepper’s re-election to the Senate was a priority, especially since “he has been very friendly [with ADA] during the past year. He has been particularly friendly with [Humphrey], who has a great respect for him.” Pepper would not be a perfect candidate, particularly since it was likely that he would have to oppose civil rights legislation during the campaign. Nevertheless, ADA leaders thought his re-election was important to the overall success of their agenda.65

One thing the national office could count on from their people in Miami was enthusiasm. The events of the postwar period had convinced Beeler of the “immediate need for decisive political action to keep our country going on a sound basis; that seems to be very well recognized by most active progressives.” What set Beeler apart from many past ADA recruits was his desire to develop what he called “a long-range program which will produce an ultimate goal and a working philosophy for the liberal movement.” In short, Beeler wanted to turn ADA into a socialist organization. Beeler had been a member of the Socialist Party, and he was convinced that “the ADA economic program is practically socialist, although it stops short of public ownership of banks and the credit system and socialization of land.” Many of ADA’s conservative critics had labeled the organization as socialist, but Beeler did not see anything wrong with that label. If ADA chose to reject socialism, Beeler did not see “how it can get many

65 Loeb to Hopkins, November 8, 1949, reel 50, no. 264., ADA Papers.
new members or obtain anything more in the way of social progress than the present limited welfare legislation now pending in Congress,” and he “would feel inclined to help another organization” instead of ADA.66

Beeler wanted ADA to operate more like the British Fabian Society, but Loeb balked at his ideas. Beeler’s “doctrinaire” approach to political action concerned Loeb in light of his summer tour of Europe. In mid-October 1949, he told Beeler that “there is much to be said for the kind of non-doctrinaire liberalism that has been in the American tradition as against the doctrinaire variety which is current in Europe.” The former was much more likely to win elections, though Loeb acknowledged that long-term political education was important to the long-term success of liberalism.67 Most liberals in Miami were not socialists, nor did they want ADA to become a “Fabian” organization, but the fact that one of their leaders was proposing such radical ideas did not bode well for the Miami chapter’s effectiveness.

Despite these ominous signs, Hopkins traveled to Miami in November. When she arrived, she found that the leadership in South Florida was far from ideal. She wrote that Max Singer, the organizing committee’s executive secretary and a Deputy Commissioner of the Dade County Department of Motor Vehicles, “was organizing ADA as a political machine and primarily from the motive of self-interest; and [he] had planned a chapter with segregated white and negro branches.” Singer wanted to use ADA as a launching pad for his own political ambitions, and he had taken advantage of the relative disinterest of the rest of the Miami group.68 Singer had also completely ignored the local labor unions, which forced Hopkins to “[talk] personally with every

66 Beeler to Loeb, November 11, 1949, reel 61, no. 32, ADA Papers.
67 Loeb to Beeler, November 17, 1949, reel 61, no. 32, ADA Papers.
68 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, November 27, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
AFL representative who was halfway progressive and who could be seen in two days.” She also talked with people at the American Jewish Congress, the Dade County Democratic Party, and the University of Miami, where thirty students turned out for Hopkins’ lunchtime speech.

Hopkins also ran afoul of local government over her desire to hold an integrated executive committee meeting. She told Loeb that Singer had already publicized the meeting in a mass mailing, but “[he] had chosen a meeting place which does not allow non-segregated meetings, in a town—Coral Gables—in which a negro [sic] is not allowed after 6:00 p.m. It was impossible to secure the cooperation of either the Coral Gables mayor, which [University of Miami student James Strachan] tried, or the Police Department, which [Singer] tried halfheartedly. Under the circumstances, I compromised by saying we wouldn’t try to have negroes in the audience but would have a couple negro speakers.” Singer’s opposition to ADA’s integrationist policies made him unacceptable as the driving force behind the chapter. She did not want Singer to resign from ADA over this issue, however, so she passed the issue off to the national office and “told him we would postpone the question until December 3rd, when the Executive Board would meet and could make a policy decision for all Southern chapters to follow.” She knew the Executive Board had no intention of doing this, but she wanted to avoid the negative publicity that might result from Singer’s resignation.69

Hopkins was determined to “get control of the organization away from Singer, at the same time insuring that we would have some active people to carry on the work.” Her most important ally in this work would turn out to be Kurt Singer (no relation to Max), a writer from Miami Beach who worked for the Speakers’ Bureau of the United Nations and had emigrated to the

69 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, November 27, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
United States from Germany (via Sweden) during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{70} When Hopkins inquired as to whether Kurt would assist her in forcing Max Singer out of the Miami chairmanship, his positive response pleasantly surprised her. Kurt Singer had grown tired of Max’s use of ADA as his own personal political machine, and the two were able to quickly minimize Max Singer’s role in the next series of ADA meetings. They even convinced Max to drop his objections to integrated ADA meetings. Once that had been accomplished, however, Hopkins was unsure of what to do with this “small time politician in a patronage job,” as one unidentified Miami liberal referred to him. He was anti-Communist, he did support Pepper’s re-election, and he did have a following in Miami. In the end, Hopkins thought Max Singer would do less damage to the liberal cause in southern Florida if she could keep him on the fringes of the Miami chapter during the 1950 election cycle.\textsuperscript{71}

As Hopkins attempted to put the Miami situation on a more solid foundation, she continued her work in North Carolina. In some cases, she could not solve the problems she encountered. For example, the Greensboro chapter had blatantly disregarded national rules and set up two organizational structures, one for white members and another for blacks. Hopkins appreciated that the Greensboro chapter was willing to accept black members, but having a white chairman and a black chairman only perpetuated the notion that southern ADA chapters were going to be perpetually segregated.\textsuperscript{72} Like most liberal southerners, the Greensboro ADA was attempting to follow the path of least resistance, not wanting to provoke an open confrontation on the South’s patterns of racial relations until they believed that conditions were more palatable.

\textsuperscript{70} Beeler to Loeb, May 22, 1949, reel 61, no. 32, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{71} Hopkins, memo to Loeb, November 27, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{72} Hopkins, “Progress Report” memo to Tucker, December 6, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
Lillian Smith, whose 1949 book *Killers of the Dream* had received widespread acclaim from liberals (and ringing endorsements from Loeb, National Chairman Robert LaFollette, and other ADA leaders), was an anomaly in her passionate denunciation of segregation.73 Hopkins was beginning to believe that expecting liberal southerners to follow Smith’s lead was unrealistic.

She had become as frustrated with the South as Barney Taylor had been, and she did not hide her disappointment and anger from her correspondents in the national office. After what she called “months of thinking about this [Southern] problem,” she had concluded that “we [should] give up our policy of non-segregated meetings in the South.” She thought ADA needed to concentrate on winning elections, and “studying the history of other organizations which have tried to work here on a non-segregated basis and my own experiences in trying to organize ADA” led her to abandon the idea of integrated chapters. She wanted to keep working in the South because of its importance to national politics, believing that “in the long run, liberals are either going to have to defeat every Republican outside the South and replace him with a Democrat in Congress; or else we are going to have to start sending a substantial number of Fair Deal Democrats to Congress from the South.” ADA had to encourage southern liberals to seize control of the Democratic Party, but at the end of 1949 all Hopkins could see was “a weakly organized group of factions” that could not compete with southern conservatives. She realized that abandoning integrated chapters was a drastic step for ADA to take, but since “Negroes will not come to our meetings unless we go out and practically force them to,” the practical effect of the change was minor.74

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74 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, December 14, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
Hopkins was imploring the national office to think in a practical manner, and LaFollette agreed that it was not in ADA’s interest “to make a business of soliciting, urging, or forcing Negroes in the South to join ADA Chapters if they don’t want to.” However, LaFollette wanted ADA to stick to its principles and strive for integrated chapters. He wrote, “Any decision to remain in the South on any other basis is a surrender of principle which I do not think ADA should make in the interest of political expedience.”

Loeb agreed with LaFollette, telling Hopkins that ADA could not sponsor a local chapter that excluded black members, at least not without “some kind of a meeting with our Negro friends, in order to determine on a policy which would be carried out with their understanding and on their recommendations.”

Hopkins thought the idea of a conference with black leaders to discuss changes in ADA policy was fine, as long as southerners were included in the conversation. However, she also thought Loeb, LaFollette, and the rest of the Washington staff were not her most important audience. Her biggest problem was that southerners were beginning, once again, to defend their society and their traditions in the wake of the 1948 Dixiecrat campaign. Some historians have dated the “backlash” against integrationist liberalism to the 1954 Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. Board of Education. Hopkins would have disagreed with this historical verdict. She wrote, “Many, many persons have pointed out to me the severely aggravated feelings on the race question, especially non-segregation. There is a rising tide of feeling [since the 1948 election]; the atmosphere of fear is heavier; the consequences for a person who violates the traditional customs are more serious, in terms of earning a living, keeping his friends and maintaining his

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75 LaFollette, memo to Loeb, December 19, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
76 Loeb to Hopkins, December 29, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
social standing.” The national staff needed to understand that “southerners do not think of non-segregation as a civil rights question, or a question of justice, but as a social question.”

If they did not wake up to the consequences of their philosophy, the results would be disastrous, both for the organization and for the national hopes of anti-Communist liberals. “It would not be hard to elect liberal Congressmen from any of the larger cities in the South, with proper organization.” However, that organization did not exist, for reasons that were peculiar to the South. As Hopkins wrote, “in Chattanooga, we have either two or four Negro members in a total of 80, and there is usually one Negro at our meetings. Think for a minute what real purpose is accomplished by this token attendance? Only one, which is to keep away a number of white liberals who would come in otherwise.” She believed that ADA needed to take a more practical approach to political organization in the South, which meant working with potential members and supporters instead of alienating them. She had returned to the question that had plagued ADA’s approach to the South: how important were its principles?

At the same time that she was trying to persuade Loeb on the segregation issue, she wanted to change to the focus of the southern office. On December 31, 1949, she informed the national office that she wanted to move her base of operations from North Carolina to Florida, specifically Miami. Her time in south Florida had convinced her that “Miami is almost certainly the only place in the South where we can build a strong and sizable ADA chapter, comparable to, say, the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh chapters,” each of which had several hundred members. It was also the only place in the South where ADA could raise a substantial amount of money. Hopkins also liked Miami because it was the least “southern” city in the region. As she put it, “It

78 Hopkins, first memo to Loeb, December 31, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
79 Hopkins, first memo to Loeb, December 31, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
is more cosmopolitan statewide, due to the influx of Northern residents.” Even though there were still questions about some prominent Democrats and officeholders in Florida, she was convinced that they would work for ADA.\footnote{Hopkins, second memo to Loeb, December 31, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.}

The final reason Hopkins wanted to work in Florida was political. She knew that Frank Graham had not been the most attentive candidate in shoring up his political base and dissuading potential rivals for the Democratic nomination, and even Governor Scott expressed his surprise at Graham’s unwillingness to acknowledge that someone might oppose him. At the end of 1949, he had no organization in place, no campaign headquarters, and no plans to raise money for a campaign.\footnote{Pleasants and Burns, \textit{Frank Porter Graham and the 1950 Senate Race}, 51-52.} Nevertheless, Hopkins had convinced herself that “not only is it entirely possible Graham will be unopposed, but even if he has opposition, both conservatives and liberals predict he will win in a walk.”\footnote{Hopkins, second memo to Loeb, December 31, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.} Her North Carolina correspondents had apparently reinforced this impression, and the withdrawal of former Senator William Umstead from the Graham race for health reasons strengthened the idea that Graham would have an easy time winning his Senate race.\footnote{Pleasants and Burns, \textit{Frank Porter Graham and the 1950 Senate Race}, 53-54.}

Claude Pepper’s race for a third full term in the Senate, however, was another matter. He had a serious opponent, two-term Congressman George Smathers of Miami, who had actually worked for Pepper’s 1938 campaign while he was a law student at the University of Florida. He had won his seat in Congress as an anti-Communist Democrat, and he had broken with the Dixiecrats in 1948 by supporting President Truman at the Philadelphia convention and campaigning for him. By October 1949, he had decided to run against Pepper, though his
personal connections to the Senator were still strong. In fact, Smathers had met with Pepper in the summer of 1949 to tell him that “a lot of people have approached me about” running for the Senate in 1950, only to have Pepper dismiss the notion of a Smathers campaign. Pepper’s victories in 1938 and 1944 had deluded the senator into thinking that he could convince the voters of Florida to overlook what they might consider “troublesome” views on foreign policy and civil rights and re-elect him anyway.\(^{84}\)

Pepper may not have sensed the danger Smathers posed, but his supporters, including Hopkins, did. Contrasting his situation with Graham’s, Hopkins told Loeb that Pepper “will definitely have opposition unless a miracle intervenes; and will have a hard race. Again, Miami is the toughest locale for Pepper in ’50 for several reasons, including the fact that Smathers is Miami’s native son and congressman.” She conceded that liberals “feel less strongly about Pepper than Graham for obvious reasons; but, he does have the most consistently liberal voting record of any Southern Senator.”\(^{85}\)

The obstacles facing Hopkins in Florida would be similar to those she faced in North Carolina, especially since Miami “needs plenty of attention to get started right and to build up in a reasonably short period to its potential membership, effectiveness and lucrativeness.” Only a full-time organizer could provide this attention, and she believed that “Miami is too important to take a chance on haphazard organizing by committee members who can give it only such time as they can spare from their own jobs.” Nevertheless, she found the Florida situation far preferable to North Carolina. She agreed wholeheartedly with organizers who had worked with organizations like the American Veterans Committee (AVC), who had told her that “North

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\(^{84}\) Clark, “Road to Defeat,” 137-152 (quote on 150).

\(^{85}\) Hopkins, second memo to Loeb, December 31, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
Carolina was the hardest state to organize” in the South. She thought it was time for a change of scenery.86

Hopkins’ request for a transfer put the ADA national staff in an interesting position. As Jim Loeb told her, “Although we are looking for another organizer in California, you are now the only full-time organizer on our staff.” It was a sign of how much importance ADA had placed on the southern project. However, her disillusionment with North Carolina liberals was clear, and Loeb thought “it is apparent that you are somewhat discouraged and that you have sought a way of getting out of the State,” no matter how useful her work had been. The real problem for Loeb was that ADA had never planned on having a full-time organizer in Florida, and she could not move without first consulting the Executive Committee or National Board.87

In the end, Loeb allowed Hopkins to temporarily move her base of operations to Miami, since “it would seem that there are financial possibilities in Miami.” He even suggested that she should organize a fund-raiser for the end of February, and he told her he would try to convince Hubert Humphrey to speak at the gathering. In order to maximize the benefit to the Miami chapter, Loeb even offered to take care of the Senator’s travel expenses and allow the chapter to keep one hundred percent of the profits from the dinner. If the Miami chapter did not succeed in establishing itself, however, Loeb told Hopkins that ADA would declare her “experiment, perhaps not a failure, but certainly not sufficiently a success to warrant its continuation,” and terminate her contract, which was scheduled to expire on January 27, 1950.88

86 Hopkins, second memo to Loeb, December 31, 1949, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
87 Loeb to Hopkins, January 11, 1950, reel 50, no. 276, ADA Papers.
88 Loeb to Hopkins, January 11, 1950, reel 50, no. 276, ADA Papers.
Hopkins understood the time and financial constraints under which she would be operating in Miami, but she wanted to continue her work for ADA beyond the timeframe Loeb had suggested, though she was unsure about how to proceed. At first, she wanted to borrow organizational techniques from the CIO, which had successfully created new locals on an ad-hoc basis since its founding in the 1930s. However, ADA’s financial constraints would not allow Loeb to fund an organizer for “several months” in a single community, as the unions had. She also thought a targeted campaign that concentrated on major cities like Houston, Atlanta, and Miami would also be feasible. She believed that “due to their size, those cities should be potential ADA material because there are a sufficient number of liberals to form an effective chapter.” The problem with that idea was the size of the territory an organizer would have to cover, which would necessitate a large travel budget that ADA could not afford.89

The only other option, as Hopkins saw it, was “to send an organizer into a city whenever National receives information that there is an interested group of individuals ready and willing to organize a chapter.” There would be no permanent staff member working in the region, but ADA would always have someone available in case an interested liberal asked the national office for literature, membership cards, or other material that might be useful in getting people excited about ADA. Such an approach would cost less, and it would “almost certainly result” in the founding of a new chapter. It was a less ambitious alternative to what ADA had been attempting to do for the previous three years, but given the modest results their approach had shown to this point, a change in tactics was reasonable. Hopkins even offered to be the on-call organizer for the South.90

89 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, January 18, 1950, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
90 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, January 18, 1950, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
Hopkins’ planning for her future with ADA hit a serious roadblock in mid-January 1950, however, when Dr. Thomas Wood, a professor in the government department at the University of Miami and the Miami chapter’s temporary chairman, told the national office about the chapter’s future plans. “It is our belief that at the present time it is unfortunately out of the question that we should undertake the financial responsibility for an organizer although we have reason to believe that after the middle of the year or perhaps somewhat sooner we shall be in a position to aid substantially in underwriting an organizer for this area.” The terms Hopkins had suggested for the chapter’s fundraising plans were generous, particularly in light of the national organization’s financial troubles, but “in the immediate future our funds will scarcely be adequate to carry on our activities here in Greater Miami.” This was not necessarily an admission of failure for the Miami chapter. In fact, the chapter was receptive to the idea of a fundraiser in February or March. However, he did not think Senator Humphrey would “have the drawing power in this area” to attract potential members or donors. Instead, he suggested Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. or Democratic Senator Herbert Lehman of New York, noting that the two men “could better promote [their] New York interest by a speech in Miami than in any other city in the country outside of New York.” He believed that getting the chapter off to a good start was critical, especially since the Pepper-Smathers election was beginning to heat up.91

In Loeb’s mind, Wood’s rejection of a full-time organizer for the Miami chapter and his desire to have someone other than Humphrey speak at an ADA banquet meant that “our proposed solution to the Hopkins problem has collapsed.” Since Miami would not underwrite her activities, he wrote Hopkins, “We find no alternative to that of merely saying, as I suggested in my previous letter, that the Southern experiment, without being a total failure by any manner

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91 Dr. Thomas Wood to Loeb, January 19, 1950, reel 61, no. 32, ADA Papers.
of means, did not prove to be sufficiently successful to warrant its continuance.” He did not hesitate to add that “we have all appreciated your devotion to ADA and the self-sacrificing job you have done for us in the most difficult section of the country,” but it was little consolation for the acknowledgment that her “Southern Office” would be closing at the end of January 1950.92

Theoretically, this should have ended Hopkins’ employment with ADA, and given her lack of success in both North Carolina and Florida, an immediate change of scenery would have been understandable. However, she refused to accept defeat without making an effort at holding the Miami banquet as scheduled. She still believed that “the group, particularly the university and labor members, underestimated the financial possibilities of a Miami Beach cocktail party and Fair Deal meeting in Miami with Humphrey.” With that in mind, she made an arrangement with Senator Pepper’s campaign team in Dade County to split her time between ADA work and the Pepper campaign, with her salary of one hundred dollars a week divided equally. The Miami chapter would cover the ADA salary once it had raised sufficient funds from the late February banquet, and she asked the national office to cover her salary until then.93

There is a palpable sense of desperation in Hopkins’ efforts to keep the southern “experiment” alive. Whatever her reasons for wanting to stay in Florida, Hopkins was determined to make the Miami chapter work, and she did everything in her power to convince Senator Humphrey to come south for the February banquet. However, in a series of telegrams attempting to make final arrangements with the senator, it became clear that the national office “[did] not see [a] sufficiently definite prospect of Humphrey visit Miami to make feasible

92 Loeb to Hopkins, January 21, 1950, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.

93 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, January 23, 1950, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
undertaking arrangements we have discussed for you."94 With that, Hopkins’ role as an ADA organizer came to an end.

This was a depressing end to the “experiment,” but ADA leaders were keeping their options open. A confidential memo from Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. to Joseph Rauh and Jim Loeb hints at another possible course of action in the South. Schlesinger sent the memo shortly after he had traveled to Chattanooga for that city’s celebration of Roosevelt Day, which ADA had created to honor the former president, in January 1950. He was positive about the meeting, especially the way in which ADA members in Chattanooga had shown they were “genuine,” meaning that they “[welcomed] northern prodding and [acknowledged] that the South would do very little without it.”95

Still, there were problems in the South that he could not ignore. At the forefront was the civil rights issue. Schlesinger agreed with Hopkins, saying that while no one thought ADA should modify its support for equal employment opportunity or desegregation, “life is made more difficult for [southern liberals] by anything which makes ADA seem exclusively or largely concerned with the civil rights issue.” He disagreed with the ADA consensus on Lillian Smith, for while most people in the national office loved her, “there seems to be some feeling [in the South] that while Lillian is an admirable moral character, that her thinking and influence are somewhat irrelevant in the south to those concerned with political problems and particularly with influencing political leaders in a liberal direction.” Finally, he suggested that ADA make an effort to make southern liberals a more significant part of ADA’s intellectual product. In other words, he wanted a distinguished group of southern liberals to “prepare a program, addressed

94 La Follette, telegram to Hopkins, February 2, 1950, reel 50, no. 264, ADA Papers.
95 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., confidential memo to Rauh and Loeb, January 25, 1950, reel 78, no. 95, ADA Papers.
particularly to the economic and political problems of the South, pointing out what could be done by federal, state and local action to improve the regional position of the South. Civil rights could be put in its appropriate place in that program. [ADA leaders would then] call a meeting in the South with representatives from all existing ADA chapters, and have them adopt the program.  "

This was an intriguing suggestion from an important liberal, but its timing meant that nothing would come from it. It would have been much better for all concerned if ADA had crafted this sort of program immediately after the 1949 Atlanta conference. This would have ensured that southerners would understand exactly where ADA stood on issues that mattered to them. Such a platform coming from the likes of Frank Graham, historian C. Vann Woodward, political scientist V. O. Key, and Lowell Mellett, who had written the Report on the South in 1938 for President Roosevelt, all of whom Schlesinger suggested, would have given Hopkins a head start in convincing interested southerners that ADA was right for them. Instead, she organized the region much as Barney Taylor had. Like Taylor, she had to spend too much time finding out where liberals were and not enough time trying to prod them to join local chapters. When liberals proved unwilling to listen, either because they disagreed with parts of the ADA platform or because they remembered the examples of other failed liberal groups, Hopkins’ frustration level grew.

Hopkins’ final memo to ADA headquarters in Washington was a testament to that frustration. She thought any further work in the region had two major obstacles to overcome. First, “particularly in the smaller cities, it takes too long to find enough real liberals who will serve on an organizing committee.” Independent liberals had no stake in ADA, and politicians with liberal tendencies thought identification with ADA would hurt them in the long run. Frank

96 Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., confidential memo to Rauh and Loeb, January 25, 1950, reel 78, no. 95, ADA Papers.
Graham’s unwillingness to associate with ADA publicly was a perfect example of that. The other obstacle was that “when you do get a group sold on organizing ADA in their community, the organizer has already found a large number of the available liberals and crossed off other possibilities. Then they meet lack of interest in some of the remaining people and fear or distaste in others.” She had personal experience with the often bitter personal rivalries within the liberal communities of North Carolina and Florida, and they prevented a significant number of liberals from being interested in dealing with ADA even if they did agree with the program.97

She also thought that it would be difficult for ADA to attract a new organizer to work in the South. She wrote that anyone who took on this job had to have the best qualities of a successful salesman, including “the ability to bounce back from discouragement and the ability to persuade people to ‘buy’ your product, idea, project or whatever.” The new organizer would also have to deal with a staggering amount of clerical work, including bookkeeping, correspondence with chapters throughout the South, and the memos and letters that kept the national office informed about his or her activities. She thought a potential solution to this problem was “to spend a little more money on part time clerical assistance or public stenographers,” as opposed to making it necessary “for the professional to do all the clerical work.”98

The biggest obstacle to finding her replacement, according to Hopkins, was the dismal track record ADA had built over the previous two-and-a-half years. Two separate southern organizers, based in three different states, had accomplished almost nothing. The decision to focus her attention on North Carolina had much to recommend it, especially since Frank Graham

97 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, February 23, 1950, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
98 Hopkins, memo to Loeb, February 23, 1950, reel 40, no. 137, ADA Papers.
had received his unexpected appointment to the U.S. Senate not long before she got the job. ADA wanted Graham elected for a full term in 1950, and functioning chapters supporting the former college president seemed like they could only help him. Unfortunately for Hopkins, long-standing rivalries within the liberal community and a general lack of interest in many North Carolina cities meant that those chapters which Hopkins did found during her year in the state were small, ineffectual, and unable to raise money for their activities.

In addition, Hopkins and other Graham supporters had to deal with their candidate’s seeming indifference with his political fate, which would prove costly to him during the 1950 Democratic primaries. He won the first primary, but his failure to capture a majority forced a run-off with conservative lawyer Willis Smith in June. Smith’s attempts to portray Graham as a supporter of FEPC and a “tool” of labor unions made this race one of the most notoriously racist campaigns of the century, and Smith’s narrow victory confirmed many of the worst impressions liberals had about North Carolina in particular and the South more generally. The other southern candidate ADA supported, Florida Senator Claude Pepper, also lost a racially-charged campaign to George Smathers, though Pepper’s deficiencies as a candidate and his difficulty in understanding changes in the foreign-policy climate in his state also contributed to his defeat. Graham and Pepper were the southern candidates on which ADA, and most other liberals, had invested so much hope, and both lost. Not only did they lose, they did so in a manner that was terribly discouraging for liberals who had hoped the changes which World War II had caused might have some political effects on the region. It was now clear that conservative politics still had tremendous appeal in the South, and that liberalism had not made as much headway as its adherents believed it had.

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CHAPTER 6

Charles C. Alexander’s history of the 1950s concludes that the decade was one in which government and society attempted to “hold the line” against the expansion of the welfare state at home and Communism abroad.1 Richard H. Pells’s intellectual history of the same decade broadly agrees with Alexander’s thesis and extends it to the intellectuals who challenged the conservative nature of the era. Because of their “disenchantment with the political and cultural radicalism of the 1930s,” liberal intellectuals “neither proposed nor trusted any sweeping solutions to the difficulties of their time.”2 The problems Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) liberals faced in the South in the aftermath of World War II had not responded to “sweeping solutions.” The result was a period in which the organization’s leaders eschewed grand organizational plans in favor of smaller-scale efforts.

However, ADA leaders working during the 1950s did not give up on the South. They still believed that if they did enough work, southerners would finally join the national consensus in favor of their program. One of the most important places where ADA tested this belief was Texas. The state offered some intriguing possibilities for liberals. Texas was a right-to-work state, as was North Carolina and Florida, but its larger population (7.7 million in 1950) meant a pool of unionized workers that numbered in the tens of thousands and was reliably liberal. Texas was also more culturally diverse than the rest of the South. Its black population was much smaller than in other southern states, but the southern half of the state was between ten and

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fifteen percent Hispanic, and Texas liberals had begun to appeal to black and Hispanic constituencies after World War II. As a result, the state’s congressional delegation, which included House Speaker Sam Rayburn and Senate Democratic leader Lyndon Johnson, were not as beholden to the racist politics prevalent in other states. Liberals also thought they would benefit from Johnson’s national political ambitions, which they believed would encourage him to transcend the racial and social conservatism of his southern colleagues in the Senate. In a sense, Johnson fulfilled these liberal hopes when he almost single-handedly steered the 1957 Civil Rights Act through a deeply divided Congress.3

There were promising signs for liberals in Texas, but other trends seemed to indicate that they would have a tough time reforming the state. The dominance of conservatives, most of whom had made their money through the oil business and related industries such as insurance and banking, had faced continued challenges from liberal and progressive interests dating as far back as the Farmer’s Alliance movement of the 1880s. The New Deal of the 1930s was another liberal attempt to challenge established national and state interests, with mixed success. This history of political combat affected Texas dramatically, though that change was difficult for outsiders to notice because these battles almost always took place within the Democratic Party.4

A combination of policy differences and personal antagonism fueled the divisions within the Texas party that emerged after the end of the war. Democrat Allan Shivers, who served six

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years as the state’s governor between 1950 and 1956, was the state’s most powerful conservative. He brooked no opposition to his rule over the party. He and his conservative allies thwarted liberal challenges to the status quo and made sure that Texas Democrats who served in Washington did not become too independent under the influence of national liberals. Shivers’ two most significant political victories came during the 1952 and 1956 presidential elections. While Rayburn and Johnson worked for Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson, Shivers delivered the state to Republican nominee Dwight Eisenhower, a native Texan with whom he had served during World War II.\(^5\)

His most important liberal opponent at the state level was Ralph Yarborough. This county court judge began his feud with Shivers in 1952, when the governor refused to allow him to run for state attorney general against Shivers’ hand-picked candidate. Angered by Shivers’ arrogance, Yarborough ran for governor instead, winning 36% of the vote as the liberal candidate in the Democratic primary. He ran against Shivers again two years later, this time winning 47% of the primary vote. By 1954, Yarborough had become the champion of liberal causes in the state. Yarborough’s platform called for workers’ right to organize, expansion of unemployment benefits, an end to restrictive electoral laws that discouraged political participation for poor, black, and Hispanic voters, higher tax rates for upper-income Texans, and regulation of the oil and gas industries. Some of these issues were unique to the state, but the overall philosophy that governed liberal thinking on these issues placed them squarely within the mainstream of national liberal politics in the era.\(^6\)


In this complicated and combative political climate, ADA leaders wanted to play a part, though its leaders were critically lacking in information that could guide their efforts to organize liberals in Texas and turn the tide toward liberal politics. ADA officials wanted to join the fight for liberalism in Texas, but they were not sure that the state’s voters were ready to reject the conservatives that had been in power for decades. Political scientist (and Texas native) V. O. Key was convinced that there were possibilities for southern liberalism, particularly among the working classes and ethnic minorities. However, his native state’s one-party system effectively excluded liberals from participation, which helped conservative Democrats to monopolize both elected offices and the bureaucracy. Liberals wanted to break up this monopoly, but they also wanted to work within the system rather than try to overthrow it. In this effort, they could count on fierce resistance to expanding the electorate, since conservatives knew that expanded voter participation would hurt their hold on political power.7

After Shivers’ frustrating usurpation of the Democratic machine in Texas on behalf of Eisenhower in 1952, ADA leaders turned to George Lambert, a veteran liberal-labor activist and former Socialist, in an effort to learn more about Texas politics.8 Between 1953 and 1956, in a series of detailed memoranda and letters to ADA’s national office in Washington, Lambert reported on the personality conflicts within the Texas Democratic Party, his efforts to expand ADA’s role among Texas liberals, and liberal efforts to take back the Democratic Party for “real” Democrats in the short term, prior to the 1956 presidential election.

7 Davidson, Race and Class, 19.

Lambert’s involvement with ADA dated to 1946, the year before it reorganized out of the ashes of the wartime anti-fascist and anti-Communist Union for Democratic Action (UDA). His wife Latane, a long-time political and labor activist in her own right, joined the Dallas Committee for Democratic Action (UDA/ADA’s local chapter) and quickly became involved in the chapter’s attempts to bolster liberalism in the area. She coordinated a series of fund-raising parties in local homes to raise money for the Austin-based *Texas Spectator* weekly newspaper.9 She campaigned for liberal candidates for the Dallas County Democratic executive committee, established connections between ADA and other prominent liberal groups (including the NAACP),10 and worked unsuccessfully to secure the re-nomination of Leland Olds as chairman of the Federal Power Commission in 1949, a major liberal cause of the time thwarted in no small part by the efforts of newly-elected Texas Senator Lyndon Johnson.11

Despite the efforts of Mrs. Lambert and other Texas liberals, ADA’s record in the state consisted of failed measures, organization in fits and starts, and electoral setbacks that disillusioned many who wanted to change the state’s political fortunes. The Dallas chapter could count on little from people at the national level, largely because of ADA’s chronic financial problems. Declining contributions from labor unions and increasing expenditures forced ADA

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9 Latane Lambert to Badger Reed, March 8, 1947, box 2, folder 8, George and Latane Lambert Papers, Texas Labor Archives, University of Texas at Arlington Special Collections (hereafter cited as Lambert Papers).

10 Minutes of DCDA meeting, March 14, 1948, box 2, folder 8, Lambert Papers.

to operate with tens of thousands of dollars in debt through most of the 1950s. As a result, ADA’s national ambitions went largely unrealized.

One of these continuing ambitions was the creation of a network of southern chapters. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, ADA’s leaders firmly believed that “the whole political situation [in the South] is chaotic. . . . the liberal-labor coalition can and should make itself felt.” North Carolina liberal activist John Thomason, whom ADA executive secretary Jim Loeb had hired in the summer of 1948 to travel the South assessing the organization’s prospects in the region, had originally wanted to stop in Dallas during his trip. However, he was not sure that Texas should be included in his jurisdiction. It was Dallas liberal Ken Ellinger “expressed the opinion that Texas should be lumped together with several other states for a Southwestern region,” that would include Arkansas and Oklahoma. As things stood in the early 1950s, ADA’s southern organizers had concentrated on organizing chapters in Tennessee, Florida, and North Carolina, ignoring Texas almost completely.

Despite these obstacles, by the early 1950s liberals had come to believe that something had to be done to force liberal political change in Texas. As one correspondent wrote just before the 1952 election, “Isn’t there someone who can put the South right concerning [Democratic presidential candidate Adlai] Stevenson?” It was with this in mind that George Lambert approached ADA’s leadership with a proposition that would make him one of their most

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14 John Thomason to James A. Loeb, December 22, 1948, reel 51, no. 301, ADA Papers.

15 R.V. Shoemaker to ADA, October 13, 1952, reel 49, no. 261, ADA Papers.
important political operatives as part of ADA’s plan to make a political survey of the South before the 1954 and 1956 elections.

In early 1953, Lambert had become the Dallas chapter’s executive secretary. His activities included soliciting the national office’s help with getting prominent liberals to make speeches in Dallas on ADA’s behalf, fighting off accusations that ADA was a Communist front, and assisting liberals in Austin as they tried to create their own chapter. He asked the national office for local subscription lists to liberal publications such as *The New Republic* and *The Nation*, and he wanted ADA leaders to invite prominent Texas liberals, including state representative Maury Maverick, Jr. and San Antonio Voters’ League chairman Henry B. Gonzalez, to the organization’s 1953 national convention. He believed that these people “should be members of ADA,” and they were the “logical people to take the initiative in establishing ADA Chapters in their communities.”

Lambert’s work pleased the Dallas organization so much that chapter chairman Pat Dailey wrote ADA Executive Secretary Reginald Zalles on May 9, 1953, proposing to put Lambert’s talents to better use. Responding to the national office’s appeal for a Dallas delegation to the upcoming ADA convention in Washington, Dailey wrote, “we are at present in the position of having to determine whether it might not be better for us to use our limited available funds for continuing and expanding our program here. The expenses of a convention delegation would divert a needed part of our resources from our total program and obligations here.” Instead, Dailey wanted to use the chapter’s funds to organize ADA chapters throughout Texas, with Lambert acting as the paid organizer for the state. The Dallas chapter would contribute 50% of Lambert’s salary and expenses, the national office in Washington would provide the rest, and

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16 George Lambert to Reginald Zalles, March 22, 1953 and April 14, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
Lambert would organize chapters, report on local conditions, and work to bolster liberalism in Texas.¹⁷

On May 24, 1953, Lambert spoke on behalf of this idea at the monthly National Board meeting, arguing that the need for organizing Texas (and the Southwest more generally) was acute and needed help from the national level to succeed. Lambert carried the Dailey proposal with him, along with details left out of Dailey’s letter. The Dallas chapter proposed that Lambert’s contract would run for six months and pay him $800 a month, half to be paid by Dallas and half to be paid by the national office.¹⁸

The timing of the Dallas proposal was perfect, since ADA leaders had just approved a larger project at the 1953 national convention. In June, Political Secretary Violet Gunther detailed the project in a memorandum to other top ADA officials. In an effort to better understand the South, ADA would “make a survey of liberal political strength in the Southern States.” Gunther reported that “the purpose of this survey would be to make an on-the-spot study of the Democratic Party in the several Southern States with a view to developing allies in what will be undoubtedly a major political struggle in ’56; i.e., the effort of the non-Fair Deal Southern Democrats to take over both the policy direction and the nominating machinery at the ’56 Democratic Convention.” Data collected in the survey would “be used as background for increased ADA work in the South and to establish state and local contacts, both as a continuing source of information and as a basis for cooperative work on mutually agreed-upon political objectives either at the state level in 1954 or particularly looking toward ’56.” The budget for

¹⁷ Patrick Dailey to Zalles, May 9, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.

¹⁸ Minutes to ADA National Board meeting, May 24, 1953, reel 46, no. 194, ADA Papers.
this project was $3,000, and ADA leaders’ willingness to spend such a sum on the survey shows how important they believed the South to be.\textsuperscript{19}

Lambert knew what he was getting himself into, especially in a conservative city such as Dallas. In March 1953, he told the national office that an editorial in the \textit{Dallas Morning News} had informed the Dallas chapter that their activities were being “watched.” As Lambert pointed out half-jokingly, “the editorial didn’t bother to mention who is doing the watching.” As far as Lambert could tell, “the newspapers haven’t been doing the ‘watching’ themselves since they have had no official reporters at our meetings in the past three months, and the only non-ADA people who have been at our meetings have been those associated with a group called ‘The Minute Women’ who have apparently set themselves up to investigate anything and anyone who could possibly be disapproved of by [Wisconsin Senator] Joe McCarthy.”\textsuperscript{20} Despite the political and organizational obstacles, he began soliciting Texas liberals and taking notes about the political developments in the state.

The job was difficult, as Lambert knew it would be. Part of the problem was that ADA, though affiliated with liberal Democrats in Texas, organized separately from them. The fortunes of the state’s Democratic Organizing Committee (DOC) were the top priority of most Texas liberals.\textsuperscript{21} Formed in May 1953, the Committee was meant to counter the strength of the Shivers-led conservative Democrats in the official Democratic organization of Texas. Lambert, like most liberals, wanted badly for it to succeed, but he worked for ADA, and they were paying

\textsuperscript{19} Violet Gunther, memo to Robert Nathan and Edward Hollander, “Political survey in the Southern States,” June 16, 1953, reel 39, no. 129, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{20} George Lambert to Gunther, March 7, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{21} George Lambert, memo to Hollander, “Report on Activities in Texas—June 1 to June 14,” June 14, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
his salary. Was Lambert attempting to build an independent liberal organization, or did local political conditions mean that taking energy and money away from loyalist Democrats would do more harm than good? Lambert’s employers in Dallas believed he was doing “an excellent job,” but the eventual goal of his work remained unclear.22

While leaders in Dallas and Washington worked to establish these long-term goals, Lambert’s plan for the summer of 1953 was to organize chapters in Fort Worth (where several Dallas chapter members already lived), San Antonio, Houston (where liberals had “complete control” of the local Democratic Party), Beaumont-Port Arthur (“the State’s only consistently liberal political stronghold of any size and importance for more than ten years”), and several other smaller communities. Lambert expected to spend two weeks in San Antonio and two weeks in Houston, indicating the breadth of the work he hoped to accomplish in those cities. The short-term goal was to assist the Democratic Organizing Committee of Texas in November at the state Democratic convention, when observers expected the conservative “Shivercrats” to maintain control of the party machinery.23

Lambert also provided ADA leaders with his detailed reports about matters of national interest. His first report covered Democratic national chairman Steve Mitchell’s tour of Texas in June 1953. Many liberals feared Mitchell’s visit, since none of them had been consulted before the trip. Lambert thought that Governor Shivers would use the trip to get back in the good graces of the party he had spurned in 1952, and liberals did not trust Rayburn or Johnson to lead the anti-Shivers movement. Johnson in particular was difficult to gauge, and Lambert believed that he “is a man without a Party and without visible means of support in Texas now,” alienating

22 Pat Dailey and Bette Morgan to Hollander, June 21, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.

23 “ORGANIZATIONAL PROSPECTS FOR SOUTHWESTERN STATES,” memo attached to Dailey and Morgan letter to Hollander, June 21, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
conservatives with his tepid support for Stevenson in 1952 and liberals with his conservative voting record in the Senate.24

In the end, however, Mitchell’s tour surprised Texas liberals. According to Lambert, Mitchell acknowledged the role the Organizing Committee had had in Stevenson’s 1952 campaign. Mitchell also noticed that Shivers and other conservatives stayed away from the events on the tour. Many of the conservatives went out of their way to denounce Mitchell publicly. “If there was no public embracing of the leaders of the Organizing Committee and of the Loyal Democrats who had fought hardest and done most of the work to keep the State’s electoral vote from being stolen from Roosevelt and Truman and Stevenson, at the same time there was no public or, as far as can be determined, private embracing of Shivers and the Shivercrats.”25 In an atmosphere where small liberal victories meant a great deal, Mitchell’s tour was an important success for Texas liberals.

By the summer of 1953, people outside of ADA were beginning to recognize Lambert as a potential source of information about Texas. In late July, Reporter magazine writer Dorothy Kahn contacted him seeking information that for a possible upcoming issue on Texas politics. Lambert’s reply to Kahn was pessimistic. He thought not much had changed in the state since 1938, with conservatives dominating the state politics and challenged by a much smaller group of liberals and loyal Democrats. Republicans were a non-factor, having thrown their support behind conservative Democrats for political and financial reasons. Lambert told Kahn that one local newspaper even speculated that “the Republicans would not even run candidates for any

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24 George Lambert to Hollander, July 8, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
25 George Lambert to Hollander, July 8, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
office in Dallas County because of general satisfaction with the incumbent ‘Democrats’ and the cost of staging their own primaries.”

His frustration with Texas politics is clear in his letter to Kahn. He noted that “there are several Republican controlled States, some almost continuously Republican, that have such things as Minimum Wage Laws, FEPC Laws, little Wagner Acts, progressive taxation, adequate control of utilities, higher unemployment compensation, and other types of socially-advanced legislation which the Corporations haven’t even had to worry about in Texas.” The DOC was the first major attempt at changing this status quo to be attempted since 1932. It was the only institution in the state that could effect change, but no one knew whether Rayburn or Johnson intended to challenge Shivers. Lambert was particularly dismissive of Johnson as a liberal savior, indicating that the Senator would have liberals’ support “only if [liberals] had no other choice!” He even believed that Johnson had made a deal with the governor in which Shivers would maintain control of the state party and Johnson would avoid a contest in the 1954 Democratic primary.

Lambert had a great deal of contempt for Johnson, but he knew liberals had to deal with him. Lambert suggested that Kahn cover several issues in her articles on Texas, including whether Republicans intended to make Texas a true two-party state, Johnson’s chances for re-election in 1954, and the hold oil companies had over the entire political system.

26 George Lambert to Dorothy N. Kahn, July 22, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
27 George Lambert to Dorothy N. Kahn, July 22, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
28 George Lambert to Dorothy N. Kahn, July 22, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
29 Ironically, nothing actually came of these conversations, since Lambert indicated in a subsequent letter to the national office that Kahn’s editor at Reporter had told him there was “much less interest in doing much on Texas than Mrs. Kahn had thought.” George Lambert to Gunther, August 11, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
While he tried to educate outsiders about his home state, Lambert traveled the state looking for ADA prospects. His August 1953 reports were mixed. He was optimistic that he could start several chapters in Texas before his six-month trial run ended. Things had progressed slower than he had hoped, partly because his wife had been forced to have surgery over the summer. Nevertheless, he thought there was a place for ADA in each city. Fort Worth was his most problematic city because his main concern there was to create an “organization of the Independent liberals, presently largely without organization, and to make them an effective force in the political situation in the community.” In order to do that, he needed to find the right leaders, and this meant finding people with experience, contacts in the liberal community, and practical political skills. By the end of August, Lambert was convinced that he had done so.

Another of Lambert’s August reports was more pessimistic, however, not only about the chapters but about the whole ADA enterprise. He believed that Texas liberals were spread too thin and had too many competing loyalties. For example, in August the Dallas County division of the DOC asked him to “put together a schedule of activities through next year’s primaries and conventions, . . . arrange for the printing of precinct maps showing the new precincts in Dallas County, . . . arrange for printing of letterheads and other material for the Committee,” and draw up their budget. Lambert did as he was asked, but these tasks took him away from his job as ADA organizer.

There were also logistical and political problems that hamstrung Lambert’s efforts. For example, in late August Lambert told Gunther that he had attempted to issue a statewide ADA

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30 George Lambert to Hollander, August 8, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
31 George Lambert to Gunther, August 11, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
32 George Lambert to Hollander, September 6, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
newsletter, only to find that the duplication facilities he wanted to use at the state CIO in Austin could not accommodate his project. He also had to deal with the fear of attempted “Communist infiltration,” noting that “several people have shown up at meetings recently who were either identified with the Progressive Party or with other of the Party’s front activities.”

Lambert decided to tighten screening procedures for new members in response to questions from potential members, with the expressed approval of the national office. However, ADA’s commitment to anti-Communism meant that financial and political resources that would have gone toward organization and political activity could not be used for those purposes.

Nevertheless, the national office was very pleased with Lambert’s work, and late that summer Violet Gunther effusively praised his work on the Mitchell trip and the Kahn letter. She said Lambert’s work was so good that she had copied it for distribution to the ADA executive committee. However, Gunther’s knew that hard work would not be enough to make ADA viable in Texas. She wanted Lambert to find out whether the DOC would be represented at a Democratic Party caucus in Chicago in mid-September, assuming that both sides in the fight for control of the Texas party would make their case at the meeting. Liberals feared that Texas Democrats who supported Eisenhower in 1952 would attempt to return to the party as if nothing had happened, and that Mitchell would not stop them from doing so.

In early September, Gunther made her concern more explicit, worrying that Shivercrat Democratic National

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33 George Lambert to Hollander, September 6, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
34 Hollander to George Lambert, September 9, 1953, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
35 Gunther to George Lambert, July 31, 1953, reel 22, no. 1, ADA Papers.
Committeeman Wright Morrow would be allowed to remain in the party after the Chicago meeting.\textsuperscript{36}

Lambert, recognizing that liberals had to work against conservatives who acted as though they were still “Democrats,” responded to Gunther’s appeal with a proposal that would kill two birds with one stone. Harris County (Houston) Democratic executive secretary Bernice Smith was to attend the Chicago meeting with several other Houston liberals, “all but one of whom were] very favorable to ADA and would be pleased with the opportunity of meeting liberals at an ADA-sponsored gathering there.” The primary purpose of the Houston delegation’s trip would be to work against the Shivers forces, but Lambert realized that the national ADA leadership would be able to meet with the Houston group in Chicago and exchange ideas and policy proposals.\textsuperscript{37}

No minutes from this meeting survive, but Gunther believed that the Chicago gathering had been useful to northern liberals as “a give and take of information and ideas about how Northerners could help the Democratic Organizing Committee in Texas get recognized by the National Party.” However, “there was no formal decision or even agreement at the meeting” about what to do next, and many of the leading lights of ADA, including Philadelphia Mayor Joseph Clark and Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey, were not able to meet with the Texans because they were at party functions. The lack of action in Chicago frustrated Gunther, and it seemed to sum up the relationship between liberals in Texas and the leadership of national liberal

\textsuperscript{36} Violet Gunther to George Lambert, September 1, 1953, reel 22, no. 1, ADA Papers.

By the end of 1953, ADA leaders understood that they had been unable to convince more than a handful of Texas liberals to join their organization.

Nevertheless, in November 1953 Dallas chapter chairman Carl Brannin suggested that the 50-50 arrangement for Lambert’s employment should continue through January 31 of the following year. Brannin had no illusions about Lambert’s ability to recruit Texans for ADA chapters, but he thought Lambert had furthered “the cause of liberal democracy in this area and [increased] awareness of liberal political organization in the Democratic Party over the State.” He also praised Lambert’s wife, calling the couple “a good team, devoted to the work and effective.”

Hollander echoed Brannin’s assessment of Lambert’s work, saying, “We also have been very much impressed with the activities in Texas and with the good job that George has done.”

This short-term arrangement did not address Lambert’s future with beyond January. Brannin wanted to know whether ADA official wanted Lambert to continue his work in “[guiding] the liberal program toward a practical political orientation,” not to mention his role “as an unofficial secretariat for the Democratic Organizing Committee on the county and state level in Texas.” Brannin credited the organization of the DOC on the county level in Dallas almost entirely to Lambert’s efforts. However, Brannin also knew that the Dallas chapter did not have the money to continue paying Lambert beyond January. Still, he thought that losing an

38 Gunther to George Lambert, October 28, 1953, reel 22, no. 1, ADA Papers.
39 Carl Brannin to Hollander, November 11, 1953, reel 22, no. 1, ADA Papers.
40 Hollander to Brannin, November 13, 1953, reel 22, no. 1, ADA Papers.
organizer of Lambert’s quality at the beginning of an election year would be a serious blow to liberals in Texas.\footnote{Brannin to Hollander, January 6, 1954, reel 22, no. 1, ADA Papers.}

As if to underscore Lambert’s usefulness as an educational resource to ADA, he continued submitting memos to the national office concerning the prospects for liberals as they tried to seize control of the state Democratic Party. His reports were not encouraging. On January 6, 1954, he concluded that “any chance of there being an effective statewide political program and organization ‘to return the Democratic Party to the Democrats’ in Texas this year is dead.” Like many liberals, Lambert blamed Rayburn for failing to organize anything more than scattered opposition to Shivers, and for de-emphasizing the DOC in favor of an “Advisory Committee to the Democratic National Committee” (Democratic Advisory Council, or DAC) with “the limited announced purposes of raising money for the National Party and advising it, through Sam Rayburn, of the political situation in Texas.” Lambert worried that Rayburn would support conservative Georgia Senator Richard B. Russell as the Democratic nominee for President in 1956. The problem for Rayburn was the quixotic nature of such a campaign, since “it is hard to conceive that he seriously believes that Russell . . . stands a chance of being nominated.” He also detailed Rayburn’s unwillingness to commit to the DOC and how it was ruining the DOC’s chances of success, as well as Johnson’s unwillingness to commit to either side in the struggle for control of the party.\footnote{George Lambert, confidential memo to National ADA, “Texas Political Scene,” January 6, 1954, pp. 1-3, reel 52, no. 308, ADA Papers.}

Up to this point, Lambert had merely reported what had been happening in Texas, but he was now offering opinions on what this all meant to Texas liberals. Rayburn wanted desperately to be Speaker of the House again, but he also worried about his own prospects for re-election in
1954. This may seem somewhat odd considering that he ended up winning three-quarters of the vote in that year’s Democratic primary, but Rayburn’s prospects were not as bright at the beginning of the year.\(^{43}\) Most of his worries centered on a pending redistricting plan that would have brought many conservative areas of North Texas into Rayburn’s district.\(^{44}\)

Shivers and other conservatives had the power to make Rayburn’s re-election bid more difficult, but Rayburn also knew that how they proceeded depended a great deal on Rayburn’s attitude toward the governor. As Lambert put it, “[liberal Austin Democrat Fagin] Dickson is of the opinion that Rayburn is afraid to be identified with any effective organization against Shivers, and that he will actively sabotage any organization that is established” in order to keep Shivers from adding conservative counties to his district. Liberals knew that Rayburn’s voting record was generally good, but they hated that his political survival appeared to be more important than his principles.\(^{45}\) Lambert’s report on Rayburn’s political troubles in Texas is significant as an example of the service Lambert provided to ADA officials in Washington. It allowed them to understand what was going on in Texas, from a point of view they would not have received from the largely conservative press in the state.

Hollander recognized Lambert’s usefulness, and he frankly admitted that “except for the very good results that have accrued from the arrangement up to now, we would have felt

\(^{43}\) For another perspective on Rayburn’s 1954 primary campaign, see Anthony Champagne, *Congressman Sam Rayburn* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1984), 131-136.

\(^{44}\) Rayburn’s Fourth District contained just over 210,000 people when he first won the seat in 1912; by the 1960 census, the Fourth had just under 260,000 in a state that had grown from 3.9 million in 1910 to 9.6 million in 1960. All census figures from Champagne, *Congressman Sam Rayburn*, 13-14, except for 1960 state census figures, from Texas State Library and Archives Commission, “United States and Texas Populations, 1850-2006,” http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/ref/abouttx/census.html (accessed January 30, 2008).

\(^{45}\) Lambert, “Texas Political Scene,” 5-7.
compelled to terminate the arrangement.” ADA leaders could not afford to lose Lambert, but he also needed to earn a living, and Hollander was not sure ADA could keep him as an employee. The National Board wanted Lambert to continue his work, but only if Dallas could finance pay for it. The limbo under which Lambert operated continued into mid-March, when Brannin told Hollander that the Dallas chapter would conducting a membership and fund-raising drive in an attempt to save Lambert’s job. In the meantime, Lambert was remained an ADA employee, but he had no assurances that he would remain on the payroll for long.

Until the Dallas chapter raised more money, the national office decided to pay all of Lambert’s salary for the first few months of 1954, but Hollander told Lambert that these arrangements could not last much longer without assistance from Dallas. Hollander regretted the situation, but he could not disagree with those ADA officials who cautioned that “at least a modicum of financial prudence has to take precedence over our hopes and ambitions. There is no doubt we are over extended and that we must be prepared to retrench if additional funds are not forthcoming.” No matter how productive Lambert was, and no matter how important Texas was to national Democratic politics, cost-cutting was vital for an organization facing tens of thousands of dollars in debt, and Lambert’s $9,600 annual salary seemed a logical place to start.

While the national office debated whether or not to keep Lambert on the payroll, he continued to tell the office in Washington about political events in Texas. In February 1954, he reported on Shivers’ attempts to gain control of the Texas Young Democrats, the only major

46 Hollander to Brannin, February 16, 1954, reel 22, no. 1, ADA Papers.
48 Hollander to George Lambert, June 9, 1954, reel 22, no. 1, ADA Papers.
49 Robert Nathan to Louis J. Hexter, June 7, 1954, reel 40, no. 130, ADA Papers.
Democratic organization that had backed Stevenson in 1952. The Governor wanted to control this rogue element within the party. His solution to the dilemma was to create his own “Young Democrats,” deny recognition to the other group, and thoroughly confuse the national party. In late March, to confer legitimacy on his group, Shivers invited Stevenson and Mitchell to speak to them, realizing “that an invitation to Stevenson would tend to show the good faith of the Shivers crowd when they took over the Young Democrats or at least would give them a powerful argument for recognition by the National organization.” To ensure his control, Shivers stacked the county meetings of the “Young Democrats” with supporters who were far from young. Some of them were between fifty and seventy years of age, a fact that even conservative newspapers could not ignore in their coverage of the Shivers meetings.50

On March 6, Lambert’s traveled to Miami for the Democratic Party’s Southern States Dinner, and he reported “a few of [his] personal impressions with some of the reasons for [his] having gotten these impressions.” He decided to “leave any of the large conclusions for you and others to draw both from my information and other information you, and others, may have on this affair.”51 Lambert was willing to take direction from ADA leaders, but he also had strong opinions about what that direction should be.

In short, he was frustrated with the southern Democrats’ complete unwillingness to talk about civil rights, labor legislation, or changes to American foreign policy, although he was surprised to find that “there also must have been some sort of an agreement by the Southerners not to wave the bloody shirt of FEPC, school segregation, stricter labor legislation, [or]


tidelands,” as they had at other Party functions. He was frustrated with the almost complete lack of minorities at the dinner, noting that that the three or four black Democrats present had been placed in a corner with “CIO people . . . or by National Committee functionaries who, it was known, would not be embarrassed by their presence.” He was frustrated with Governor Stevenson’s inability to remember the names of southern Democratic leaders, wondering whether he was as out of touch as he seemed at one of his pre-dinner press conferences. On the other hand, the selection of Texas Agricultural Commissioner John C. White as a speaker at the functions preceding the dinner was encouraging, since White had been the only state official in Texas to back Stevenson in 1952. Lambert took this as “a direct slap at Shivers” and his cronies, some of whom were in Miami. Even this encouraging sign was not without its problems, however, since “there seemed to have been a deliberate effort made to assure that [these policy discussions] would be poorly attended,” especially by the general public.52

As for the dinner itself, Lambert tried to gauge the popularity of Democratic leaders, especially southerners, based on the reception they received when they rose to speak (he had also done this when Mitchell toured Texas the previous year). Rayburn received a long standing ovation, Johnson’s name was received with tepid applause, and Russell appeared to be somewhere in the middle. Lambert paid attention not only to what was said, but what the conservative Texas Democrats were doing during the speeches. For example, Lambert noted that when Johnson spoke out against Senator Joseph McCarthy, Wallace Savage, whom Lambert called the “‘Benedict Arnold’ Democratic State Chairman” in Texas, ignored the senator and began taking notes. He barely acknowledged the popular Rayburn when he spoke. According to Lambert, “Savage got up only after everyone else at his table had gotten up and after a few

52 Lambert, “Report on . . . Regional Dinner.”
handclaps lit a cigarette in what looked like a gesture of contempt.” $^{53}$ One thing that seemed clear from listening to the speeches in Miami was that the need for “unity” and the unwillingness of Democrats to commit to more substantial reform was a bad sign for liberals.

The usefulness of reports like these to ADA leaders convinced them to keep Lambert on the payroll through the 1954 Democratic primaries, even though the Dallas chapter had not raised any money toward his salary. $^{54}$ Looking at the quality and detail of the information Lambert was providing, it is easy to see why ADA officials did not want to lose him. He had a gift for telling liberals in Washington what was going on in Texas from a unique point of view. With this in mind, the Washington office was willing to swallow an expense that might have seemed prohibitive under any other circumstances. However, Lambert knew that he had to deliver tangible results to ADA if its officials were going to continue to fund him.

In mid-May, after the window of opportunity for candidates to register for the Democratic primaries in Texas had closed, he summed up where liberals stood at that moment. He was not optimistic about his prospects. According to Lambert’s report, Rayburn had done little with the Democratic Advisory Council beyond turning it into a personal fund-raising tool that would funnel money to the national party. Rayburn would not let the group back liberals and loyalists in the primaries and would not invite Stevenson to Texas for speeches or fund-raisers. As a result, liberals had washed their hands of the DAC for the time being, choosing instead to campaign for Shivers’ main rival for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1954, Ralph Yarborough. “Work and money is being shifted to the Yarborough campaign in the hope that Yarborough can be elected and that, if elected, his prestige as Governor will cause enough of the


$^{54}$ Hollander to Ruth Ellinger, July 7, 1954, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
County level politicians who normally control delegates from their Counties to the State Conventions to vote with him in the Conventions to enable the Democrats to have control.” The relative strength of Democratic loyalists in some of the state’s largest cities, including Houston and Dallas, also encouraged Lambert. Nevertheless, Lambert was not expecting miracles in 1954 or 1956, recognizing that Shivers’ control of the Democratic machinery would be difficult to overcome considering the liberals’ relative lack of organization beyond the precinct level.55

As a result, when the 1954 Texas Democratic primaries ended with victories for Rayburn, Johnson, and Shivers, liberals in the state knew that they had failed to significantly influence the party. In these circumstances, the fact that ADA’s financial situation had not improved over the summer could no longer be ignored. On November 19, 1954, not long after the birth of the Lamberts’ second child, Hollander regretfully terminated the Texas project. In his letter, Hollander offered his thanks for Lambert’s part “in the stirrings of great things that are coming out of Texas” and noted that “Bob [Nathan] and I have rather over-stretched the instructions of the Executive Committee in carrying [the project] this long.”56

Lambert accepted the decision of the Executive Committee humbly. He wrote, “I hardly feel that my work here merits the praise you gave it in your letter.” He also understood that ADA’s grim financial outlook could no longer be ignored, regretting that “we somehow should have been able to justify it more fully in terms of additional organization and resources for ADA.” He offered to continue reporting on Texas politics for ADA’s benefit on an expenses-only basis, and the national office agreed to retain him in this capacity.57 He also continued to


56 Hollander to George Lambert, November 19, 1954, reel 24, no. 1, ADA Papers.

57 George Lambert to Hollander, November 29, 1954, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
fight attacks on ADA from both sides of the political spectrum. For example, in April 1955, he campaigned against a planned “Southwide Regional Conference” on racial issues to be held in Texas because the Southern Conference Educational Fund, which had organized in the wake of the failure of SCHW in the late 1940s, was a group of “fellow-travelers” with unclear motives.58

However, the most interesting aspect of Lambert’s ADA work was that he had begun to believe that liberals and loyal Democrats in Texas were gaining the upper hand. In 1955, Indiana lawyer Paul Butler had become chairman of the national party, and one of his first actions as chairman was a visit to Texas. He wanted to end the split between conservatives and liberals in the party. “Real” Democrats hoped to convince Butler that Shivers would never support the 1956 Democratic presidential nominee unless he was able to play the role of kingmaker, and they also wanted most of the money Butler raised on his trip to be turned over to the liberal faction. However, Lambert found out that Butler and Shivers had been quietly begun meeting to work out a truce for the sake of Democratic unity. Lambert did not know exactly what had been promised, but he suspected that the deal involved Shivers’ Lieutenant Governor, Ben Ramsey, replacing Morrow on the National Committee in return for Butler’s pledge not to seek a loyalty oath of any kind from the Texas delegation in 1956.59 Lambert did not know the details, but he had a true believer’s suspicion of any deal in which “Democratic Party contributions [would be] handled by a man who had just announced flatly and publicly, as Allan Shivers just had, that he would again desert the Democratic Party’s ticket next year if Adlai Stevenson was again the Presidential nominee.”60

58 Hollander to George Lambert, April 29, 1954, reel 78, no. 97, ADA Papers.
59 Alfred Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography (New York, 1975), 300.
Despite their suspicions of Butler, liberals decided that the best thing to do under the circumstances was to support his tour. If Butler chose to refuse that support, they could expose the national chairman as Shivers’ puppet. If he accepted their help, they hoped to convince him that dealing with Shivers would do nothing to assist the national party and might hurt it significantly. Liberals, the major labor federations, and ADA leaders agreed that helping Butler was the best course of action, and they had support from DAC leaders in several East Texas counties who refused to have anything to do with Butler unless he refused to associate with Shivers.61

In the end, however, Shivers turned out to be the best friend of the loyalist Democrats. In May 1955, the DAC announced that it would be handling all of Butler’s arrangements for the tour. Shivers’ response was to publicly announce, through his political lieutenants, that conservative Democrats would be boycotting Butler’s tour. Elected officials, most of whom owed their political fortunes to Shivers, and the state’s major conservative newspapers followed suit and denounced Butler, but liberals and loyalists exploited the opportunity. The East Texas loyalists who had threatened to ignore Butler now arranged a luncheon in his honor. Democrats across the state now lined up for tickets to Butler events, and Shivers was forced to “invite” the chairman to a private lunch in Austin at a point in the schedule when Butler could not possibly accept. Shivers then turned around and blasted Butler for snubbing him, conveniently ignoring the fact that “Shivers [had] earlier announced that he would completely ignore the visit of the man with whom a few weeks earlier he had been so chummy.”62 Lambert did not see this as a

final victory for Texas liberals, but he thought that the state party’s influence could be tempered to the point that Shivers would not be a national spoiler in 1956.

Butler’s tour began in Lubbock on June 14. Lambert thought Butler began timidly with a speech that stressed a hope for party unity, and Lambert speculated that this was because Butler feared that much of the audience would be pro-Shivers. For his part, Butler saw few avowed Shivercrats in the Lubbock audience. The only major figure in the Shivers camp who attended the event “refused to sit on the platform and his introduction was met with something less than cordial recognition by the crowd.” Lambert sensed a change in Butler’s mood, however, when the crowd refused to acknowledge Senator Johnson but loudly cheered when he mentioned Rayburn’s name. This happened frequently during Butler’s tour, and Butler tailored his message for the liberals and loyal Democrats who were showing up to hear him. He did not repeat the mistake he had made in Lubbock, when a remark praising Shivers “had a deadening effect on the crowd from which it never quite recovered, even when towards the end of his talk he got on to more safe and familiar ground by delivering an able attack on some of the more glaring deficiencies in the Republican Administration’s record in office.”

His next stop, two days later in Dallas, showed that Butler had learned an important lesson about the dynamics of Texas Democratic politics. It did not hurt that twelve hundred people came to his Dallas event, double the size of the Lubbock crowd. As a result, Butler gave the “wild-eyed radicals, left-wingers, ADAers and fellow Democrats” (to quote a Shivercrat press statement that criticized the Dallas gathering) who came to hear him a stronger performance. He urged “real” Democrats not to support Republican candidates and criticized the “infiltration” of the party by those who had no intention of supporting its principles. In a meeting with local

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labor leaders after the speech, he declared himself a liberal in the Roosevelt-Truman tradition, supported civil rights legislation and national health insurance, and urged the defeat of conservative “Democrats” in future elections. Lambert took these statements to imply that Butler was calling for the defeat of the entire Texas congressional delegation, since even Rayburn hated the idea of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission. He was stunned that Butler would say these things when he could be fairly certain that these statements would get back to Johnson and Rayburn. Lambert and other liberals were ecstatic about the effects Butler’s visit might have on their political fortunes in Texas, and Lambert communicated that sentiment to Washington.

Still, liberals and loyalists could not be overly confident about where they stood in Texas. Butler attempted to tailor his message to the audience before whom he spoke. In Waco, he echoed the sentiments of his Dallas speech in a liberal city that backed Stevenson strongly in 1952. When he traveled to McAllen and Corpus Christi, however, he toned down his criticism of conservative Democrats in front of crowds that backed Shivers. By the time Butler’s tour reached Houston for the Young Democrats convention on June 18, no one was quite sure what to make of him. At a press conference prior to his Houston speech, Butler revealed that Shivers would have to force Wright Morrow to resign as Texas’ Democratic National Committeeman and replace him with a loyal Democrat if he expected to remain in the party’s good graces. This appeared to be a strong statement in support of Democrats who would not betray the party in future elections. However, as had been the case so often on the tour, Butler remained enigmatic. He promised Shivers a great deal of influence in the selection of the Texas delegation to the 1956

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convention. This caused a poor reception to his speech before the Young Democrats, who almost canceled Butler’s engagement in retaliation for the chairman’s overtures to Shivers, because Butler limited his attacks to Eisenhower and the Republicans.⁶⁶

In the end, Lambert and the liberals did not know where they stood and what the Butler tour would mean. Lambert tried to reach some conclusions about the Butler tour in a separate report to the national office. The central question was how ADA leaders should reconcile Butler’s criticism of “Democrats” who supported the GOP to make a clean break and join the other party with the reality of Butler’s attempts to woo Shivers. Lambert believed that the tour had helped their cause, and he listed several reasons for his optimism. First, large numbers of loyalists had gathered at Butler’s speeches, discussing organization and fund-raising for the fights to come. Second, Lambert did not discount the significance of the “spectacle.” Seeing hundreds of people gathering together to denounce Shivers sent the message that he was not invincible. Third, and most importantly, the Butler tour had forced many Texas Democrats to choose sides, especially after Shivers turned his back on Butler publicly. Even Rayburn and Johnson, who had refused to publicly “cross swords” with Shivers, endorsed Butler’s tour and praised the chairman on several occasions. Shivers’ opponents now had money with which they could organize against him, had split the Shivercrats over Morrow’s departure from the national committee, and had convinced Butler that Shivers could not be trusted.⁶⁷

All liberals did not share Lambert’s optimism about liberalism in Texas, however, and Lambert acknowledges their reasoning as well. Some activists worried that Butler would not press for concessions from Shivers beyond replacing Morrow on the National Committee. The


money (more than $20,000) that the national party had raised in Texas had not yet been transferred to the party loyalists, and some liberals were beginning to think they would never get their hands on it. In fact, some of the more conspiratorial liberals thought that Shivers would seize the money in exchange for a $250,000 payment to the national party. “That Shivers is shrewd enough to try to make this kind of trade is not doubted. That the National Party leadership could resist the temptation is considered most doubtful.” Lambert quoted one anonymous Texan as saying that if the national party wanted to sell out to Shivers, they needed to ask for $10 million instead. Another problem for liberals was that, just as the “Texas Democratic Party” centered itself on the personality of Governor Shivers, the liberal-loyalist opposition depended heavily on Speaker Rayburn, and he could disband the DAC at any time, without explanation.  

Who was right? Lambert acknowledged in August that he would not know for some time. Since 1955 was not an election year, the political game slowed down considerably after the Butler tour, only to pick up again in March 1956 with another of Lambert’s reports to the ADA leadership. He reported on a potential schism within the anti-Shivers ranks over the makeup of the delegation they would choose for the 1956 national convention. Rayburn and Johnson had expected the DAC to allow them to choose a delegation as they saw fit, but the DAC board rejected their request by a 9-2 vote. Instead, liberals pressed for a “pro-New Deal, Fair Deal, and probably pro-Stevenson” delegation that would not depend on the Washington politicians. The proposed liberal delegation would be beholden to no one and had to pledge its support for the Democratic ticket before that ticket was selected. Rayburn wanted the delegation to support Senator Johnson as a “favorite-son” candidate throughout the balloting, only giving way when

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68 Lambert, “GENERAL OBSERVATIONS,” VI-VII.
Johnson himself withdrew. Once again, liberals were in a bind. They could not support Shivers, of course, but they did not want Rayburn to turn the state Democratic Party into a pro-Johnson organization either.

Texas Democrats disapproved of Rayburn’s “dictatorial” handling of the Texas delegation to the Democratic convention. There was every indication that several DAC members would openly declare their displeasure with Rayburn’s attempts to take over the delegation. Most DAC members favored Stevenson, and Rayburn wanted to keep his reputation as a “democratic” figure within the party, in the sense of allowing the organizers and activists to decide on policy for themselves. Rayburn was also feeling heat from the right. On March 25, Shivers appeared on Meet the Press to publicly insult the House Speaker and make “a sarcastic promise to support Johnson if only he knew his views on such issues as federal aid to education, states’ rights and desegregation.”

Therefore, Lambert was quite optimistic that the circumstances of the moment precluded any sort of compromise between Shivers, Rayburn, and Johnson. As he wrote, “given the kind of terms Shivers could be expected to exact—Shivers as delegation Chairman, and a majority of Shivercrats (disloyal Democrats) on the delegation . . . and the consequences of these terms to the national Party prestige of both Rayburn and Johnson if they should again show up in Chicago supporting, or as part of, a party-bolting delegation—it would seem that the liberal DACers’ alternative would likely be more palatable.”

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70 George Lambert, “TEXAS POLITICAL REPORT,” 2-3.

71 Steinberg, Sam Rayburn, 301.

In mid-April, Lambert again reported to ADA from Chicago in a manner that, in his own words, was not “fully reported in the press.” On March 21, Johnson had met with DAC members in Washington, but he told them that he thought he had the power to decide who would be representing Texas at the 1956 national convention, where he fully expected to be a strong contender for the nomination despite recent health problems. He did not want an “extremist” delegation representing Texas, and he would be using his own organization at the 1956 convention. Lambert worried that in “many, if not most, instances Johnson’s County leadership is the same as Shivers’ leadership and many, if not most, of these County leaders for Johnson are also Eisenhower Democrats.” At the same time, Johnson was playing his usual games with both sides of the party, telling liberals in Washington that he had not yet decided to be a candidate while giving the opposite impression to Rayburn and others within the DAC.

Lambert thought that this meant Johnson was over-confident in his ability to round up the delegates for the convention, only to be quickly disabused of that notion by some of his people in the state the day after the DAC meeting. On March 23, 1956, Johnson returned to Texas for meetings with his top political advisors. Lambert thought Johnson was fearful of repeating his 1952 performance, when he had stayed out of the credential fight within the Texas delegation contested between Rayburn and Shivers. His neutrality in that fight earned the nickname of “lyin’-down Lyndon.” Liberals and labor leaders in the DAC made their sentiments clear in a meeting of the DAC’s steering committee on March 25. The delegates were asked to consider a sub-committee proposal that “called for DAC support of the Rayburn proposal that Johnson be [sic] favorite son candidate and delegation chairman only if the loyal Democratic delegation is

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73 See Caro, Master of the Senate, 801-830, for more on Johnson’s plans in 1956.

selected through DAC and the delegation is under no obligation to Johnson other than to vote for him on the first ballot.” The DAC agreed to this proposal because they had canvassed county Democratic leaders and found that a majority of them were refusing to give Johnson the power he wanted.  

The next domino to fall in the fight over the Texas delegation was Rayburn, who had stayed out of the limelight during Johnson’s machinations. DAC State Secretary Kathleen Voigt did reach Rayburn in Washington, however, for an off-the-record conversation about the proposal. Voigt spoke on behalf of the loyal Democrats in insisting that something be done to get the rank-and-file to fight for the Democratic ticket in the fall, and Rayburn’s response indicated he was willing to work with DAC liberals to protect his own interests.

This represented the end of Lambert’s ultimately futile quest to turn what Robert Nathan referred to as “the wonderful people he met in Texas, [and] the feeling of kinship and the dynamic liberalism he found there” into thriving local ADA chapters and a liberal shift in the Democratic Party in Texas. His struggles highlight in miniature the dilemma Americans for Democratic Action faced in the years following World War II. The biggest problem ADA faced was that its leaders were primarily outsiders, and like reformers throughout American history, they saw the South “as a problem requiring remedial action.”

ADA officials never explicitly put matters in those terms, but that was how many Texans viewed northern liberals, and the gap between these regions was never truly bridged in the years following World War II. The state’s Democratic party was so reactionary, so unwilling to

75 George Lambert, “Texas Report,” 4-5.
76 Hollander to George Lambert, November 19, 1954, reel 52, no. 308, ADA Papers.
77 Larry J. Griffin and Don Doyle, introduction to The South as an American Problem, Griffin and Doyle eds. (Athens, 1995), 4.
change, so outside what liberals considered to be the “mainstream” of American political life that many Texas liberals believed “outside” pressure was the only way to force change. Others wanted national liberals to stay out of the fray, thinking their efforts would be counter-productive at best. Lambert was often caught in the middle of these arguments, appreciating the perspective the national office could provide while advising them to stay out of the fights between liberal and conservative Democrats. There was also deep skepticism about whether ADA should shoulder the task of attempting to change Texas, or the South more generally. Part of this skepticism was based on an assessment of ADA’s finances, but the way in which Allan Shivers, Sam Rayburn, and Lyndon Johnson fought each other for control of the state while Lambert was working for ADA undoubtedly confused national liberal leaders observing the situation at a distance. In short, there was a fundamental gap between the “vision” ADA leaders had for their organization and the practical problems that constrained that vision, and Lambert’s adventures in Texas are an illuminating example of that.
In the mid-1950s, responding to past failures in the South, ADA leaders abandoned regional organization in the South. They never stopped seeking out individual liberals who might have been good candidates to start chapters, but they had abandoned ambitious, costly projects designed to accelerate this organization. There is evidence that ADA officials had learned this lesson long before they began to apply it. As early as March 1951, James A. Loeb, who had been with ADA since its birth, admitted to the organization Executive Committee that “there are certain communities, states and even regions in the U.S. where, for different reasons, it is neither feasible nor possible to organize active, functioning chapters of ADA.” In some places, including Wisconsin, this was because the regular Democratic organization was strong enough, and liberal enough, to satisfy ADA leaders. In the South, however, the opposite was true. As a result, “ADA organization in the South is next to impossible and often self-defeating[,] except in a few communities where special circumstances prevail.” If ADA was to organize southern liberals in the future, it could do so only at the state level and only with Washington collecting all dues from individual members.1

However, ADA had not completely given up on the South. The 1950s was a decade in which economic, political, and social change in the region was a national priority for liberals. In March 1956, as one anonymous correspondent wrote the official publication ADA World, “In the areas of the hard core of resistance [to integration], the atmosphere is for all the world like McCarthyism.” He or she believed that the both races suffered from some fear. “White people

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are afraid of white people, and look over their shoulders before they speak. Negro people are not afraid in the sense of a new panic, but have a stolid determination to see it through.” One thing southern liberals like this writer believed, however, was that “the old patterns will no longer do (and all know this, consciously or not) and the new ones have not been established. . . . There’s all the harshness and tension of the last-ditch stand that cannot win but can take a terrible toll.”

Something had to change, but no one truly knew how it would change.

There was the hope that a new generation of southerners could spark social and political change in the region, and ADA and other liberal organizations could participate in that change. Liberals hoped that this new generation would not adhere to the political and racial conventions of the past. The vehicle through which ADA hoped to mold southern liberalism was its student division, first known upon its founding in 1947 as Students for Democratic Action (SDA) and renamed Campus ADA (CADA) in 1958. Since its founding, SDA organizers had been creating chapters across the country, but in 1956 a new executive secretary, Yale Bernstein, saw potential for the liberal students in the South. By the mid-1950s, as he put it, “the clarity of the issues in the South” was so obvious that organizing chapters on southern campuses would be not only fruitful, but necessary for the hopes of liberalism, both regionally and nationally. The increased interest in civil rights issues that resulted from the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education facilitated organization, and ADA’s student wing soon found itself involved in some of the most important events of the civil rights movement that followed Brown. These included bus boycotts in Montgomery, Alabama and Tallahassee, Florida; northern boycotts of

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2 “From and About the South,” ADA World 11.3 (March 1956), 2M, reel 141, series IX, no. 2, ADA Papers.

southern colleges that refused to allow black athletes to participate in intercollegiate athletics; and the campaign to desegregate the University of Florida. SDA and CADA chapters were not often the driving forces behind these campaigns, but the association with ADA gave these students an important organizational backing for their activities. It also gave ADA leaders a chance to affect the next generation of southern liberals and create a base from which liberalism could grow in the coming decades.

The actions of these students, most of them white, flew in the face of the conventional wisdom about the region, which ADA’s previous experiences in the South had only reinforced. Barney Taylor, Alden Hopkins, and George Lambert had all traveled the South attempting to attract support for ADA liberalism, but they had convinced themselves that liberal southerners would never be more than a tiny minority of the region’s population. However, they failed to recognize that this minority could potentially be decisive in the struggle against segregation. Historians have begun to reevaluate the strength of integrationist sentiment in the white South. They now recognize that the white South “was not a monolithic wall of resistance” to the demands of the civil rights movement. White liberals in the South may not have “considered themselves radicals,” but they were useful to the civil rights movement as an example of the kind of new southerner movement leaders wanted to create. Novelist Lillian Smith, who had been a founding member of ADA and had written passionate pamphlets for ADA criticizing southern society, was the embodiment of the kind of southerner ADA had always wanted to attract. Students who joined SDA or CADA thought of themselves as part of the vanguard of southern liberalism.

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The enlistment of southern college students in ADA was not a phenomenon unique to the 1950s, however. SDA had been created at the same time as the parent organization, and the South was one of its top priorities almost from the beginning. Its first field secretary, Charles G. Sellers, Jr., was a student at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and he spent much of 1947 traveling through the South to gauge how much support SDA might be able to attract. He told one potential campus leader, Brandon Locke of the University of Virginia, that “about fifteen new SDA chapters [would] result” from his efforts. Like his ADA counterparts, Sellers understood that southern students faced “a very discouraging situation” in places such as Charlottesville. However, he hoped that Locke would take the lead in forming an SDA chapter, since the conservative nature of the university’s politics “[made] it even more imperative that a dissenting voice be raised on the campus.”\(^5\)

Locke’s response to Sellers’ request to form an SDA chapter illustrates one of the unique problems SDA faced in trying to organize students. Locke told Sellers that, since they had met over the summer, “many scholastic problems have come up that kept me close to my books.” Liberal students may have been committed to liberalism, but they could never forget that they were students first, and their academic responsibilities had to take priority. He had also talked with leaders of other liberal groups, including the American Veterans Committee (AVC), about liberal prospects at Virginia, only to be told that they “[were] not at all optimistic about the chances of success of a SDA chapter and felt that it would entail an enormous amount of time if attempted.”\(^6\) This problem was more familiar to ADA leaders. Liberals who had tried to organize in the South over the previous decades had become profoundly pessimistic about the

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\(^5\) Charles G. Sellers, Jr. to Brandon Locke, August 18, 1947, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.

prospects for southern liberalism, and they had shared their negative attitude with Sellers and others.

Despite this consistent negativity from liberals in the South, SDA continued with its southern efforts. Many of those efforts centered on Nashville, where in May 1950 twenty-one students from Vanderbilt, Scarritt, Peabody, Cumberland, Fisk, and Tennessee A&I formed an SDA chapter. Campus liberals formed the chapter at a moment when Vanderbilt was beginning a “great leap forward” in its academic standing under Chancellor Harvie Branscomb. Branscomb had become chancellor in 1947, and he wanted to make the university a national institution. In order to do that, Branscomb had to curtail the power of the university’s Board of Trust, and in June 1950 he succeeded in convincing the board to remove older, more conservative board members from active duty on the board. This was important to campus liberals because the old alumni had a reputation for being “suspicious of innovations” and were notorious for “[keeping a lookout for any form of liberal or radical heresy on campus],” including those advocating black civil rights and supporters of “New Deal regulatory or welfare policies.” These board members were never able to stop reform, but they held powerful positions on the board, and Branscomb’s ability to remove them from those positions meant that liberals would have a better chance of making their voices heard.7

In 1949, Ralph Dummit had become SDA Field Secretary, and he saw the creation of the Nashville chapter as an encouraging sign for southern organization. The inclusion of students from black and white colleges in the city made it SDA’s first integrated chapter in the South, and Dummit hoped “to get six chapters in the South in order that a Southern Region may be set up. If such a Region is established, there are hopes for a full-time field organizer and an office for

7 Paul K. Conkin, Gone with the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University (Knoxville, 1985), 434-435, 450-455.
the South.” By the middle of June 1950, the chapter had attracted twenty new members, showing that it was possible to expand an SDA chapter beyond a small core of already committed liberals.\(^8\) The Nashville chapter also proved that it could be politically effective when it helped convince a local theater, the Circle Player, to integrate its seating arrangements. Sherman Conrad, a Vanderbilt student and the chapter secretary, credited a quiet campaign from SDA members with bringing about a change without much fanfare. He called the Circle Player’s integration the “farthest step forward so far” for race relations in the city.\(^9\) While that was an exaggeration, Conrad’s enthusiasm over SDA’s early success in Nashville was an encouraging sign for its future prospects.

In February 1951, the situation appeared so positive that David Heinlein, the Vanderbilt student who chaired SDA there, requested that his school’s members secede into a separate chapter, leaving students from the rest of the city in their own “Nashville” organization. It was a problem born of “extreme problems of successful action and growth,” and Heinlein’s proposal would “enable the Nashville unit to function as a recognized campus organization, facilitating the growth and increasing the activity of the unit, but in no way impairing the cooperation of the Nashville SDA groups.” The split would become official when the students outside of Vanderbilt had built up their numbers to a point where they were able to function on their own. Until then, the Nashville students would remain a single chapter.\(^10\)

The situation in Nashville seemed positive, except when SDA officials actually looked at their records to determine how many members the Nashville chapter actually had. Al Ettinger,

\(^8\) Ralph Dummit to Lee Levitt, May 16, 1950, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.


\(^10\) David Heinlein to SDA National Board, February 15, 1951, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.
SDA’s executive secretary, told Heinlein that those records showed a grand total of one paid-up member from Vanderbilt. He also told Heinlein that he wanted a status report on SDA’s activities in Nashville, assuming there was still a functioning chapter there.\[11\] The most intriguing aspect of this situation is that Ettinger wrote his letter to Heinlein in January 1952, ten months after Heinlein had reported that two separate Nashville chapters had to be formed. Why had Heinlein not written a report to the Washington office since then? Why had no one in Washington noticed that the membership increase in Nashville had featured no corresponding increase in the financial contribution the chapter was making to SDA? Why was no one communicating with anyone? No correspondence exists to explain the complete collapse of the SDA chapter in Nashville or the lack of communication between the Nashville chapter and SDA’s Washington headquarters.

Dummit hoped that Knoxville, home of the University of Tennessee, would be a more promising city for SDA organization, but the situation at UT presented in microcosm the various difficulties that SDA faced in attempting to establish liberal student organizations. Like many southern campuses, UT was “not exactly a hotbed of wild-eyed [political] innovators,” and university president Dr. Cloide Everett Brehm was adept at fending off politicians who criticized professors for “questionable” political affiliations.\[12\] At first glance, it appeared that liberals who wished to organize on the UT campus would have relatively minor problems in so doing, but prospective SDA leaders in Knoxville faced several challenges. Initially enthusiastic student leaders lost interest or abruptly left school. At times students who bravely headed-up SDA efforts on campus proved also to be headstrong and lacking in tact. Timid university

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\[11\] Al Ettinger to David Heinlein, January 21, 1952, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.

administrations used delay and obfuscation to discourage “controversial” student initiatives. The mass of students remained politically inert or, when race issues emerged, actively hostile to progressive efforts.

Nevertheless, Dummit encouraged students in Knoxville to form a chapter. His point man in that effort was UT student Lee Levitt. In late April 1950, Levitt had called a meeting in late April to discuss the prospects of SDA on the campus. He had also attempted to meet with the dean of students at UT concerning whether SDA would have a charter to operate on campus. Levitt was optimistic about their chances of getting a fair hearing from the dean, since SDA’s officially non-partisan stance would side-step the university’s prohibition on political parties operating on campus. If they failed to get the dean’s permission, however, Levitt thought he could follow the lead of students in Nashville by starting a chapter with no official ties to the school. They could also attract students from surrounding colleges with an unofficial chapter, including predominantly black Knoxville College, thereby creating a second integrated chapter in Tennessee.¹³

The issue of obtaining official permission for the UT chapter, however, proved to be a stumbling block. Levitt placed the issue before the dean of students, and provided him with some SDA literature, “having decided to be completely frank about our ‘radical’ intents.”¹⁴ Six months after Levitt had first approached the dean, he had received no word on their application, and he promised Dummit that he would “prod” the administration for a decision. However, these intentions soon conflicted with another basic fact of life on a college campus. Levitt, like many college students, changed his plans in the middle of his UT career and in late July he

¹³ Levitt to Dummit, May 18, 1950, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.
¹⁴ Levitt to Dummit, May 26, 1950, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.
decided to leave the school to become a journalist at what he described as a “weekly about 50 miles west of here.” Levitt’s departure forced him to turn over the organizing in Knoxville to two other students, Harry Cohany and Buford Rhea, neither of whom had the kind of personal relationship with the administration that Levitt had claimed to have.\(^{15}\)

Cohany and Rhea represented SDA before the school’s administrative council when it met in September to consider the group’s application, but the council forced them to endure another delay while it sent the matter to a subcommittee for further study. While Cohany and Rhea were optimistic about the application, thanks to the presence of several “liberal faculty members” on the committee, the delay into November would severely hamper further organization, as would the “dispersal” of students that accompanied the end of summer school.\(^{16}\)

Dummit fumed at the “disgusting performance of the Administrative Council” at UT, but there was little he could do about it. The school’s administration had reserved the right to accept or reject organizations on its campus, and Dummit knew that SDA’s support of integration and academic freedom in a McCarthyist atmosphere would cause college officials across the South to balk at allowing SDA on their campuses. He also suffered, as ADA organizers had, under a debilitating lack of information from those chapters he had been able to organize. In November 1950, when Dummit resigned from SDA to join the Army, the situation at Tennessee had not yet been resolved, and he concluded that “SDA is about dead there.” He suspected that the administration there had much to do with its collapse thanks to its foot-dragging on SDA’s application to become an official organization on campus.\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) Levitt to Dummit, September 16, 1950, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.

\(^{16}\) Levitt to Dummit, September 16, 1950, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.

\(^{17}\) Dummit to Conrad, November 28, 1950, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.
In late November, the bad news became official. UT’s administration had rejected the application, and it had done so without making public its reasons for doing so. Levitt, who had remained in contact with the UT chapter since his departure, suspected that his own reputation as an “irritating troublemaker” had something to do with the rejection of SDA. He was now worried that he had allowed himself to “to be pushed to the forefront of our campaign to get on the campus.” It turned out that Levitt had been one of the most outspoken students at the university, and his opinion columns for the *Daily Beacon*, the campus’s student newspaper, had contributed to the administration’s decision. He had also participated in “a bitter fight a month or so ago over the abolishment of U-T’s literary magazine, which [Levitt] edited last year.” He did not think that he was the deciding factor in the rejection of SDA, since “most of the members of our chapter were involved in the same controversies I was or else expressed strong sympathetic opinions concerning them at the time.” However, “few of them were as directly associated with previous battles with the Administration as I was.” Levitt was no longer a student at UT, but his past actions were casting a shadow over SDA’s activities. Finally, the Korean War had drawn in most of the promising members of the chapter or was threatening to do so.\(^\text{18}\) In short, the appearance of a strong start to the University of Tennessee SDA chapter was illusory.

SDA in Knoxville had been able to do little to protect student publications from regulation by the UT administration, and they had been ineffective when it came to the other major issue for campus liberals. Liberals had been pushing for the integration of southern universities since the end of the Second World War, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had brought several lawsuits against those schools that continued to

\(^{18}\) Levitt to Dummit, December 1, 1950, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.
discriminate against black students. In 1950, the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Sweatt v. Painter* had integrated the law school and graduate school at the University of Texas. Other cases were making their way through the judicial system, but liberals were pressuring segregated schools to admit black students before the courts forced them to do it.

In December 1950, SDA leaders petitioned UT to end its segregationist policies, but the school’s administration ignored their efforts. Unfortunately, *ADA World*, the organization’s official newspaper, had already credited Tennessee with integrating its state universities, and Robert K. Owens, chairman of the Knoxville ADA chapter, attempted to correct that misconception. While state Attorney General Roy Beeler had ordered the integration of Tennessee’s public graduate and professional schools, the university administration in Knoxville had overruled him, arguing that “the Constitution and the statutes of the State of Tennessee expressly provide that there shall be segregation in the education of the races in schools and colleges in the state and that a violation of the laws of the state in this regard subjects the violator to prosecution, conviction and punishment as therein provided.”

Owens and other liberals protested the justice of this decision, but they feared that the final dispensation of the case would take another court case that would last for years.

Despite repeated failures in Nashville and Knoxville, SDA kept trying to gain a foothold in the South. In the spring of 1952, the SDA National Board approved another Southern organizing trip to connect with liberal students in the region and assess organizational possibilities. Sherman Conrad traveled to New Orleans, Atlanta, and several cities in Texas on his tour. In Houston, he suffered a broken nose in a confrontation between a group of liberal students he was meeting at a local hotel and a group of conservatives, meeting at the same hotel, who supported

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Georgia Senator Richard B. Russell’s presidential campaign. Ettinger’s facetiously recommended that SDA “establish the ‘Order of the Pink Heart’ as a reward for those injured in the line of duty, and that Sherman Conrad be the first recipient of this distinguished award.”

Despite this painful incident, Conrad believed that SDA still had a chance of succeeding in the South, and Ettinger agreed with his optimism. In the summer of 1951, he had seen encouraging signs at the University of Miami, where student liberals had decided, in lieu of starting an SDA chapter, to attempt a takeover of the Young Democrats in Dade County. Ettinger thought this made sense because the Florida Democratic Party was loosely organized. This meant that “by enlisting a sufficient number of liberals in the organization we can gain control and influence a more liberal trend in state policy and legislation.” Activities with the Young Democrats would not preclude the creation of a chapter in the future, since the two organizations would serve different functions. SDA leaders would “keep alive liberal issues and serve an important educational function on the campus,” while liberals who thought SDA to be too “radical” could join a broader-based Young Democratic Club. The attempt to take over the Young Democrats eventually failed because of the strength of its conservative faction, but Ettinger liked the way the Miami students were thinking, and in 1952 liberals at St. Petersburg Junior College and the University of Florida in Gainesville also started SDA chapters.

The chapter in St. Petersburg was a particular point of pride for Ettinger because of its leader, Bill Haddad, who had attracted significant attention to SDA in the fall of 1951 with his protests against campus segregation. In one debate, Haddad proudly reported, he had “beat the living verbal hell out of the KKK” in favor of integration. Ettinger liked Haddad’s approach

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21 Ettinger to George H. Jones, Jr., May 10, 1951, reel 51, no. 299, ADA Papers.
because the chapter was “in a constant state of turmoil, and they manage to find a way to operate and publicize their position in every situation that arises. . . . They know they’re right; they yell it to the world; and they don’t give a damn what the world thinks.” This was how to bring about real change. As Ettinger wrote at the time, “in terms of ideology, we have everything on our side—all the salient values of democracy. But without aggressive people who are willing to proclaim and work for that ideology, it is nothing.”

Ettinger best described his organizing philosophy for the South in his response to criticism he had received from John H. Harris, a student and SDA member at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. Harris believed that the college campuses of the South were too inherently conservative, that students were too apathetic to care about politics, and that chapters could not receive meaningful assistance from the national office. Ettinger believed that the notion of entrenched conservatism at southern colleges was a “fallacious generalization.” He understood that continued racial prejudice undermined liberalism, but “in other respects, I believe [southern universities] are frequently more liberal than northern colleges. For example, accomplishments of the New Deal are held in much higher regard by people in the south than they are in the north.” Ettinger also believed that liberals in southern college towns had a higher sense of purpose than northern liberal student, who had comparatively less to do.

He disagreed with Harris’s characterization of college students as ill-informed and apathetic, an opinion probably stemming from Harris’s frustration after several years of failed effort in the Chapel Hill community. Ettinger knew that the effects of McCarthyism were taking a toll on college students, but he thought the result was fear, not apathy, and fear, as he put it,

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22 Ettinger to Jack W. Hopkins, November 6, 1951, reel 51, no. 299, ADA Papers.

23 Ettinger to John H. Harris, May 18, 1951, reel 51, no. 299, ADA Papers.
“has a tendency to inspire action of one kind or another.” If students thought that the government or school administration was attempting to take away their rights, chances were good that they would fight back.24

Finally, if Harris believed that the national office in Washington needed to do more for SDA chapters, an increased flow of communication from the chapters would help. “Speakers do not drop out of the blue by parachute of their own inspiration. They are usually requested by the local chapter and the request is acted upon by the national office whenever possible.” Since Ettinger had only received two letters from SDA at North Carolina in the spring of 1951, and neither letter had requested a speaker, he had assumed the UNC chapter did not desire one. Ettinger knew that SDA members were receiving regular communications from Washington. “If you have not seen these memos, or read the material in our chapter mailings—especially the staff letters and the Executive Committee minutes, I can only attribute this either to irresponsibility of your chapter chairman or your own disinterest.”25 Ettinger was harsh with Harris, but he did not want to take the blame for the unwillingness of liberal students in the South to organize and work for what they wanted.

What made Harris’s attitude so frustrating was that southern students elsewhere were doing their best for liberal causes. It was a difficult challenge, made more difficult because of “how discouraging it is for a few people to try and carry the whole load of organizational activity. And yet, that is the way it usually is.” Ettinger believed that “a few people inspired by

24 Ettinger to John H. Harris, May 18, 1951, reel 51, no. 299, ADA Papers.

25 Ettinger to John H. Harris, May 18, 1951, reel 51, no. 299, ADA Papers.
a vision—called by whatever name—do most of the thinking and the work. They try to inject enthusiasm and rally support even when they feel there will be no response.”

In late 1951, Ettinger left SDA. His replacement as SDA executive secretary was Galen A. Martin, a West Virginia native who had been active in the SDA chapter at Berea College in Kentucky while he was a student there. He would later refer to his time with SDA as a “revelation.” His first major project with SDA was an attempt to revive the chapter in Nashville. The catalyst for Martin’s interest in Nashville was the ultimately unsuccessful presidential campaign of Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver. On two separate occasions in the summer and fall of 1952, Martin contacted Vanderbilt political science professor Lee McLean, who had worked on Kefauver’s campaign, to ask whether he would become SDA’s faculty sponsor at Vanderbilt. Martin had also written liberal contacts at William and Mary in Virginia, North Carolina A&T and the University of North Carolina to gauge their interest in SDA. Most of the responses he received “did not indicate that it would be worth [his] while to take such a long trip,” so he abandoned the idea of an extended trip through the South.

McLean’s response to Martin’s inquiry, written in February of 1953, was cautiously optimistic. He recounted the history of the Nashville SDA chapter, noting that its biggest problem had been that “its meetings were restricted to the campuses of our two Negro schools here. Due partially to the inconvenience in going crosstown to attend meetings, the white

26 Ettinger to John H. Harris, May 18, 1951, reel 51, no. 299, ADA Papers.


membership was small and the organization was not as effective as it might have been.”

McLean wanted to restrict any new SDA activity to Vanderbilt. He also wanted to make sure any new organizing had better timing. Liberals had spent the fall semester working for Adlai Stevenson’s presidential campaign, and his defeat had caused “a somewhat natural despondency” among the liberal element at Vanderbilt. This malaise had carried over to the spring, and McLean had advised liberal students that “the time is not ripe now” for organizing SDA. He believed that a chapter with fifteen or twenty students, organized that spring, would make less of an impact than a chapter with fifty or one hundred students might make in the fall of 1953.

McLean thought that SDA’s had to make a big impression in Nashville and that it had to do so right away. He was “becoming increasingly concerned about the willingness with which the American people seem to be accepting McCarthyism and its challenge to civil liberties. . . . I am convinced now is the time we must ascertain [sic] ourselves even more than before, even though these are certainly distressing days.”

McLean was determined to go ahead with a Vanderbilt group, and Martin pledged to help him. In the summer of 1953, he encouraged McLean to send someone to the SDA annual convention in August so that he or she could meet with fellow liberals and exchange ideas on how best to promote liberal causes. McLean had also pass along favorable reports on the possibilities at the University of Kentucky and the University of Alabama, though Martin wanted more information on whether any previous efforts at those schools had borne fruit before


Part of the problem was that Martin could not think of anyone potential members at Kentucky or Alabama beyond those students who had supported Stevenson.  

The name McLean passed along to Martin was that of Marshall Cox, whom Martin urged to attend some of SDA’s summer workshops in Washington. He tried to excite Cox about working with SDA by spelling out the platform on which they would organize. Their top issue for 1953 and 1954 was opposition to the Bricker Amendment, which would have restricted the President’s authority to negotiate treaties and agreements with foreign nations and increased the Senate’s power over these matters. They would also support Senator Lister Hill’s “Oil-for-Education” proposal, which earmarked revenue from off-shore oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico toward federal aid to education. Finally, Martin wanted SDA to focus on discrimination in the broadest possible sense. This meant continuing to campaign for the desegregation of southern universities, but he also wanted SDA chapters to work for the repeal of the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which had introduced of quotas to restrict immigration. What made the bill truly repulsive to SDA, however, was that it barred political “subversives” from entering the country. President Truman had vetoed the bill, but a conservative coalition of Republicans and Democrats had overridden the veto, and Martin wanted SDA chapters to get behind a campaign to repeal it. The bill was a reminder to liberals that Americans did not discriminate merely against African-Americans.  

Vanderbilt was not the only school that was pro-active in organizing SDA chapters. In August 1953, Arnold Rieger, a student at the University of Virginia, told Martin he wanted to

33 Martin to McLean, April 10, 1953, reel 135, series VIII, no. 170, ADA Papers.  
revive an inactive chapter at the school. Martin considered this possibility “a real break in, for our purposes, the almost solid south [sic].” As was the case in Nashville and Knoxville, however, the hope for a breakthrough in Charlottesville turned out to be unrealistic. The biggest problem Rieger faced at Virginia was a university culture in which, as the student Cavalier Daily editorialized, the vast majority of students “attend classes occasionally, the flicks [movies] frequently, and have a ‘great time’ on weekends.” These students were simply oblivious to the notion that they should care about world affairs or reforming campus life, and this allowed a small group of committed students to control campus affairs. Unfortunately for Rieger, most of these students were conservative, leaving a small pool of liberals for him to organize.

As a result, in the fall of 1953, when Rieger returned to Charlottesville, he found that “things have not been breaking the way I had hoped.” He could not convince a liberal member of the faculty to sponsor SDA, finding them either in poor health, out of the country, deeply involved with their own research, or unwilling to organize a chapter. He also had to deal with the Young Republicans and Young Democrats, who formed the solidly conservative political bloc on campus. As Rieger later wrote, “the reactionaries have taken over.” Worse still, Rieger’s main lieutenant with SDA urged Rieger to work with the conservative Young Democrats in lieu of the “‘loaded name’ of ADA.” Rieger refused, saying “I am a fighter, and I will not call a spade a diamond.”

Rieger may have welcomed the ADA label, but he also knew the political climate in Charlottesville, and his experiences with the Young Democrats on campus taught him to keep

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35 Martin to Arnold Rieger, August 17, 1953, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.
36 Virginius Dabney, Mr. Jefferson’s University: A History (Charlottesville, 1981), 301-302.
37 Rieger to Martin, October 4, 1953, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.
attention off SDA until the time was right. As a result, he rejected Martin’s offer to make a trip to the university for a public appearance. He knew that “a speaker from National Headquarters could either (1) serve as an incentive for those already interested, or (2) cause resentment among the student body, which spontaneously from its number, and not from outside pressures.” He did not believe that “this is the time to take such a risk.” Instead, he wanted Martin to come to Charlottesville for private consultations.\(^{38}\)

This approach highlights a problem that plagued SDA’s attempts to organize in the South. Southerners seemed not to know whether they wanted to operate out in the open or behind the scenes, and they often changed their minds on this subject. National SDA officials did their best to understand the predicament southern liberals faced, but the confusion hampered effective organization. It also fueled the delusions of those reactionaries who thought SDA and ADA were part of some larger liberal conspiracy that was never willing to show itself publicly.

Martin showed as much patience as he could with his southern contacts. In October 1953, he told Rieger that he was very pleased with the progress at Virginia, despite “the difficult environment in which you have to work.” He also agreed that “a publicized visit from an outside ‘organizer’ would not be of much help to you to this time.”\(^{39}\) However, Martin’s patience and understanding could only last so long, and the news Rieger reported to Martin in the last months of 1953 only got worse. Martin already knew that the conservative Democrat Thomas B. Stanley had won the state’s governorship and that, as Rieger put it, “Stanley is nothing but a puppet for [Harry Byrd, the state’s Democratic kingmaker].”\(^{40}\)

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\(^{38}\) Rieger to Martin, October 4, 1953, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.

\(^{39}\) Martin to Rieger, October 6, 1953, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.

\(^{40}\) Rieger to Martin, November 7, 1953, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.
Things were not much better for the chapter in Charlottesville, either. In November 1953, conservative students at Virginia began to accuse SDA of being a Communist organization. This was a familiar tactic for conservatives to try, but Rieger could not pinpoint who was behind it. The shadowy nature of conservative organizations on campus meant “that you can’t put your finger on any one individual, and if you don’t have any counter-support, you are licked. You can’t fight by yourself.” He also had to deal with infiltrators to SDA meetings, mainly from the Young Republicans, who showed up only to cause trouble. In this kind of hostile environment, Rieger referenced his military training, writing that “if you can’t advance and you are too proud to retreat, you’ve got to dig in. . . . I’m sending an ultimatum to all those on our mailing list to send their membership cards filled in, or forever hold their peace.”41

The fights of the fall semester had taken their toll on Rieger. If he could not convince campus liberals to join SDA, he would close down the chapter. He could take some solace in the student council’s unanimous rejection of the conservative Students for America group, despite its association with General Douglas MacArthur and radio commentator Fulton Lewis, Jr. Rieger took some credit for the decision to turn down SFA. As bad as things had become for him, he feared they would only get worse if SFA were permitted to operate on campus. “God knows, if they ever get rolling my head will be the first to go on the block.”42

The irony of Rieger’s success against the SFA in December 1953 was that it came at the expense of one of SDA’s most cherished values, the right to freedom of expression for students of all political persuasions. Martin understood Rieger’s desire to keep what he called the “Junior Thought Police” from operating at Virginia, but “on the basic consideration of their right to be

41 Rieger to Martin, November 7, 1953, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.
42 Rieger to Martin, November 14, 1953, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.
recognized as a campus group, I think we must support them.” SDA had supported the rights of liberal and conservative student groups at other schools, and Martin wanted their position to be consistent throughout the country. Martin also considered the moral ramifications of SDA defending SFA’s right to organize after SFA’s attack on campus liberals. As he told Rieger, “I should think it would be rather embarrassing to them for us to defend their rights after the way they have attacked [SDA]. . . . if they were recognized on your campus, I do not see how they could possibly fail to recognize SDA, if we had sufficient members there.” They could claim the moral high ground because of their positive program, while SFA appeared to exist “just to attack other groups.”

In the end, SDA at the University of Virginia under Rieger’s leadership was another failed experiment. Rieger tired of the constant criticism from conservative groups, and he decided to close the chapter in the spring of 1954. However, by this point Albert Leong at the University of Texas in Austin had contacted Martin about starting a chapter there, reenergizing SDA’s southern efforts. Leong’s motivation for organizing SDA at Texas was straightforward. As he put it, “factors like regimentation, conformity, loyalty oaths, and indirect methods of suppression of free thought all engender distress and alarm among both faculty and students.” One advantage that Leong possessed was that ADA’s Texas organizer, George Lambert, was available for constant consultation. This would ensure that there would be no problems of communication between the local SDA and the national office. Martin expressed concern about the quality of the group Leong had assembled. In fact, as he told Lambert, “we would particularly like your help in insuring that Albert and his associates at Texas are ‘good liberals’

43 Martin to Rieger, November 23, 1953, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.

44 Albert Leong to SDA, November 20, 1953, reel 135, series VIII, no. 172, ADA Papers.
whom we would like to have in SDA."

For all of the talk about fighting against loyalty oaths and advocating intellectual diversity, it was somewhat ironic that Martin asked Lambert to help make sure that the Texas SDA would be politically acceptable.

Lambert believed Leong was a solid liberal with good organizational skills, though he was “skeptical of [Leong’s] ability to find enough like-minded people the undergraduates to get together a Chapter.”

Leong had no such reservations, in part because he had done a great deal of preparation before contacting Martin. “We have secured two of the finest professors on the campus as sponsors; we have adopted a constitution and by-laws; we have official school approval; we are cooperating wholeheartedly with the Austin ADA; we have elected officers; [and] we are planning top-notch discussions and debates between prominent faculty members.”

His goal was to attract thirty to fifty students, out of a student population of around 13,000, “who can institute a progressing, expanding program—which, when developed, can be applied to augment membership.”

In January 1954, Leong established a chapter with eleven paid members, and he immediately began sponsoring events for local liberals. His first major SDA event was a discussion on “How Economics Has Influenced American and Russian Political Development.” The topic was intellectually intriguing, but Leong had scheduled the event at the same time as that season’s basketball game between Texas and SMU. Still, “we attracted some thirty students along with two staunch reactionaries—the questions of the latter livened the meeting considerably. All in all, it was a success—with informative talks and the collection of badly-

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45 Martin to George Lambert, November 20, 1953, reel 135, series VIII, no. 172, ADA Papers.
needed dues.”⁴⁹ It was successful enough that Leong scheduled a debate on the Bricker Amendment for February 16, even though, as Martin noted, the Senate would have voted on the amendment by that date.⁵⁰

After the defeat of the Bricker Amendment, Leong sponsored a panel discussion on Indochina in February and a speech from economics professor Clarence Ayers on “The New Economics” in March. These events were important successes for SDA at Texas, but Leong still had important problems he needed to address. He had to deal with harassment from right-wing groups on campus, though it amounted to little more than the defacing of a few posters. The bigger issues were “lack of funds and a non-expanding membership. Liberal students attend our discussion-meetings but hesitate to join. Our development seems to have reached an impasse.”⁵¹

There was little Leong could do to expand on SDA’s educational activities. He had positioned SDA as one of the campus’s most important groups in terms of educating students on current events from a liberal perspective. However, he wanted to encourage students to take a stand by joining SDA, and on that score he had little success, mirroring the experiences of students at Tennessee, Vanderbilt, and Virginia. The national office responded by telling Leong to “play up and publicize the more famous liberal names in ADA” and tackle the Communism issue head on, perhaps through “a discussion meeting in which you discuss just such a problem so as to bring the question out into the open to thoroughly ventilate it and thus put to shame those people who are frightened.”⁵²

Leong continued to work throughout the spring of 1954 was floundering. The chapter’s leadership decided to move beyond education and into action on local issues. The main issue in Austin, as it was in many southern cities, was segregation. The chapter did not press the university to expand the mandate of the Sweatt decision and admit black students to its undergraduate programs. Instead, SDA leaders focused on forcing the integration of public accommodations and the city’s public schools. As part of the campaign, chapter chairman Leslie Ghetlzer surveyed several restaurants near the campus in May, asking them if they would serve black patrons. Some respondents favored immediate desegregation, while others told her they would integrate their facilities only if the courts or the city ordered them to do so. She also polled the student population to find out where they stood on the issue.53

The enthusiasm and energy of SDA at the University of Texas was a good sign for the future of the organization in the South. It was with this example in mind, and not SDA’s failed efforts in Tennessee and Virginia, that Yale Bernstein worked as SDA Field Secretary. He began working with SDA in the spring of 1954, but he did not make his first tour of the South until the spring of 1956. The timing of this tour was crucial. The effects of the Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. Board of Education two years earlier had become clear by this point. Virginia’s Democratic political boss, Harry F. Byrd, had promised “massive resistance” against any efforts to integrate schools in his state, and in 1956 a group of southern members of Congress were working on a “Southern Manifesto” that promised to use all methods at their disposal to turn back desegregation. In such a politically charged environment, the universities of the South would be an important battleground, especially since the region’s colleges would be an important test case for the South’s continued commitment to segregation.

It was this South that Bernstein toured in 1956. His first impression of southern universities, which he formed before he the tour began, was that they “must be organized,” either in 1956 or at some future moment.\textsuperscript{54} Like other SDA organizers who had visited these campuses, he found a mixed reception for SDA. He met with the student body president and vice-president at North Carolina College, Durham’s school for black students, and thought he could start a chapter there immediately. Meanwhile, at Duke, he could barely rouse a response from liberal students, even those who had expressed interest in SDA.\textsuperscript{55}

The University of North Carolina also looked to be a tough sell for Bernstein, especially since campus liberals were more concerned with a campaign to reinstate the editors of the university-funded student newspaper, the \textit{Daily Tar Heel}. The editors had criticized the administration for its hiring of Jim Tatum as the university’s head football coach. The \textit{Tar Heel} wrote that Tatum’s hiring was a sign that the school planned to emphasize athletics at the expense of education. Bernstein suspected, however, that the newspaper’s public support for integrating the university was the real reason behind the campaign to fire these editors. Nevertheless, he found himself impressed with the students he met at UNC, calling them “the best group I’ve seen at any SDA meeting, anywhere. Liberal but mature and knew what they were doing.” One problem he foresaw in Chapel Hill was that they were split between Stevenson and Kefauver for the 1956 presidential campaign, but he thought their maturity would moderate any rifts that might occur over the summer.\textsuperscript{56}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Bernstein, memo to SDA, January 18, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 60, ADA Papers.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Bernstein, “North Carolina Organizing Trip, 1/30/56-2/5/56,” undated, reel 127, series VIII, no. 60, ADA Papers.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Bernstein, “North Carolina Organizing Trip.”
\end{itemize}
In the end, Bernstein was extremely optimistic about the overall results of his North Carolina trip. If he was able to get through to the liberals at Duke, “we will have the top three in the state ([Women’s College in Greensboro], UNC and Duke) plus several smaller Negro colleges.” With such an extensive network of chapters, “we will have a Carolina region” that he thought was worth the effort. There was, however, one problem that needed to be addressed, namely “heavy-handed” NAACP tactics that put white liberals on the defensive. He believed that “there is no disagreement as to ends, and not even a strong one as to means, but the disagreement seems to be that the white liberals view the situation is [sic] more complex than do the Negro, and the whites are looking for lasting solutions.” His solution was to convene a series of “regional meetings” in the hope that he could “[bring] them together into an effective team. I believe the differences are semantic and superficial.”

Ironically, Bernstein wanted SDA members at black colleges in North Carolina to push the benefits of SDA over the summer, when they attended local and statewide NAACP conventions. Bernstein wanted NAACP members to join SDA, but he also thought the NAACP needed to change its tactics in North Carolina for the sake of liberal unity.

As he traveled the South in 1956, Bernstein also engaged in a larger reconsideration of the question of race and segregation and how it affected the drive to attract southern whites to SDA chapters. Bernstein believed that white and black students were talking past each other. White liberals wanted to probe the “armor” of segregation on their campuses, but they did not want to push for complete and immediate integration. They referred to themselves as a “third force,” one that disagreed with both reactionary intransigence on segregation and the NAACP’s all-or-

57 Bernstein, “North Carolina Organizing Trip.”

58 Bernstein, memo to SDA national office, February 14, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 60, ADA Papers.
nothing approach. According to Bernstein, whites believed that “discrimination must be fought on the economic sphere before it could be won on the social sphere. They believed that the political and economic battles (and general liberal measures raising the standard of living and bringing industrialization) must be fought first and that demand for immediate integration was forcing the issue into a two sided war where the 3rd force was being silences by both sides.” They favored integration, but they thought an open confrontation with segregationists would delay the desired outcome.59 In this sense, the new generation of white liberals had the same approach to the issue as older liberals.60 It was the attitude that Martin Luther King would criticize in his “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” As King wrote, “I guess it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say “Wait.””61

Bernstein did not attack the motives of white liberals in the way King did. He saved his criticisms for other “politically aware” students. “Many I spoke with were liberal as they come, but so ingrained with their southern past that they could not recognize the reasons for integration.” These liberals did not believe themselves to be superior, but they had concluded that “separation was desirable.” What really surprised him was that these opinions “were held by people, [who were surprisingly] liberal in general, and surprisingly educated, intelligent, and politically aware.” Bernstein believed that education would help to change the attitudes of these

59 Bernstein, memo to SDA national office, February 14, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 60, ADA Papers.
60 Chappell, Inside Agitators, 48-49.
students, but “we must alter 100 years of upbringing, an upbringing they themselves are uneasy about.”  

Finally, Bernstein considered the black liberals he had encountered, who often posed the most complicated problems. He believed that the leadership of the NAACP and other black organizations was “woefully unaware of most of the non-racial issues around us and their relation to the race question. . . . It is easy to understand their primary concern, but they do not have the tools with which to fight . . . those tools being general political awareness.” Liberal black students were even less likely than adults to making these kinds of connections. He thought it was not a question of goals, but of the tactics needed to achieve them. “[The] disagreement seems to be that the white liberals view the situation is more complex than do the Negro, and the whites are looking for lasting solutions.” Worse still, “the average Negro student, so I am told by the leaders I met, have a background of ‘uncle Tomism.’ That is, they are so used to their second class position, they haven’t the tools, or even the interest in bringing themselves up.”  

How could SDA leaders help the problems liberals faced on southern campuses? Bernstein thought that SDA could be “the most effective solution to the southern problem” because it was not a “One Issue organization.” Its leaders could “see the complexity and interrelation of the problems” all southern liberals faced. “SDA can be the meeting ground. The whites can be made to understand the tactics and ideas of the Negro liberals and the Negroes can be made to understand the tactics and ideas of the white liberals.” He also wanted to integrate

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62 Bernstein, memo to SDA national office, February 14, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 60, ADA Papers.

63 Bernstein, memo to SDA national office, February 14, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 60, ADA Papers.
the South into national discussions about tactics and politics. “I think our meetings in the North have been void of any real appreciation of the problem.” Bernstein thus allied himself with a particular strain of northern thinking on the South, one which believed that the region was fundamentally different from the North. Consciously or not, Bernstein was agreeing with the idea that the region was the “other,” a place that needed to be made more like the North in order to fully “Americanize” it.

In mid-February 1956, Bernstein visited campuses in Nashville and Knoxville, and his interactions with liberal students in Tennessee only strengthened Bernstein’s conviction that SDA needed the South as much as the South needed SDA. “If we can program in civil rights and toward the economic problems of the south [sic], we would be accomplishing what would be, in my opinion, the most worthwhile of all possible SDA projects.” He believed that “SDA as of now is the ONLY student organization training the necessary leadership ability in the South . . . where the outcome of the total situation depends on this leadership.” Given the response he was receiving, “a Southern conference next year by SDA could be a milestone in student liberalism and a keystone in southern progress. Many of the students I’ve met will be the leaders tomorrow (especially in the Negro schools). The South is aflame . . . and SDA can capture this fire.” He had also concluded that a broader program for action, though still desirable in the long term, was not necessary to organize chapters in the South. “The race question in its broadest terms

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64 Bernstein, memo to SDA national office, February 14, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 60, ADA Papers.

(including the southern economic question), is, in my opinion, THE issue. Academic freedom is NOT an issue here."

What made Bernstein’s approach to organizing southern colleges different was the urgency in his rhetoric. In his opinion, SDA officials would not “have another crack in the South,” and this made the region SDA’s most important priority. He thought SDA was “re-evaluating our reasons for existing. A short time in the South would answer these questions. We don’t have to sell ourselves here . . . we’re needed badly. Our national resources should be directed toward a program for our southern chapter[s].” If successful, Bernstein believed, SDA “can be part of the future. It can be built into a force that will help solve the race question . . . that will aid the unionization and industrialization of the South . . . and ultimately the backbone of the emerging liberal politics in this area.” He believed that “for the first time since I took this job, I feel as if I’m accomplishing something.” Bernstein kept his optimism in the face of the difficulties he faced in the South, even when a police officer drew his weapon against Bernstein while he was in a parked car having a conversation with a black female student. It seemed that nothing could temper his excitement about the possibility of SDA becoming a force for liberal politics in the South.  

Bernstein’s encouraging conclusions about SDA’s prospects in the South kindled a new optimism in ADA’s most influential leaders, including executive director Edward Hollander. Hollander liked what the “bright Jewish boy from New York” was doing at southern colleges, and in February 1956 Hollander asked George S. Mitchell, the executive director of the Southern

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66 Bernstein, memo to SDA national office, February 29, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 60, ADA Papers.

67 Bernstein, memo to SDA national office, February 29, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 60, ADA Papers.
Regional Council (SRC), whether he thought “there are constructive purposes to be served under the circumstances in our continuing to organize among Southern students.” Hollander thought Bernstein’s approach to the South was worthwhile. He thought that SDA had “been overweighted [sic] with intellectuals from the Atlantic Seaboard whose principal activities have been to agitate themselves and ADA on some very fine—almost theological—point of academic freedom.” Segregation and civil rights, on the other hand, had “so much more reality and significance than the comparatively sterile issues on which many of the students have concentrated their energy, that it would be very healthy for the organization, as such, to build up a wider membership of students in the South who would make their cause SDA’s.” He also agreed with Bernstein’s criticism of the lack of cooperation between white and black liberals. “It would seem to us that establishing communications and avenues of collaboration among white and Negro students would be constructive for its own sake, apart from the benefit to SDA as an organization.”

That benefit would be immediate, since Hollander had concluded that “no other liberal organization is [organizing liberals at southern colleges]. The Young Democrats of course are not liberal in this sense and the NAACP student organizations are under severe handicaps of course and cannot organize in white colleges.” Before giving Bernstein an unqualified endorsement, however, Hollander wanted to know whether SRC or other liberal groups would object to a new, aggressive SDA campaign. Mitchell raised no such objections, telling Hollander, “your people will do good.” He warned ADA leaders about the demographic differences between the southern states and included a detailed map to highlight those

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68 Edward Hollander to George S. Mitchell, February 24, 1956, reel 40, no. 135, ADA Papers.

69 Hollander to Mitchell, February 24, 1956.
differences. The available statistics on race in the South forced Mitchell to conclude that the
“Black Belt” of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia would be most difficult for SDA to organize,
though Mitchell still encouraged forays into those states. He thought that Bernstein should
concentrate on areas outside the Deep South, including North Carolina, Tennessee, and Florida,
confirming Bernstein’s instincts about colleges in those states.\textsuperscript{70}

One other aspect of the southern politics in the mid-1950s that Hollander and Mitchell
considered was the changing political awareness of southern blacks. From Washington,
Hollander concluded that white liberals needed to acknowledge “the tendency of the Southern
Negroes to cut loose from their dependence on the goodwill of the whites and to organize
themselves for action on their own behalf.” He believed this added “a new dimension which is
only very slowly being recognized in the North.”\textsuperscript{71} Mitchell agreed, but he thought southerners
were just as slow to recognize this growing political consciousness. Whites who had joined the
burgeoning Citizens’ Council movement “[supposed] that they are dealing with the Negro people
their daddies knew, being people who could be bullied back into ‘their place; by threats and
scaring this one and that.” Mitchell knew that southern blacks were beginning to challenge this
ancient stereotype, and SDA leaders needed to recognize this fact.\textsuperscript{72}

By the spring of 1956, it was clear that the nature of race relations in the South had
changed dramatically. No single event symbolized that change more than the bus boycott in
Montgomery, Alabama, which started in December 1955. The catalyst for the boycott had been
the arrest of local NAACP secretary Rosa Parks for her refusal to adhere to the segregated

\textsuperscript{70} Mitchell to Hollander, February 27, 1956, reel 40, no. 135, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{71} Hollander to Mitchell, March 12, 1956, reel 40, no. 135, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{72} Mitchell to Hollander, March 16, 1956, reel 40, no. 135, ADA Papers.
seating arrangements on the city’s buses. When Parks decided to fight the case, community leaders, including the young Atlanta-born Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., organized a boycott of Montgomery’s public transportation system that eventually lasted more than a year. Thousands of people who had depended on buses for transportation to work or school now walked, used taxis, or organized carpools, inspired by King’s stirring oratory and the efforts of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). MIA leaders suffered persistent police harassment and often violent opposition from the Citizens’ Councils and the Ku Klux Klan, but they eventually convinced the Supreme Court to rule that the city’s segregated bus system was unconstitutional.\footnote{73}

In the spring of 1956, SDA’s national leadership decided to help the boycott in whatever way it could. On March 24, when the SDA National Board convened in Philadelphia, Civil Rights Vice Chairman David Kotelchuck “suggested that SDA undertake a national program to provide some kind of aid to the Montgomery boycott and that campus activity commence.” The board was unsure at that time about what “aid” they would provide, though they eventually decided unanimously to proceed pending the expressed approval of the MIA.\footnote{74}

Kotelchuck immediately wrote Martin Luther King for approval. He referenced a speech by Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, pastor of Montgomery’s First Baptist Church and one of King’s closest advisors, in which Abernathy had pleaded for assistance from students in the MIA boycott. SDA, according to Kotelchuck, “felt a conscious desire to lend our moral and financial support, especially to the many young people who are participating effectively in this program.” To that end, he announced the creation of Indorse Montgomery Protest Action City Transit, or

\footnote{73}{Branch, Parting the Waters, 128-203.}

\footnote{74}{SDA National Board meeting minutes, March 24-25, 1956, reel 129, series VIII, no. 108, ADA Papers.}
IMPACT, to consolidate SDA’s efforts on behalf of the Montgomery boycott. He suggested to
Dr. King that IMPACT would raise money for the purchase of a station wagon that the
boycotters could use in their carpools.\footnote{David Kotelchuck to Martin Luther King, Jr., March 28, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers.}

While Kotelchuck implied that SDA’s decision to proceed with IMPACT would depend on
King’s prior approval, on March 29 Kotelchuck approved and mailed an appeal to SDA chapters
across the country, before King could respond to his letter. In the appeal, Kotelchuck implored
members to understand the “refusal to ride in shame” and “desire to walk in dignity” that
sustained the boycott, as well as the urgent financial needs of the MIA. The circular estimated
the cost of a station wagon for the boycotters at $2,500. He hoped that IMPACT would raise
enough money to provide more than one car to the MIA. All it required was that members
“GIVE GENEROUSLY NOW!”\footnote{SDA mailing to chapters on IMPACT project, March 29, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers.}

Perhaps realizing that his enthusiasm had led to undue haste in his solicitations,
Kotelchuck sent King a copy of the March 29 circular one week after he had sent it to SDA
chapters, reiterating that while “response to our initial mailing has been tremendous . . . we
cannot encourage this interest and channel it into activity connected with IMPACT, until we hear
from you.” Kotelchuck also awaited news on the status of the boycott before proceeding. In late
April, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed segregation in intrastate commerce, and Montgomery
City Lines had subsequently announced it would adhere to the court’s ruling. While the status of
the boycott remained in doubt, Kotelchuck informed the chapters that “actual solicitation of
funds [should] be suspended briefly.” The campaign resumed, however, after King told
Kotelchuck that he was “deeply gratified to know that your organization is interested in contributing a station wagon to aid in our struggle here. I assure you that this would be a most welcomed gift. I am sure that it would give a big lift to our people both morally and physically.”

With that encouragement, Kotelchuck restarted IMPACT with the encouragement of ADA national chairman Joseph Rauh, who told SDA chairman Samuel Perelson that IMPACT “is a wonderful way to involve students on campuses across the nation in constructive action in support of the boycott.” He also urged Perelson to keep the campaign going despite the Supreme Court ruling against segregation in intrastate commerce. Rauh, whose legal expertise was well respected in Washington, argued that the Supreme Court had side-stepped the issue. As a result, the IMPACT campaign was still viable. With that in mind, Kotelchuck redoubled SDA’s efforts to raise money for IMPACT, designating the period between May 7 and May 20 as a special period for fund-raising activities. These activities appeared at first to make a significant dent in IMPACT’s fund-raising goals. The chapter at Temple University in Philadelphia, for example, sent $130 to Washington toward the station wagon.

Unfortunately for SDA, the Temple contribution was one of very few that the organization collected in the spring and summer of 1956. As had been the case in previous campaigns and organizational drives, the rhythms of the student calendar caused Kotelchuck’s plans to go awry. Students had scattered for the summer, which meant that fund-raising appeals and other

77 King to Kotelchuck, May 1, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers.
78 Joseph Rauh to Samuel Perelson, May 2, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers.
79 Kotelchuck, mass mailing to SDA chapters, May 4, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers.
80 Evelyn Jones to Rosalind Schwartz, June 25, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers.
correspondence were not getting to liberal students. These circumstances forced SDA to reintroduce the IMPACT campaign when students returned in the fall. The Montgomery boycott continued, and the appeal the organization sent out in August suggested that every member contribute the equivalent of one day’s pay from their summer job to IMPACT. “To spend one day working for the dignity of man is little enough to ask of anyone. If every single SDA’er makes it a personal obligation to contribute, Montgomery can have its station wagon within a month.” However, the circular also acknowledged that the campaign might have to focus on other communities in the South if the boycott ended abruptly. “Should the Montgomery boycott be settled before the station wagon is purchased, the money will be sent to Tallahassee, Florida—site of another bus boycott—or it will be used for some similar purpose.”

In the end, IMPACT failed to raise the $2,500 necessary to buy an automobile for the Montgomery boycotters, but SDA leaders earned a great deal of praise for their efforts. Martin Luther King called the program “a big lift to our people both morally and physically” that “[gave] us renewed courage and vigor to carry on.” Joseph Rauh called the campaign “a wonderful way to involve students on campuses across the nation in constructive action in support of the boycott.”

81 SDA mailing to chapters on IMPACT, August 7, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers. In fact, some of the money from IMPACT eventually found its way to the Tallahassee boycott. SDA sent over $340 to the Tallahassee Inter Civic Council, the Florida capital’s equivalent to the MIA and pledged, “This is our way of saying that we recognize that whether we live in the north or the south, whatever our race or color, the struggle for equality that is going on in Tallahassee is our fight as well; and our dignity and value as human beings is going to be enhanced or reduced depending on whether you win or lose.” Charlotte Lubin to Dr. M.C. Williams, November 27, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers.

82 King to Kotelchuck, May 1, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers.

83 Rauh to Kotelchuck, May 2, 1956, reel 127, series VIII, no. 73, ADA Papers.
by passing a motion that publicly supported the effort to help the people of Montgomery.\textsuperscript{84} Even though IMPACT was ultimately a failure, everyone associated with it thought it had been a noble effort.

The effort was necessary for moral reasons, but there was also a political dimension to SDA’s efforts on behalf of the growing civil rights movement. At the time, Americans were unsure of how the civil rights issue would affect the nation politically. Since the 1930s, black voters had largely supported the Democratic Party, but there were signs that an electoral realignment was occurring in the black community. The continued intransigence of many southern Democrats on racial issues, expressed most vividly in the “Southern Manifesto” of March 1956, was disheartening to many blacks. They also recognized that the administration of President Dwight Eisenhower was taking steps to deal with racial issues. As a result, the November election dealt a harsh and surprising blow to the Democrats. Eisenhower had received nearly 60\% of the black vote in the election, stunning Democrats who had counted on that constituency as part of their electoral strategy for nearly a generation.\textsuperscript{85} In order to counter growing Republican strength among black voters, liberals needed to show their commitment to the movement, and IMPACT was one way to do that.

IMPACT was also a sign that Bernstein’s message about the significance of the South in the organization’s national plans was getting through to SDA leaders. He continued to preach that message throughout 1956. In April, he wrote a confidential memorandum to the Washington office reiterating his conclusion that “there are few, if any, organizations working for liberalism, either on the student or adult level, in the South,” which meant continued

\textsuperscript{84} ADA Executive Committee meeting minutes, May 24, 1956, reel 34, no. 63, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{85} Branch, \textit{Parting the Waters}, 180-182, 191-192.
opportunities for SDA. It “could become the clearing house of student and adult liberalism in many areas of the South, and because of its political orientation could provide the necessary informed leadership so lacking in the South.” It could also expand the definition of what it meant to be a southern liberal. Civil rights was still the most important issue to liberal students, but “many of the liberal concepts and principles assumed by students in the North are unheard of in the South. In this area, SDA could perform an educational job which is not being done by the established educational institutions.”

He then addressed the question of how best to attract southerners to SDA. He recommended that “the organizer be a Southerner himself.” A native southerner would “be someone who understands the thought processes and the problem in that area,” and he or she would also be able to attract “confidence from the wavering whites.” Bernstein also thought it would be important to get help from the Southern Regional Council, the NAACP, and the largest liberal labor unions in the South, and a southerner would more easily attract that kind of help from fellow southerners.

Bernstein then discussed where he would send a new southern organizer. He thought Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina would be “comparatively easy,” and though “the chapters would not be large, [they] could be effective.” He thought enthusiasm for SDA would be high in these states. His hopes for the “Deep South,” including Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana, were far less ambitious, and he invoked the example of the Roman general Fabius Cunctator, who famously avoided battle with the Carthaginian general Hannibal and successfully wore him down. “Often SDA [chapters] as such cannot be organized, but

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87 Bernstein, “Organization in the South.”
individuals can join, receive help and information, and work through ‘front’ groups and do a
‘Fabian’ sort of job.”\footnote{ Bernstein, “Organization in the South.”}  Ironically, this put SDA’s leadership in the position of endorsing the kind of tactics that liberals had vehemently criticized Communists and Socialists for using in the 1930s and 1940s. In the late 1940s, for example, ADA leaders had explicitly dismissed the Southern Conference for Human Welfare as a front organization. Now Bernstein was asking his superiors to endorse a similar strategy in the Deep South, where organizational prospects seemed bleakest.

There were potential bright spots. Bernstein thought the contacts SDA leaders had established with Martin Luther King during the Montgomery boycott would help them in Alabama, and he believed that many of the predominantly black schools in Georgia and Louisiana might be receptive to SDA’s message. However, he was not particular about who received the credit for SDA’s organizational activities. “The most important thing is to get the job done, whether it be done under the title SDA or not, and in the deep South, often a front group such as ‘Campus Political Club,’ is more effective but SDA must offer the leadership.”\footnote{ Bernstein, “Organization in the South.”}

Bernstein traveled across the South as he mapped out this strategy. In late March and early April 1956, he met with prospective members on campuses in Louisiana. He met with nine potential members at Tulane in New Orleans, only to find that most were graduating seniors or graduate students. In addition, they were all Unitarians in an overwhelmingly Catholic city. Finally, Tulane liberals had endured persistent investigation by authorities at the state and federal level. Senator James Eastland of Mississippi had taken a particular interest in whether Communists were at work on the Tulane campus. He had sponsored a Senate investigation into

\footnote{ Bernstein, “Organization in the South.”}
Communism in Louisiana which Bernstein described as a “farce.” Despite the obstacles, Bernstein thought “a fairly active chapter can come out of Tulane.” The other main possibility in New Orleans was the city’s main black college, Dillard University, where Bernstein believed that SDA could work as a useful front for the NAACP and other unaffiliated liberals.90

His first-hand experience of the situation in Louisiana convinced him that the state was potentially a civil rights battleground. In the mid-1950s, the state NAACP found itself in a tough spot because the state government had forced the organization to turn over its membership rolls “under an old anti-[Klan] Statute [the NAACP] helped pass.” Bernstein thought they had a good chance of getting the courts to throw out the request, but the pending case hampered NAACP organization. As he put it, “The issues are clear, but there is fear.” On a more positive note, “the Catholic Church has taken a firm and absolute stand in favor of immediate integration, and [New Orleans] is predominantly catholic [sic].” This was important because “more students attend Catholic school than public school. The Unitarians have, of course, taken a similar stand, but here, the main force for integration is the Catholic Church, and in my opinion, if I had to have an ally, I would take the Church.”91 The Archdiocese of New Orleans had not yet desegregated its schools, but Archbishop Joseph Rummel had admitted black students to the Notre Dame Seminary and desegregated mass services in the city.92 Bernstein hoped that SDA would “bring together the liberal catholic, the liberal non-catholic and the Negro elements.” These groups had

91 Bernstein, “Louisiana till 4/9/56.”
been independent from each other and Bernstein believed that “SDA can solve that [problem] by definition.”93

Above all, Bernstein’s time in Louisiana served to strengthen his conviction that “SDA should, (and this should be its first project) raise enough money ($5,000) to get a FULL TIME ORGANIZER IN THE SOUTH. THIS PERSON SHOULD BE SOUTHERN AND SHOULD STAY IN THE SOUTH FOR A YEAR.” He firmly believed that SDA could have chapters in thirteen different southern states by April 1957 and that SDA would work with the NAACP, SRC, and other liberal groups without taking money from them. As he saw it, “It can easily be done. It should be done.”94

The question was, would it be done? Bernstein’s optimism about the group’s southern prospects was not limitless, and in the summer of 1956 he left his post as SDA organizer. Would his departure signal an end to talk about organizing SDA in the South? IMPACT had been an interesting campaign, but it had only raised a few hundred dollars before it had ended. Still, there were other issues that could focus attention on the South, including segregation in college athletics. Some SDA leaders recognized the impact athletics had on southern universities and hoped to exploit it. For example, in November 1956, Tony Adona, an officer in SDA’s chapter at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, wrote other chapters across the country urging northern universities not to play football or basketball games against southern schools. No southern university had integrated its athletic teams as of 1956, but the fact that several southern states banned integrated athletic competitions was the impetus behind Adona’s appeal. The “underlying principle” of his message was that “racial discrimination is incompatible with good

93 Bernstein, “Louisiana till 4/9/56.”

sportsmanship,” and he wanted universities to follow the lead of Harvard’s basketball team, which had canceled a fall tour of the South despite not having a single black player on its roster.  

As with so many of SDA’s calls for action, little came of Adona’s mass mailing, but SDA leaders still thought a great deal about southern issues. One student who took notice of what became known as “Operation Integration” was Allan C. Brownfield of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. In October 1957, he wrote SDA in Washington to express his displeasure with Adona’s campaign, which had just recently come to his attention. He thought the campaign would “[undermine] college administration” and “[attempt] to place the responsibility for major educational decisions in the hands of students (and their leftist friends) instead of in the constituted leaders responsible for these decisions.” He called SDA “a shadowy pressure group—working for its self-assigned goals and using any methods (boycott—pickets—pressure) to do it.” Brownfield found it ironic that many of the schools trying to force integration on southern schools were barely integrated themselves, sometimes with only three or four black students on campuses with enrollments in the thousands. He concluded ominously, “We in the schools of the South (no matter what we personally believe about the race problem) will not be slapped in the face. If you succeed and some colleges refuse to play us—well it won’t hurt us as much as it will them.”

Realistically, Brownfield did not have to worry about SDA’s impact on the South in the short term. Given Bernstein’s ambitious rhetoric, it is interesting to note that SDA chapters in the region did very little during the 1956 campaign season. While ADA publicly campaigned for

95 Tony Adona to SDA chapter officers, November 13, 1956, reel 124, series VIII, no. 25, ADA Papers.

96 Allan C. Brownfield to SDA, October 17, 1957, reel 136, series VIII, no. 183, ADA Papers.
the Democratic ticket of Adlai Stevenson and Estes Kefauver and participated in discussions about how to lessen the influence of the White Citizens’ Councils and the Klan, SDA did nothing. In fact, there is no indication from SDA records that any of their southern chapters functioned at all during the 1956-1957 school year, even during the fall semester, when the presidential campaign was in full swing. The reasons for this inactivity are unclear, though continued financial problems and fear of the Citizens’ Councils and other segregationists may have played a role. Despite these and other obstacles, it is still surprising to note that Bernstein’s repeated and passionate insistence that the South was ripe for organization, and vital for national liberalism’s success, resulted in no activity during such a crucial year.

That does not mean that SDA was permanently inactive, however. The October 1957 edition of *ADA World* included a story entitled “Help, Support for Southern Liberals Sought in North,” which highlighted a new area upon which SDA wanted to concentrate. The article talked about the intersection of academic freedom issues and civil rights in cases where professors and students who had spoken out against segregation. An SDA report on the issue concluded that “one of the fundamental conditions for academic freedom is integration. But, while this may be so, academic freedom is also a necessary condition for integration.” Their opponents “recognized this dependence and so have sought to stifle dissent and the free exchange of ideas with special legislation, dismissals of professors, expulsions of students, and a powerful campaign of intimidation directed against the universities.” The story urged SDA chapters to condemn the dismissal of faculty and students who did not support segregation. These condemnations would “let those who have been silenced knows that they do not stand alone.”

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The easiest way to convey that message was to fight against the forces that made segregation possible. As SDA leaders rebranded their organization as Campus ADA in 1958, southern members began to embrace a more direct approach to the problem that mirrored the confrontational approach civil rights leaders embraced in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1960, the ADA Executive Committee expressed its frustration with “massive defiance of law [that could] no longer be met by half-hearted gestures or facile compromise.” What made many in ADA particularly upset was that such defiance continued even in the face of congressional legislation and Supreme Court decisions in favor of voting rights and desegregation.98 As they had learned during the 1950s, however, strongly worded resolutions and expressions of support for civil rights legislation could only do so much. They still needed to win the support of southerners who could use their influence on the ground, and students remained a vital part of that effort. In the spring of 1960, for example, CADA members at the University of Texas demonstrated against segregation on the streets of Austin. The university had officially desegregated in 1950 as a result of the Supreme Court decision in *Sweatt v. Painter*, but the protestors demanded steps that would completely integrate the campus, including integrated student housing, black participation in productions of the drama and music departments, and integration of the university’s athletic teams. However, the ADA label still carried a stigma that campus liberals did not want attached to their campaign. As chapter secretary Hubert Beare noted, “the demonstrators did not want any outside group sponcering [sic] it.”99

Liberals at Texas may have wanted to keep CADA at arm’s length, but the protests in Austin were an encouraging sign. The same could be said for developments at the University of

99 Hubert W. Beare, Jr. to Sheldon Pollack, March 26, 1960, reel 139, series VIII, no. 234, ADA Papers.
Florida. In the spring of 1961, history graduate student Warren Dean organized a chapter and presented its credentials to the national office in the summer. Dean worked quickly to make the UF chapter relevant. “[We] expressed support of the Jackson, Mississippi Freedom Riders through wires to the New York Times and Jackson, Mississippi; then we obtained a great deal of publicity by welcoming another group of Freedom Riders who came to Gainesville.” This activity brought Dean to the attention of the Gainesville NAACP chapter and liberal students at all-black Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach.\(^\text{100}\)

More importantly, he had become active in the effort to integrate the university. The UF law school had admitted its first black graduate student in 1958 under pressure from the NAACP and under court order, but the university’s undergraduate schools were still segregated as of 1961. Dean had worked with other campus liberals to prepare admission applications for five black students. At the beginning of the fall semester, these applications were still pending before the state’s Board of Control of Higher Education. Dean found the prospect of participating in the integration of the university exciting, as it would “give our membership a great feeling of accomplishment and also will give liberalism a real boost here.” He intended to pursue these five cases through the state’s legal system if the Board of Control rejected the applications, and he asked CADA officials in Washington for help in obtaining legal representation for the black applicants if they needed it.\(^\text{101}\)

Dean even contacted Martin Luther King in the fall of 1961 to ask his assistance in desegregating UF. He expressed confidence that the Board of Control “will back down without a court struggle if they are confronted with qualified students.” He also told King that “the climate

\(^{100}\) Warren Dean to Howard Wachtel, August 2, 1961, reel 138, series VIII, no. 211, ADA Papers.

\(^{101}\) Dean to Wachtel, August 2, 1961.
of opinion on campus is not at all rabid—in fact, a majority of students in a poll taken a few years ago came out in favor of integration.” Dean wanted King to write a letter supporting the Gainesville chapter’s efforts and “asking for the co-operation of Florida’s Negro teachers and students.” Doing so would place Dean’s efforts in the context of the final push to integrate southern universities, which was taking place in the early 1960s across the region.\(^\text{102}\)

Dean suffered through a long delay in waiting for King’s response, confessing to the Washington office that “we are pressed for time” as a result. Nevertheless, Dean pressed on, working with the principals of black high schools in the state to secure financial assistance that applicants could use in case the university accepted them. “We have a couple of possibilities, but you [in the Washington office] might be considering a fund of our own if only one or two students qualify.”\(^\text{103}\) In late January 1962, Dean finally received a reply from King, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) chairman did express support for the Gainesville chapter’s efforts. King also expressed confidence that “the principals of the Negro high schools in Florida [would be] anxious to participate in this project.”\(^\text{104}\)

The activist nature of the chapters in Gainesville and Austin was an encouraging sign for the national office. So too was the organization, in March 1962, of the Southern Student Freedom Fund (SSFF). SSFF partnered CADA with several important liberal organizations, including Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the National Student Association (NSA), and SDA chairman Howard Wachtel explained that the coalition would “educate non-southern sections of the country to the problems which confront Southern Negroes,” as well as “embark

\(^{102}\) Dean to King, November 21, 1961, reel 138, series VIII, no. 211, ADA Papers.

\(^{103}\) Dean to Lambert, December 27, 1961, reel 138, series VIII, no. 211, ADA Papers.

\(^{104}\) King to Dean, January 27, 1962, reel 138, series VIII, no. 211, ADA Papers.
upon a nationwide fund raising campaign on U.S. campuses for groups involved in the front-line fight for equal rights for all.” In a sign of the increased radicalization of CADA leaders, Wachtel announced that the first recipient of SSFF money would be the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which had already gained a reputation for its radical approach to civil rights activism in Mississippi, the state many liberals considered to be a “last frontier” for liberalism. As Wachtel noted, “SNCC is in desperate need of funds for bail, jail fines, subsistence wages, administrative expenses, and many other vital items. Several fund raising affairs are already planned at NYU, Columbia, the University of Chicago, Swarthmore and several other schools.”¹⁰⁵

The establishment of SSFF benefited CADA as well, since SSFF acted as a clearinghouse that brought liberals from several different organizations together. This was good news for Warren Dean, whose work in Gainesville was now gaining national attention from liberals. Wachtel made sure that Walter Williams of the NSA, who administered SSFF, knew what Dean was trying to accomplish at UF. Wachtel noted that the integration campaign had spread, with sixty black students preparing applications for admission to the university in the fall of 1962.¹⁰⁶ Williams wrote Dean directly after hearing of his project, calling it “worthy of praise” and asking Dean for additional information on what sort of assistance he might want.¹⁰⁷

Dean would need considerable assistance to make the project work. In May 1962, he informed CADA’s national office of the specific financial requirements he would need to succeed. Dean’s goal was to subsidize as many black students as possible for one academic year.

¹⁰⁵ Wachtel mass mailing to CADA chapter chairmen, March 27, 1962, reel 137, series VIII, no. 204, ADA Papers.

¹⁰⁶ Wachtel to Walter Williams, April 10, 1962, reel 138, series VIII, no. 211, ADA Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Williams to Dean, April 18, 1962, reel 138, series VIII, no. 211, ADA Papers.
He thought that “since there are bound to be a high number of drop-outs,” the financial burden on whoever would be supporting the students would decline significantly for the second year, and other sources would “probably be able to cover the survivors for the sophomore year.” Rauh assured Dean that he had secured sources for at least some of that funding, including CADA’s three chapters in Washington and several chapters in the Midwest. However, Dean wanted to make sure he was at the head of the campaign. As he told Rauh, “[if] you have no objection we’ll decide who will receive the scholarships at this level.” This project was part of a larger campaign in Florida designed to flood the university with black applicants, though Dean was not yet sure how many they had collected.  

This was the most significant project a student chapter of ADA had undertaken in the South since its founding fifteen years earlier, and Dean expressed great satisfaction with it. “[You] can’t imagine how exciting it is to be involved in this project.” He compared working with ADA in Gainesville to being “a cat in the dog kennel.” He faced constant harassment from the local chapter of the John Birch Society and received little support from the university’s administration. Many of the forty members of the chapter would not be present to see the end result of the project, but “if we can accomplish this, I’ll feel everything’s been worth it. Florida is certainly ripe. If we can do this, we’re ready to integrate the local high schools.” The events of the previous months had convinced Dean that “the walls are cracking,” and he was proud to have played a part in cracking them.

The culmination of Dean’s effort came in late July, when Dean called political secretary Richard Lambert to inform him that the university had accepted one of the seven black

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applicants who had been working with CADA in preparing his application. The school had also accepted another female student who had applied without any assistance from CADA or the NAACP. In total, there were seven African-American students accepted into the University of Florida in the fall of 1962, and CADA, through Lambert’s efforts, had raised one thousand dollars on their behalf, enough to support two of them for their first year’s studies. The UF chapter of CADA trumpeted their accomplishments to the university community in a public statement that recounted the beginning of the campaign and the abortive attempts at admitting three Daytona Beach students in the fall of 1961. The chapter acknowledged the financial help Lambert and others in the national office provided for the project, and the release also detailed several trips chapter members had made to Jacksonville, Miami, and other cities looking for qualified black applicants. Once CADA in Gainesville had found the applicants, the chapter made sure their applications received proper consideration, found additional funding for one of the students from Gainesville-area churches, and made sure “all of the students were welcomed on arrival” to UF. Their plan for the fall of 1962 was to set up a permanent fund for black students who needed financial assistance and “to provide tutorial sessions for first semester students who request them.”

The success of the integrationists’ campaign, compared with the public firestorm that had erupted earlier that year when James Meredith had attempted to integrate the University of Mississippi, was a great coup for the Gainesville chapter of CADA. However, Dean did not want to stop their campaign. A November 1962 resolution commended the university

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administration and the state government for its “stated aim” of “the creation of a public school and higher education system second to none in the nation,” but it criticized “the infringement of academic freedom [sic] and inquiry” at UF.\textsuperscript{112} Their target was the Johns Committee, a Florida Senate panel charged with finding and eliminating “subversives” from state government, academia, and society. Under the leadership of former governor Charley Johns, the committee targeted suspected Communists and homosexuals in a campaign that destroyed the reputations of many UF faculty members and students.\textsuperscript{113}

The Johns Committee had been operating in the state for eight years by the time the Gainesville chapter of CADA spoke out, but its condemnation of the state’s “self-appointed heresy-hunters and thought-controllers” was an important introduction to a second major campaign for the chapter. The resolution also called for the immediate reinstatement of professors and students whom the Johns Committee had targeted, and it asked the university administration to establish new guidelines that would “protect faculty and students from attacks by those who are insulated from civil action for slander.” Finally, it admonished the state legislature to abolish the Johns Committee, calling it “a committee which has brought only disgrace rather than honor to the State of Florida and its citizens.”\textsuperscript{114} Clearly, liberals and conservatives were still contesting the meaning of academic freedom and the extent of Communist subversion in American institutions on the UF campus.

It is also clear that the UF chapter of Campus ADA was the organization’s most active chapter in the organization’s fifteen-year history. Dean and his lieutenants deserve some credit

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\textsuperscript{112} UF Campus ADA resolution, November 2, 1962, reel 138, series VIII, no. 211, ADA Papers.

\textsuperscript{113} Julian M. Pleasants, \textit{Gator Tales: An Oral History of the University of Florida} (Gainesville, 2007), 48-50.

\textsuperscript{114} UF Campus ADA resolution, November 2, 1962, reel 138, series VIII, no. 211, ADA Papers.
for the integration of the university, but CADA’s true impact on the process is not clear. Stephan Mickle, one of the seven black students that enrolled at the University of Florida in 1962, credits George Allen, the university’s first black law school graduate, with convincing him to be a pioneer. He makes no mention of CADA as a group that assisted him in any meaningful way, though he does acknowledge that he “was able to establish some relationships with some of the . . . more friendl[y] and liberal white students” later in his career at UF.\textsuperscript{115} It is possible that some of these “friendly” students were members of CADA, but Mickle does not mention any group affiliations these friendly students had. Since Dean and other CADA members never mentioned Mickle’s name in any of their correspondence concerning their campaign, it is possible that he received assistance from the NAACP or other organizations instead.

In the two decades prior to the mid-1960s, Gainesville is the only success story of any significance in the history of the student wing of ADA as it attempted to organize southern students and mobilize them for action against the entrenched political and social structure of the region. In most cases, attempts to organize SDA and CADA chapters at universities in Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, and Texas produced minimal results. Liberal students on southern campuses fought against student apathy, hostility from university administrations, and smear campaigns orchestrated by conservative students. Despite the obstacles, SDA and CADA leaders continued to organize, recognizing that the South had become an important battleground in American politics. As the fight for black civil rights intensified in the 1950s and 1960s, campus liberals continued to agitate for change. In the end, campus liberals who joined the student wing of ADA became loud voices for liberalism in a way

\textsuperscript{115} Mickle interviewed in Pleasants, \textit{Gator Tales}, 340.
that their adult counterparts could never truly manage, though their record of successful action is less than impressive.
In the fifteen years following the end of World War II, Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) attempted to position itself as an anti-Communist, politically savvy liberal alternative to the “Popular Front” approach that had characterized many liberal organizations and political movements before the war. One aspect of their approach to the problems America faced was very different from their rivals on the left. While some people on the left believed that reformers needed to loudly and publicly proclaim the need for economic reform or black civil rights, ADA leaders were more conservative and defensive in their approach to political organization. They believed that liberals needed to defend what they had won during the New Deal and World War II, protecting themselves against big business conservatism and McCarthyism at home and the influence of the Soviet Union abroad. This approach did not preclude further reform, but they wanted to protect the liberal consensus with which they believed most Americans had come to agree. Some Americans remained unconvinced, of course, but ADA leaders believed that a steady application of reason and political pressure would move more citizens into agreement with the assumptions of liberalism.

This approach to liberal organization worked for ADA outside of the South, where large chapters with hundreds of members exerted real influence over local and national politics. However, the defensive liberalism of ADA did not work in the South, though its failure was not from a lack of trying. ADA leaders tried to organize southern chapters in several waves of activity, beginning with Barney Taylor’s Memphis-based efforts in 1947 and 1948. After Taylor resigned from the organization, ADA commissioned an extensive reexamination of their prospects in the South, decided that a renewed effort was needed, and enlisted labor bureaucrat Alden Hopkins for a second “southern office,” which opened in the spring of 1949. When her
year-long efforts in North Carolina and Florida failed to attract liberals to ADA’s cause, the organization abandoned the idea of costly, regional organizing in the South, endorsing small-scale local activity instead. Taylor, Hopkins, and Texas organizer George Lambert were all conscientious, hard-working ADA organizers, but the entrenched conservatism of southern politics proved too difficult to change. While ADA leaders never stopped encouraging southern liberals to join the group, in the mid-1950s their emphasis shifted toward the younger generation of southerners, and their student auxiliary could point to some success in the South, especially on the movement for social and political integration of African-Americans. At a time when civil rights was becoming the most important domestic political issue in America, ADA’s younger generation made an impact on the debate in the South, particularly at the local level.

Nevertheless, by the mid-1960s even the most optimistic liberals were willing to concede that a shift had taken place within the liberal movement. The murder of President Kennedy in November 1963 had stunned the nation, but liberals had a particularly difficult time dealing with its meaning. Many on the left saw this as a moment in which great possibilities and hopes died along with the president, and it deeply affected intellectual liberals, including Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who had served on Kennedy’s White House staff and would become the unofficial historian of his administration. Political scientist James Piereson has convincingly argued that the Kennedy assassination took a “confident, practical, and forward-looking philosophy, with a heritage of genuine accomplishment,” and turned it into “a pessimistic doctrine—and one with a decidedly negative view of American society and its institutions.”

It is possible, however, to note this transition toward pessimism and radicalism among liberals before the Kennedy assassination. In November 1962, for example, Arthur Gorson,

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Campus ADA’s national chairman, announced to its chapters across the country that the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) had granted CADA “observership status.” CADA had also agreed to financially support one of SNCC’s field workers for one year, at a cost of $2,200. These steps had gained the approval of CADA’s national board, but Gorson needed the chapters’ approval before they could move forward with the field worker project. By March of 1963, Gorson was able to report to Charles Sherrod, coordinator of SNCC’s operations in Albany, Georgia, that CADA had approved the project, and the first payment of funds to SNCC was made in May of that year.

CADA’s endorsement of SNCC was a telling moment in its history. While SNCC was not yet the lightning rod for criticism it later became, even among some within the civil rights movement, its methods and goals were certainly far more radical than the methods and goals ADA had embraced at its founding in 1947. By the 1960s, the lack of political and organizational progress in the South had led to deep frustration and an embrace of more radical solutions, which the partnership with SNCC hinted at. Until now, younger liberals had acquiesced to what many considered to be a relatively conservative, gradual approach to reform during the postwar period. They also consented to an approach that agreed with conservatives on the importance of the Communist threat. By the 1960s, a growing number of left-leaning Americans had concluded that this approach had failed. Many ADA members had come to agree with New York Post columnist James Weschler, who argued that ADA had become “primarily a mating ground for those with sentimental ties to the liberal and radical past, a sort of Alumni

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3 Gorson to Charles Sherrod, March 13, 1963, reel 137, series VIII, no. 204, ADA Papers.
Association that recruits too few of its members from more recent classes. In order to forestall movement toward radical solutions that would undermine conventional liberal reform, he argued, ADA officials needed to make their organization more relevant to a new generation of liberals.

ADA’s experiences in the South in the years following World War II helped to pave the way for the radicalization of a significant portion of its membership in the 1960s. For twenty years, its leadership attempted to organize liberals in the region, and it had tried to do so as quietly as possible. Their view of the South was complicated. They believed that conservatives controlled government, the business community, and social institutions. ADA leaders regarded hostility of these “reactionaries” as irrational, and they believed that conservatives would react violently to any attempt to challenge the political status quo, whether through incendiary rhetoric or actual violence.

The hopes of ADA leaders, and of liberals more generally, rested on what they believed to be the latent sympathies of the general southern population. These hopes rested on two important assumptions. First, ADA leaders believed that the South was not nearly as politically and socially retrograde as intellectuals had always believed it was. Its leadership may have been reactionary and anti-democratic as ADA philosophy defined it, but southerners were fundamentally no different from their counterparts in the rest of the country, and liberals had convinced Americans everywhere else of the righteousness of strong, New Deal liberalism. They saw no reason why the South had to be any different. The story of ADA in the South suggests that this liberal optimism about the South was exaggerated. Southerners continued to elect conservatives because they were conservative themselves, not because politicians were deceiving them.

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Their second assumption was that the dislocations and upheavals of World War II had created an especially positive atmosphere for liberal reform. Many southerners had begun to publicly question the beliefs of previous generations as they served with black soldiers in the Army, worked in large government installations that contributed to the war effort, or joined labor unions that had begun to organize in southern factories. Each of these actions validated liberal assumptions, and ADA officials saw no tangible reason why these trends could not continue after the war.⁵

There was an important caveat to liberals’ optimism about the South, however. They knew they faced powerful obstacles to their program in state and local government in the South. Moreover, most of the print and broadcast media in the region was conservative and therefore unlikely to be sympathetic to liberal organizations or politicians. First impressions counted for a great deal, and ADA leaders wanted to make sure the initial contacts its representatives had with southerners were as free from prejudice as possible. ADA leaders thought that if southerners saw ADA members as people just like them, southerners would be more likely to listen to their program and, therefore, to discount the incendiary rhetoric politicians and writers often used to paint ADA as subversive. In order to make the best first impression, however, most ADA leaders wanted to keep their activity as quiet as possible until their chapters had reached a critical mass of local support.

The first place where ADA officials thought they had created that kind of liberal community was Memphis in 1947 and 1948, where war veteran Barney Taylor had set up the headquarters for what he and his superiors had hoped would be a permanent “Southern Office.” Postwar Memphis was a promising place in which liberals could operate, primarily because the

city’s political machine, under the control of “Boss” Ed Crump, was such an inviting target for reform-minded liberals. Taylor’s experience began a long-term trend in the history of ADA activity in the South. Because of ADA’s limited financial resources, Taylor and his successors had to be selective in terms of where they operated. The staff in Washington, in concert with Taylor, selected Memphis not only because it was convenient for Taylor but because it offered a chance to affect the 1948 gubernatorial and senatorial elections in Tennessee. ADA leaders wanted to slowly chip away at the entrenched position conservative Democrats enjoyed in the South. They hoped that the results of the 1948 elections, in which Gordon Browning returned to the governor’s mansion and Estes Kefauver was elected to the Senate, were the start of a liberal trend in the South that would make the region more politically balanced.

The elections of Browning and Kefauver in Tennessee were good news for liberals, but these electoral victories did not translate into increased support for ADA, in Memphis or anywhere else in the South. The financial troubles of the organization meant that it had to concentrate on achieving the most possible success with the least expense. ADA leaders had to use the organization’s resources in places where it could get the best returns, and it quickly became apparent that those places were all outside the South. The staff could not afford to spend thousands of dollars on a southern organizer if that organizer could only recruit a few dozen new members. Taylor had some important assets he could bring to bear, most notably the indignant eloquence of Lillian Smith, who continually implored southerners to reject their retrograde assumptions on race and class and embrace modernity. However, in fact the majority of the financial contributions and letters of support ADA received as a result of Smith’s appeals came from outside the South.
Taylor also had to deal with the issue of Communism. Liberal intellectuals dismissed concerns about Soviet infiltration of the United States as paranoid and without merit. However, Communists, socialists, and fellow travelers had been influential in the formation of organizations such as the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW), standing side-by-side with Eleanor Roosevelt and Frank Porter Graham to denounce segregation and economic exploitation. ADA leaders thought they had dealt with the issue of Communists in the liberal movement as best they could. Its leaders had loudly and repeatedly claimed that Communists were not welcome in their organization. Despite these denials, many southerners, particularly those in the print media, claimed that the doctrines of the New Deal and Fair Deal, which ADA supported, had links to Communism. Taylor did his best to convince people that ADA was not linked in any way to the Southern Conference, and he worked to limit the Conference’s influence. He also worked against the 1948 presidential campaign of Progressive Party candidate Henry Wallace, whom the Communists supported. Many southerners, including some who might have otherwise been interested in joining the chapters Taylor was trying to create in the South, continued to believe that ADA was a Communist organization as a result of the Wallace campaign.

Taylor’s bitter resignation from ADA in 1948 reflected liberal frustration with the South’s resistance to liberal reform. The question had become whether ADA leaders should write off the South as hopeless for liberal organization. The political and business class of the South had revealed itself as the stiffest domestic challenge to American liberalism, but what made the South interesting was the challenge it presented to ADA. By the late 1940s, liberals outside the South had become temperamentally conservative. According to Piereson, they saw the New

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Deal as “something to be defended and preserved, but also a roadway into the future through future acts of reform.”

This work was important, but it was not particularly exciting, especially when compared with the struggles of the 1930s. Leftist critics of “Cold War” liberals agreed, and they thought this approach was flawed because of its rejection of radical change and its detachment from the lower classes, which the liberal consensus seemed to ignore.

In the intellectual and political climate of postwar America, the South represented an opportunity for liberals. It opened the possibility of restoring a crusading, moralistic spirit to liberalism, a spirit that had animated the Progressives around the turn of the century. Since the beginning of Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency, liberals had been able to “solve” so many American problems, but the South had remained beyond their collective reach. The idea that “life in the region was so harsh and so at odds with the nation’s self-understandings that America repeatedly had to step in and clean up the messes the South had intentionally or otherwise created” was nothing new for liberal reformers. What made postwar liberals unique was their optimistic belief that they could convince the South to embrace liberalism if they worked hard enough and educated enough people on what liberalism truly meant. It was a political crusade in which success would have placed postwar liberals on a pedestal that previous generations had failed to reach.

This belief in the importance of this “crusade” explains why early failures in the South failed to convince ADA’s national staff to abandon the South. By the late 1940s, several events reinforced the idea that the South was an opportunity for liberals. The renegade southern

7 Piereson, Camelot, 7.
8 Piereson, Camelot, 5.
9 Larry J. Griffin, “Why was the South a Problem to America?”, in Griffin and Don H. Doyle, eds., The South as an American Problem (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 13.
Democrats who became Dixiecrats in the summer of 1948 generated a lot of noise, but their electoral impact in that fall’s election was small. Liberals could point to several new southern members of Congress and governors who had run on progressive platforms or had challenged entrenched political machines. Most importantly, ADA had played a prominent role in shaping the national debate during the year, committing the Democratic Party to a stronger position than southerners had wanted in favor of black civil rights. It was in this cautiously optimistic atmosphere that ADA leaders now explored their possibilities in the South with the assistance of North Carolina activist John Thomason.

ADA’s strategy for organizing in the South reflected an acceptance of its perception as a controversial group, even if its staff did not think of liberalism as particularly controversial. The list of invitees for the Atlanta conference it convened in February 1949 was short on elected officials and long on labor leaders, independent liberals, and academics. Thomason and Loeb understood that southern liberals did not appreciate outside criticism of the South any more than conservatives did, so they carefully emphasized that they would engage in as little criticism as possible. The records of the conference show a group trying to find its way through a confusing political landscape. The southerners defended traditional patterns of racial relations against northern criticism while acknowledging that changes had to be made, though the southerners warned against concentrating on civil rights and ignoring education, public works, and other issues. They concluded that the southern political class did not truly represent the people, but they did not necessarily trust politicians who claimed to be liberal or progressive. Above all, these southerners wanted to act, and they hoped ADA’s national reputation would help them do so.
This Atlanta meeting was a catalyst in ADA’s decision to hire a second full-time southern organizer in the spring of 1949. Another catalyst was a change in strategy, also related to the conclusions of the conference. Taylor had traveled extensively from his home base in Memphis, visiting liberal prospects in cities throughout the South. It had been a grueling schedule, and it had been expensive. Given the organization’s continuing struggles to raise money, its financial problems were critical. The second southern office, run by former National Labor Relations Board researcher Alden Hopkins, concentrated its efforts in North Carolina and Florida, states that appeared to have better prospects for liberals. Coincidentally, these states also had prominent liberal politicians facing tough elections in the summer of 1950. Senators Frank Graham and Claude Pepper were darlings of the liberal establishment in Washington, which made them obvious targets for conservative Democrats.

ADA’s decision to limit Hopkins’ organizational activities to those two states showed that reliable politicians could expect the enthusiastic backing of liberal activists. Graham and Pepper would welcome the assistance of outside organizations. The same would be true of their conservative southern opponents. The 1950 election cycle was the first that registered the effects of Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy’s campaign against Communist infiltration of the American government. The truth of his allegations notwithstanding, his charges affected voter perceptions in several key races, including North Carolina and Florida. Graham’s association with the Southern Conference and the Pepper’s criticism of the Cold War consensus left each of them vulnerable to McCarthyist charges. Reactionaries also assailed the senators for their support of anti-poll tax and anti-lynching legislation, which branded them as radicals in southern
Under such powerful attack, it would seem to make sense for Graham and Pepper to accept help from liberal organizations, no matter how much their opponents criticized those groups.

As Hopkins found out, however, neither Graham nor Pepper welcomed ADA assistance. Hopkins quit ADA well before either Democratic senatorial primary in 1950, but her experience showed that the long-standing tension between activists and politicians was still strong. She had to deal with the legacy of the 1948 campaign in North Carolina, where some of the most notorious abuse of Henry Wallace’s southern tour took place. Opponents of ADA had succeeded in lumping it with the Southern Conference and Wallace’s Progressives, which was a real problem in North Carolina given Senator Graham’s association, while he had been president of the University of North Carolina, with SCHW. Graham’s concern with the ADA label, despite his continued support for ADA positions, meant that he shunned Hopkins’ assistance. It did not help her cause that when she traveled the state, she discovered that the vast majority of the members ADA organizers had attracted were on the fringes of the liberal movement. Moreover, in 1949 she had to deal with the uncertainty plaguing the Graham campaign, primarily because no one seemed to know who would run against the senator in the Democratic primary.

When it became clear that Hopkins would get nowhere with her efforts in North Carolina, she abandoned the state at the end of 1949 and traveled to Miami, where a new, more enthusiastic group had launched a chapter and pledged to work for Pepper’s re-election the following year. The liberals in South Florida were more doctrinaire and intellectual in their approach than those in North Carolina, who were drawn more heavily from the labor community.

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in the state. Hopkins did her best to steer the Miami liberals toward a more practical political approach that would have less concern with doctrinal purity. She continued to run into trouble, however, particularly on issues of race. She could never convince southern ADA chapters to totally embrace integration. ADA leaders had run into this question in the past, and they continued to do so throughout their attempts to organize in the South. Its platform repeatedly called for an end to segregation in support of black civil rights, but how could the organization advance such views when its southern chapters held segregated meetings, as they often did? Was ADA attempting to organize all liberals, or should it concentrate on attracting only white liberals to its banner? Hopkins failed to persuade her superiors in Washington to relax restrictions on segregated meetings, no matter how distasteful she thought they were personally. This conflict was a key factor in her failure to establish an independent source of financial support in either state, which doomed her southern office to the fate of Taylor’s.

The same financial constraints that frustrated Taylor and Hopkins also doomed the efforts of Texas liberal activist George Lambert, who went to work for ADA in 1953 in an attempt to organize the state and learn more about its politics. Texas’ support for Dwight Eisenhower in the 1952 presidential election had frustrated liberals, particularly because conservative Democrats had been so instrumental in throwing Texas into the Republican column. Liberals wanted to cut into the power Governor Allan Shivers had over the state’s Democratic machine, but they needed to understand how it worked before they could do so. That is where Lambert entered the picture. As the Dallas chapter’s executive secretary, he had gathered information about contacts throughout the state and encouraged the creation of chapters in Houston, San Antonio, and several other cities. He also offered to be ADA’s eyes and ears in Texas, giving them a sense of how bright liberal prospects truly were.
The problems Lambert faced were the same as those that vexed Taylor and Hopkins. The most important problem was the fitful financial and political support from Washington and the almost universal hostility of the local press. One additional problem, however, was unique to Texas. The state had a fairly fluid political situation that most liberals found confusing. As was the case in most southern states, the bipartisan politics familiar to the rest of the nation took place entirely within the confines of the Democratic Party. Liberals had to contend with the constantly shifting loyalties of Shivers, who worked to maintain his good standing with the national Democratic establishment while undermining its liberal principles with nearly every action he took in office. They also had to reckon with Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson, whose national leadership positions within the party did not guarantee them political survival in Texas. Could liberals trust the Speaker and the Senate majority leader? Lambert’s reports to Washington reflected his ambivalence toward the two, especially Johnson, whose ties to conservatives made him nervous.

Between the 1952 and 1956 elections, Lambert worked for ADA, producing a series of fascinating memorandums and confidential reports about the activities of the various Democratic factions. Given the state’s electoral importance, liberals had to do all they could to gain in strength and put the “Shivercrats” on the defensive. ADA liberals and fellow Democratic “loyalists” did their best to convince national party leaders that throwing the party’s support behind Shivers and the conservatives would do the party no good, but Shivers had numbers on his side. Thus, national Democrats sought to avoid confrontation with the governor in the hopes that he would support the national ticket in 1956. In the end, Lambert experienced the same sort of frustration that plagued other southern organizers, but his detailed reports on Texas politics represent an intriguing, and underused, source of information about the subject.
In the years following Lambert’s failed effort in Texas, ADA officials avoided large-scale organizational efforts in the South. Instead, its leaders decided to wage a long-term campaign aimed at creating liberals who would be politically active in the 1960s and beyond. The vehicle for this campaign was its student division, Students for Democratic Action (SDA). In the wake of the Brown decision and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956, the campaign for black civil rights became a national story, and liberals again tried to convince themselves that they were not dealing with a monolithic, reactionary southern population. They hoped college administrators would be particularly understanding of their desire to organize on campus, since, at least in theory, they would be committed to free speech and would welcome diverse political opinions.

SDA organizers ran into trouble on political grounds, however. Concerns about Communist influence over American institutions extended to academia. Beginning in the early 1950s, congressional investigations of colleges and universities touched nearly every institution in the country formally or informally.\(^\text{11}\) These investigations had at least some merit for those who wanted to purge American liberalism of Communists and fellow-travelers, but the manner in which conservatives conducted these probes angered Cold War liberals. They deplored the way in which federal and state politicians ignored concerns about civil liberties, and they hated how administrators caved to political pressure and dismissed politically “questionable” faculty. SDA chapters in the South were quick to protest against civil liberties violations on campus, but this left them vulnerable to attack from the same administrators and politicians. The more SDA protested, the more its leaders might be seen as “troublesome” and “radical,” and students would be less likely to join SDA if the group appeared to be too radical.

\(^{11}\) Pells, *The Liberal Mind*, 287-295.
SDA organizers also dealt with more mundane organizational problems, including the transitory nature of college life and the fact that the students most likely to be politically motivated were often more concerned with their studies. As a result, many of the schools where SDA was most active, including the University of Florida, Vanderbilt University, and the University of Texas, had chapters that formed, dissolved, and re-formed on at least one occasion. Despite the challenges, ADA’s student organizations turned out to be the most satisfying chapters they formed during the post-war period. The issues they dealt with during the 1950s and early 1960s, including McCarthyism and civil rights, were familiar, but they brought an enthusiasm to these issues that led to louder calls for change and more action. SDA and Campus ADA chapters on southern campuses organized debates on hot-button issues of the day, sent numerous letters to campus newspapers opposing segregation and supporting federal aid to education, and urging qualified black students to apply for admission to their schools.

The civil rights issue was most crucial to the effectiveness of ADA’s student organizations. Yale Bernstein, the SDA organizer who was most adamant about the need to organize in the South, knew that layers of distrust existed between white and black students in liberal organizations. He thought of ADA liberalism as a “third force,” one that could work on the political and economic change that had to precede integration. In working toward such change, white and black liberals would each have to compromise. Whites would have to acknowledge the importance of civil rights, while southern blacks would have to expand their definition of “liberalism” to include economics, civil liberties, and other issues. SDA, according to Bernstein, could be the catalyst for such change because it had no natural constituency to placate. ADA leaders had always thought of themselves in these terms, and now it had a chance to make a difference in the South.
In the end, the students ADA recruited in the South were not able to live up to the lofty ideals of Bernstein and other national SDA leaders, who had convinced themselves that a large, untapped reservoir of liberal students existed in the region. However, their accomplishments were more noticeable than those of their ADA counterparts, who never seemed to act in favor of liberal reform in the South. SDA publicly supported the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955, raising money to help boycotters with their transportation needs and earning the praise of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the process. SDA’s decision to engage in such a campaign was a calculated risk, given ADA’s past discretion in the South. However, ADA leaders needed to acknowledge a new wave of student activism. The confrontational ethos of SNCC, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and other groups became a defining characteristic of the 1960s, but it did not emerge suddenly. In the late 1950s, many younger liberals had already begun to reject the “conservative” liberalism that had been in the ascendancy since World War II and that had informed ADA’s approach to the South in the same period. SDA leaders thought they could channel this dissatisfaction into support for a comprehensive liberal program that included, but was not limited to, civil rights.

The problem with SDA’s all-encompassing approach to liberal reform in the South was that, by the late 1950s, civil rights had become the issue in the region, at the expense of other important political and economic issues. This was not necessarily a detriment to campus organization, since liberal students came to recognize they could make a difference on a local level, whether through organizing boycotts of intercollegiate athletics in southern states that refused to allow integrated competition or encouraging qualified black students to apply for enrollment in southern schools. This brought liberals in direct conflict with the political and academic power structure of the South, something ADA officials had been trying to avoid since
the organization’s founding. ADA liberals had always reassured southerners that they were not radicals, but the events of the 1950s and early 1960s had convinced many liberals that more radical solutions were needed. They concluded that the South needed a crusade, and younger liberals were determined to recapture the crusading spirit of previous generations.

One defining characteristic of this spirit was impatience. Younger liberals were impatient with resistance from the southern power structure and the resulting slow pace of reform, largely because they were so convinced that integration was necessary. If something was morally right, why was it necessary to wait to achieve it? They were also growing impatient with fellow liberals who refused to answer this question to their satisfaction. They could not understand why people who publicly proclaimed their commitment to civil rights balked at the opportunity to act on their ideals.

One of the elder statesmen of ADA liberalism, Minnesota Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, had made this very point in 1948, when he was a younger politician seeking a seat in the United States Senate. His famous speech at that year’s Democratic convention in Philadelphia argued that the country had waited nearly two centuries too long to live up to its promise of equality for all. By the time of the 1964 Democratic convention in Atlantic City, an older Humphrey, seeking his party’s vice-presidential nomination, had reversed course. He urged the representatives of the Mississippi “Freedom Democrats,” who had traveled to the convention intending to challenge the all-white regular Democratic delegation of that state, to compromise their principles in the interest of political unity.12 Humphrey’s backroom dealing was the antithesis of his eloquence in Philadelphia sixteen years earlier, and many liberals believed that he (and others like him) had betrayed their principles to benefit their own careers.

12 Gillon, Politics and Vision, 162-163.
The frustration that accompanied that conclusion was palpable, and it was the result of years of struggle. The story of ADA’s repeated attempts to gain a foothold in the South represent a small part of that process, one that highlights the obstacles liberals faced in the region. It is surprising that, in the face of intense opposition from southern politicians and their allies in the press, ADA leaders made numerous separate attempts to organize chapters and create interest in their brand of Cold War liberalism. They did so because liberals had convinced themselves that the South represented a last frontier for their ideas, which they believed a majority of Americans had permanently and irrevocably embraced. By reaching out to the South, liberal intellectuals and activists could recapture the crusading spirit that had animated previous generations and “save” the one part of the country that most needed their help.

The fact that many southerners either actively campaigned against ADA or simply ignored the group was a challenge to liberalism’s vision of itself. Liberalism had established itself as a consensus philosophy in the post-war period, one that its adherents believed all Americans would eventually embrace. The recalcitrance of the South in the two decades following the end of World War II appeared to be empirical evidence that contradicted this theory, and it led many on the left to abandon traditional liberalism for more radical ideas. These “new radicals” attacked Cold War liberalism “as lacking in vision, as shoring up the status quo through incremental reforms, as too pragmatic to affect far-reaching changes, as too boring to command the interest of creative men and women.”

The shift away from consensus liberalism and toward radicalism was gradual and based on experience, and ADA’s frustrating experiences in the South were one part of the experience that caused such a change to take place in the 1960s.

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13 Piereson, Camelot, 24.
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Douglas Steven Gallagher was born in 1977 in South Miami, Florida. The oldest of four children, he grew up in South Miami and Coral Gables, Florida, graduating from Coral Gable High School in 1995. He earned his B.A. in history, with a minor in philosophy, from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee in 1998, graduating summa cum laude. He earned his M.A. in history from the University of Florida in 2001, where he has worked as a teaching assistant and teaching associate since 2001.