

HOWARD W. ODUM'S SOCIAL THEORIES IN TRANSITION: 1910-1930*

WILLIAM B. THOMAS

University of Pittsburgh

The American Sociologist 1981, Vol. 16 (February):25-34

This essay examines Howard W. Odum's changing social theories about racial groups and race relations. It focuses first upon his initial 20 years of productivity as a social scientist, discussing the origins and development of his scholarship and social activity for ameliorating racial conflict, for drawing black intellectuals into the sociological mainstream, and for studying the sociology of race relations both comprehensively and scientifically. Finally, it demonstrates how Odum, as President of the American Sociological Society (1930), influenced the course of action surrounding the sociological discipline's attempt to bridge the gap between social theory and practice.

Howard Washington Odum was a sociologist in the vanguard, advocating both social action for interracial cooperation and race relations as a field of study for comprehensive, scientific sociological investigation. Of the interpretative literature written about Odum (Cf. Bogardus, 1957; Gatewood, 1965; Grantham, 1968; Kantor, 1973; Simpson, 1955; Sosna, 1977; Tindall, 1958, 1967, 1976; Vance, 1972; Vance and Jocher, 1955), relatively little has been devoted to his earlier contributions to the sociology of race relations. This essay therefore will focus upon his initial years of productivity, culminating in his presidency of the American Sociological Society in 1930. It will illustrate how, as a southerner, Odum attempted to influence, through his profession, the course of action surrounding American race relations. It will thereby highlight the origins and development of Odum's agenda for: a) reducing racial conflict between blacks and whites; b) for drawing black intellectuals into the mainstream of the sociological community; and c) for encouraging social scientists to study racial groups scientifically as a prerequisite process for understanding and

consequently ameliorating racial tensions in America. To appreciate, however, his development as a spearhead of race relations in the South, it is necessary to assess his earlier and contrasting assumptions about racial groups. Such an examination, indeed, must be tempered by some understanding of the imminently complex and seemingly paradoxical nature of his thinking as a sociologist. Accordingly, the evolution of his ideas will be seen against the background of the social *Zeitgeist* and of the pervasive intellectual influence of his academic mentors.

A descendant of slave owners and southern planters, Odum was born in Georgia, May 24, 1884, during the post-Reconstruction era. He was reared and lived most of his life in a South fraught with political, social, and economic schisms: i.e., provincial sectionalism between an aristocratic southern gentry and poor whites. The tensions and conflicts arising from these cultural dichotomies, for example, may be gauged in part by the documented lynchings of 2,458 blacks during the first 35 years of Odum's life ("Colored Men Lynched," Editorial, 1911), and the fact that, according to Odum, the Southeast was responsible for more than 90 percent of the lynchings occurring between 1925-1930 (Odum, 1936:151-153).

As a young student of classics at the University of Mississippi, Odum developed a dynamic interest in the social forces and processes that operated and affected the development of southern

* The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Research Associates Henrietta T. Dabney, Professor of Sociology, Norfolk State University, and Thomas J. Riley, graduate student, University of Pittsburgh. Research for this paper was funded by a Faculty Research Grant from the School of Education, University of Pittsburgh. [Address correspondence to: William B. Thomas, Foundations of Education, 5B12 Forbes Quad, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.]

blacks. Encouraged by psychologist Thomas Pierce Bailey to pursue the social sciences, he began to conduct research on the folk songs and traditions of southern blacks living in nearby communities. Subsequently, under the tutelage of G. Stanley Hall at Clark University, he wrote and published a doctoral dissertation (1909) titled "Religious Folk-Songs of the Southern Negroes." The prologue to Odum's thesis set the stage for what would consume a major part of his research energies until his death in 1954.

To know the soul of a people and to find the source from which flows the expression of folk thought is to comprehend in large measure the capabilities of that people. . . . The student of race traits and tendencies must accept testimony from within the race. . . . *To place (people) fairly before the world is the first service that can be rendered in the solution of race problems. . . . Justice to the race and the scientific spirit demand the preservation of all interesting and valuable additions to the knowledge of folk-life* (Odum, 1909:265-266). [Emphasis added.]

The following year, Odum (1910) completed a second dissertation under Franklin H. Giddings at Columbia, publishing and titling it *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro*. Odum's assumptions underlying this sociological treatise would haunt him for many years thereafter. Touched by the tentacles of the then widely-accepted ideas of social Darwinism, Odum had noted of black children that they "attain little in the intellectual way beyond childhood," even under competent instruction. Characterizing blacks as "shiftless, untidy, indolent; . . . improvident and extravagant; lazy rather than industrious; dishonest, over-religious and superstitious," Odum asserted that the minds of many "are so dense that they can scarcely learn anything" (Odum, 1910:37-39).

He concluded that there is "no absolute race equality in any sense of the word." Moreover, blacks would achieve their place in the American social order through an evolutionary process—developing slowly and entirely as a separate race. He believed that this process would occur only when blacks ceased wishing to become as whites (Odum, 1910:286-297).

Odum's ideas were not inconsistent with those of his advisors at the University of Mississippi, and Clark and Columbia Universities. In fact, Odum included one of Bailey's discussions, "Children Differ in Environment," in his published dissertation. In it Bailey (in Odum, 1910:299-302) had asked rhetorically:

Must Southern children of the dominant race grow up to scorn and despise, or else condescendingly to tolerate, their less fortunate fellow creatures? . . . Must the Southern child be compelled to choose between the idea and the real in a world whose ideas must be realized in accordance with the laws of nature? . . . Let him who would establish any kind of equality on any basis than that of a biologically based family life, give us the recipe for life in a vacuum.

Bailey concluded that science, "star-eyed," "truth-loving," "spiritually intellectual science" alone would prepare mankind for the solution of the race problem.

Odum's academic sage at Clark shared similar views on the role of science—i.e., anthropology, sociology, and economics—as even conditioners of philanthropy and social legislation. Hall (1905:358) asserted:

No two races in history, taken as a whole, differ so much in their traits, both physical and psychic, as the American and the African. . . . The selection of the best . . . has helped to make the average Southern pure-blood negro distinctly above his ethnic congeners in the Dark Continent in stature and vigor if not in intelligence.

Franklin Giddings was no less under the influence of Spencerian principles of social evolution. A psychological sociologist, he had written in *The Principles of Sociology* (1896:328-329):

. . . the lower races have . . . been in existence much longer than the European races, and have accomplished immeasurably less. We are, therefore, warranted in saying that they have not the same inherent abilities. . . . The same amount of educational effort does not yield equal results when applied to different stocks.

By the turn of the century, however, Giddings had begun to modify his position on biological conceptions as foundations of formal sociology. He stated: "The at-

tempt to construct a science by means of biological analogies . . . was one of those misdirected efforts that must be looked upon as inevitable in the development of any branch of knowledge" (1900:29).

Giddings now espoused psychological theories of the inter-relatedness of individual personality with social institutions. Yet, he did not totally eschew earlier explanations for differentiation between unequal and conflicting elements within a group, e.g., between the stronger and weaker classes (Giddings, 1904:167-170).

While at Columbia, however, Odum found an intellectual balance in his study with the social anthropologist Franz Boas. The enlightenment from this association and Odum's empirical research on black children in the Philadelphia schools in 1910-1911 seem to have tempered some of Odum's earlier views on race. Boas (1910:22-25) believed in "the plasticity of human types," pointing out that differences between the two races were insignificant when compared with the range of variability exhibited in each race by itself. Citing, for example, the fact of rapid development among "favorably situated social groups" of whites and retarded development among poorer whites, Boas concluded that these differentials did not sufficiently prove mental inferiority among the poorer group. Could not then this analogy stand for differences among blacks and between blacks and whites?

In essence, then, it was these kinds of thoughts, coupled with the conditioning influences of southern tradition and folkways, that helped to shape the social ideas of Howard Odum. Acting more under the influence of Boas than either Hall or Giddings, however, Odum began to consider the racial phenomenon not only in terms of inherent differences, but from an environmental perspective. Of further significance to his changing views was his hypothesis that studying the problems of educating blacks had special importance for race improvement. Hence, in his five-month study in Philadelphia schools (Odum, 1913), he began to observe that the physical measurement, school attendance, and educational progress of these black youth were products of environment *alone*. Although he held that fa-

vorable environment could only develop the mental processes already possessed, he was optimistic in the fact that "the records of a limited number of Negro children equal the records of the best white children and give indication of larger possibilities" (1913:205). In a less romantic vein than his earlier *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro*, he posited:

It would clearly be impossible for the Negro children to show the same manifestations of mental traits as white children, *after having been under the influence of entirely different environments for many generations* (1913:206). [Emphasis added.]

Odum urged that, in instances where blacks were disadvantaged due to identifiable environmental factors, there was an obligation "to determine the exact nature of the differences, their specific causes, and the means by which a new environment and method may overcome such weaknesses" (1913:206).

These observations had significantly heightened Odum's sensitivity to what he would later term "errors in sociology," i.e., the disregard for "differentials due to the cumulative power of folk-regional and cultural environment" (Odum, 1937:338).

Odum's appointment to the University of Georgia in 1912 and Emory University in 1919 provided him with an academic base out of which to publish, in addition to his Philadelphia school study, several essays on problems facing American blacks. On the one hand, Odum attempted to demonstrate in one essay the extent to which philanthropy was contributing to research by white graduate students studying social problems among blacks (1915a). On the other hand, a second treatise (1915b) called for greater research emphasis from the standpoint of "race development" vis-a-vis such traditional terms as "race traits" and "race psychology." Assumptions based upon race development, he argued, offered a better medium for measurement. Development implied progress. It also indicated that the researcher employed differing and changing criteria for measuring that progress. Thus, social scientists could measure conditions without the constraints of rigid dogma and false science, e.g., the mental

inferiority of blacks as an absolute characteristic.

Challenging such dogmatic conclusions drawn from cursory observations done in the name of science, Odum cited two fallacies commonly encountered in the study of race problems. He noted that the first fallacy often misled both the student and the public to consider all facts relating to Negroes as absolute characteristics of all Negroes, without distinguishing different groups or stating the scope to which their assertions might properly apply. Odum cautioned against the generalizability of conclusions about racial groups. He suggested that researchers might select specific problems and fields for experimentation, reaching conclusions which would then contribute to the whole subject, as was done in other broad areas of research.

A second fallacy in research on blacks, stated in a typical style known as "Odumesque," was the tendency to believe the problems of racial groups "can be relegated to certain positions or transferred into certain dimensions at will." That was to say, while the problem of blacks was unique, involving separate and distinct principles, it could not be separated from problems of the larger society. To him the race problem was one "of relations, of adjustments, of growth, of evolution, of life in its larger biological and spiritual senses." To address the problem as social scientists, it was necessary to see the problem in relation to the "organic principles" of a society, emphasizing cases of extremity and minority, but more importantly, indicating something of their ratio to the whole.

Odum came to the University of North Carolina in 1920 at the invitation of President Harry W. Chase. This was a major turning point in both his career as a social scientist and the course of sociology as a legitimate discipline taught in the South. Within the first four years of his arrival, he: 1) founded the Department of Sociology and the School of Public Welfare (1920), 2) founded *Social Forces* (1922) and served as its editor for several decades, and 3) founded the Institute for Research in Social Science (1924).

A forward-looking scholar in terms of

what he thought social science should be, Odum, according to his protegee and associate Guy B. Johnson, devoted much attention to race study as one of the primary foci of the Institute (Personal Interview, 7/22/80). He initiated, with eight students, a course on "the Negro," for which Johnson, amidst a rising student interest, assumed responsibility in the late 20s. Johnson, also a sociologist, and now a Kenan Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina, worked very closely with Odum, collecting Negro songs sung by migrant workers and chain gang road crews working in the vicinity of the campus (see Odum and Johnson, 1925; 1926). He reports further that Odum's interest in folk songs by the 1920s was deliberate. The study of these songs revealed much about the conditions of southern life. Gathering data in this manner was then by far, more benign than the outward study of race prejudice, segregation, and other subjects which might threaten the social order of a conservative region such as the South.

Odum's penchant for objective study of racial groups from both an academic and public policy viewpoint and his willingness to challenge the *status quo* in race relations make it very difficult to tag him a moderate, radical, or conservative, especially in that period. It is certain, however, that his thinking at that time was in a state of flux. He was still haunted by the powers and influences of southern folkways over social change. On the one hand, Odum (1923:282) was ambivalent in reconciling dilemmas between what he termed "statesmanship" and aggressive action which challenged race-related problems. He recognized "mutually beneficial opportunities for justice and progress for all the people of both races" through social action. Paradoxically, he yielded to "the permanence of separate race relationships" as a given fact of life. On the other hand, and according to Guy Johnson, he verbally expressed regrets to close colleagues over his value judgments in *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro*, which Johnson noted did not reflect his personal evaluation of blacks. Furthermore, in 1925 he wrote in *Southern Pioneers in Social Interpretation*:

What man of distinction does not blush to think of youthful statements made, or early convictions for which he has proclaimed himself willing to make the great sacrifice, or make a fool of himself generally? Is he now in the glow of his prestige and honor, the more intelligent or merely more learned and experienced? (1925:9).

New social directions in the American scene were having a significant impact upon Odum's thought. This was the era of the Negro Renaissance. Odum (1926:127-128) hailed this mid-twenties movement as "a renaissance of the scientific search after truth, . . . one of the most encouraging signs and developments which is taking the place of the old sentimental viewpoints concerning the Negro." He believed that this new era of self-discovery and consciousness of blacks would toll the death knell to the old regime. Under that regime, "the Negro acted the unnatural part and does not know himself as he really is." Meanwhile the white group "patronized him with sentimental attitudes" based upon either a denial of the existence of race or an insistence that race was fixed immutably in the annals of social development.

Optimistically, Odum saw in this rebirth the promise of major social change in attitudes of both whites and blacks; furthermore, blacks would be called upon to assume new roles through governmental relationships.

This period inspired him to return to his writings in the humanities, a field which Odum did not regard as being wholly separate from the social sciences (see Odum 1928; 1929; 1930). Moreover, the evolving *Zeitgeist* and his development as a sociologist were further impetus for him to expand upon his observations of the state of the art surrounding social research on blacks. In *Man's Quest for Social Guidance* (1927:191-205) he continued to chastize fellow social scientists for having neglected the details of the lives of blacks and of their larger economic, social, and political relations to whites.

He also challenged their attempts to validate, based on extreme cases of inferiority or superiority, assumptions of innate equality of mankind (a northern view) or the traditional assumptions of race in-

feriority (a southern view). Furthermore, in measuring the whole race, these scientists, he noted, often had relied upon a restricted population sample, either choosing too few, or citing the misdeeds of the submerged masses to illustrate *a priori* premises. Odum found that their analyses often were ahistorical, looking only at contemporary individuals and disregarding past progress of the group. Another tendency was to look only at "aggregates," focusing upon achievement of a few while disregarding distributions and often comparing relative progress of black Americans in relation to blacks in Africa. Odum had thereby even undercut one of his major advisors' notions about blacks.

Personally, Odum was indifferent to the small talk within faculty cliques. His actions directed toward racial justice even annoyed some of his colleagues and members of the nearby communities. For example, Guy Johnson recalls that some colleagues held the study of blacks in derision and that one historian, who had been writing about the "horrors" of Reconstruction from a pro-southern bias, became incensed and walked out of a convocation when Odum introduced guest-speaker James Weldon Johnson to the student body, using the title "Mr." On another occasion when the Trustees ordered signs displayed designating separate restroom facilities for visiting blacks to the campus, Odum went through the sociology building tearing down these signs.

He did not merely confine himself to social issues and research, but took an equally strong interest in both his teaching and students. For example, in 1926-1927, William H. E. Johnson, now Professor Emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh, was an undergraduate student in Odum's course. As an English major attracted by Odum's interest in humanistic literature, Johnson recalls how greatly impressed he was with Odum's thesis that the alignments of the then 48 states of the U.S.A. should be radically altered, a view which became a major focus of Odum's research on regionalism. Returning to Chapel Hill for graduate study in 1932, Johnson again was associated, now more closely, with Odum through their mutual involvement with the Tennessee Valley Authority Pro-

gram in the 17 Western counties of North Carolina. According to Johnson, "Odum hoped that the areas of the seven states covered by TVA would constitute the '49th State,' ushering in his dream of regionalism." He recalls further that "The last time I had contact with Howard Odum was in May 1934 when, having received the MA in education, I had been awarded an UNC Travel Grant to pursue my study of education at the first Anglo-American Institute conducted by Moscow (USSR) State University. As a member of American sponsoring committee, Howard Odum wrote a recommendation of me to the Soviet director. Not only was I accepted at the Institute as a student but, largely because of Odum's letter, I was made the Librarian and given full board and living quarters. This was the real start of my life-long pursuit of Soviet studies which has lasted for fifty years" (Personal Interview, Pittsburgh, 9/2/80).

In the formative years of his social activism at the University, Odum waged war with citizens from Charlotte, Burlington, and other Piedmont cities. They had resorted to sending resolutions and telegrams to the Governor, the legislature, the President and the Board of Trustees over what they feared to be the University's role in the evolution controversy. They sought censure of Odum and the assurance that state funds were not being used to support the journal *Social Forces*. Furthermore, Odum had aligned himself with the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. He had even mapped out and published the agenda for the newly formed North Carolina State Conference on Interracial Cooperation in *Social Forces* (Odum, 1922). When Odum and President Chase were able to give them that assurance, the criticisms gradually subsided.

Odum, himself a Methodist, was impatient with the fundamentalist, anti-intellectual Protestantism of the South, as well as any other religion founded upon what he viewed as dogmatic principles (see Gatewood, 1965). In fact, in a letter to his friend Benjamin B. Kendrick he wrote: "I have no patience with the Catholic religion and policies" (3/13/30). He cited Methodist Bishop Candler along with Governor Thomas Watson as the two

sources, more than any other, who had kept Georgia in an "anti, 'agin' mood" ("agin" is Southern dialect for "against"). Odum (1925:10) launched a scathing attack against religious doctrinaire when he decried the loss of intelligent, religious leadership in matters pertaining to social justice.

In religion and morality, for which we claim so much, we have been poor in the fruits of social righteousness, justice, and the essence of Christianity. The religion that boasts much, complains continuously, seeks notes in other people's eyes, klans together for persecution, mobs the weak, has little respect for truth, is selfishly self-centered, is emotionally and lazily inclined toward the easiest way, would hardly be expected to produce distinguished creative contributions in any field.

He weathered well the storm of allegations of impiety made against him and *Social Forces* by the religious and secular communities. In a letter to his mentor, Franklin Giddings, Odum wrote: "Some of the brethren just assumed as a matter of fact that we were through with . . . that was one of the best things that has happened to us because we took a big dose of it at one time, and it was oil instead of poison. Unless I am mistaken, we are here for a good, long, steady, continuous piece of work" (1/2/30).

A touchstone of Odum's genuine commitment to the study of race problems and the employment of social agencies for their ultimate amelioration is found in his policy statement for *Social Forces*. (Odum, 1922:56-61) He asserted that race relations in this country would continue to constitute a major, national problem. These problems could neither be adjusted through a *laissez faire* policy on the part of private and public institutions such as schools and churches nor through the actions of "the un-American and un-Christian methods" of the unthinking, unscientific, and anti-social agitators.

By 1930, Odum was fully seasoned and engaged in research, writing, and sociopolitical activity at the local, state, and national levels. At times he over-extended himself. He served on the Governor's commission for the study of prisons in North Carolina and was actively involved

in President Hoover's committee for the study of social trends in the United States (Ogburn and Odum, 1933). As a committee member, he chaired the section on public welfare and advised his friend William F. Ogburn (President of American Sociological Society 1929) in outlining and coordinating the total project. He accomplished all this while writing the conclusion to his trilogy *Cold Blue Moon* (Odum, 1931a), which, as he wrote to his publisher, "has social significance in its portrayal of the social distance between the Old South and the New, between the white man and the Negro" (To D. L. Chambers 10/22/30).

In each of these capacities, he sought to bring blacks and the study of race relations closer to the larger social picture. As a powerful member of the prison commission, for example, he relentlessly pursued raw data on prison populations. He suspected there was a great possibility of racial conflict when there were large numbers of illiterate, untrained white guards and large numbers of black inmates interacting in such superordinate/subordinate roles as these.

The question arose whether to include blacks as an issue in the Hoover study on social trends. Odum advised Ogburn, a fellow Southerner then teaching at the University of Chicago, that by having one division dealing with minority groups, as had been originally suggested by Jack Woofter, "we can satisfy all the Negro group without, at the same time, featuring any one race too much. . . . In this way we can both include the Negro in the general analysis and give him some special emphasis" (To Ogburn, 1/7/30). This was not merely a passing recommendation from Odum. As a followup, he wrote to Ogburn that he and Woofter were developing plans to discover some norms for measuring a number of new trends with reference to blacks, "so as not to make this study just another study of the Negro" (7/15/30).

Neither was Odum merely rhetorical in his rejection of what he termed "the old conformities as to form and method of presentation of research about blacks" (To Ogburn 5/22/30). In fact, when asked to review *Poor Nigger* by the Italian writer

Orio Vergani, Odum resolutely expressed his distaste for the book to Editor Anne Johnston at Bobbs-Merrill, stating:

I cannot like *Poor Nigger* very much. I believe that it impresses me as being artificial. In trying to portray the primitive African driven on in some modern civilization or in working out his relationship with white people, especially white women, it seems to me that the pictures are inferior ones. There are, however, situations and elements of power and sublimity in the author's picture of this Negro's remarkable survival (5/14/30).

As a social activist, Odum served on the Southern Commission for the Study of Lynching, a vital arm of Will W. Alexander's Commission for Interracial Cooperation in Atlanta. At this time Odum was beginning to feel the pressure of his numerous and demanding commitments. The Committee on Lynchings had been received with much acclaim by both the public and the press. Hence, both George F. Milton, Chair of the Committee and Editor of the *Chattanooga News* (To Odum 10/23/30) and W. C. Jackson (10/21/30), then Vice-President of North Carolina College for Women, strongly urged Odum to "make a sacrifice" and to become more involved "in the investigation process because (their) field investigators were relatively untrained in social research."

Odum recognized the importance of the Commission's doing a creditable job amidst high expectations from segments of the southern community. He rose to the occasion, assisting in identifying and training investigators for social research, and ultimately publishing "an essay on "Lynchings, Fears, and Folkways" (1931c).

Although he held strong antipathies for acts of racial violence, he did not necessarily hold contempt for his fellow southerners who either participated in or sympathized with this extreme measure of social control. Recalling his recent trip through the South, he reported to Benjamin Kendrick that "one of the nicest men I know told me that the Georgia folks were right about this thing of lynching and branding the Negroes, and that some of the rest of the State would have to follow them. He (Odum's friend) remarked that

North Carolina did not have any better sense than to interfere with it" (3/1/30).

Instead, Odum had a great affinity for the South, viewing these attitudes and behaviors as those not necessarily peculiar to the South, but as vestiges of folkways which had ruled continuously since Reconstruction. Accordingly, and consistent with Franklin Giddings's thinking, Odum believed that folkways defeated stateways in every instance in which stateways ran counter to the folkways. From this premise Odum (1936:13-15) captured much of the flavor of his home region when he wrote several years later that:

There is a like-mindedness of the region in the politics of the "Solid South," in the protestant religion, in matters of racial culture and conflict, and in state and sectional patriotism, much of it tending to take the form of loyalties to the past and to outmoded patterns rather than faith in the future and confidence in achievement. There is therefore an apparent dominance of a general inferiority complex and defense mechanism along side widely prevailing inner and outer conflict forces of race and manners, of intolerance and conservatism, and of pride and work, which constrains and constricts the whole person. This conflict and constraint from within has been greatly accentuated from without by attitudes, criticisms, and actions of other regions.

In their posthumous tribute to Odum, his colleagues Rupert Vance (President of American Sociological Society 1944) and Katharine Jocher (1955:207) wrote that Odum saw organizations and offices as "instruments which were good only if they contributed to the more efficient utilization of man's intelligence and capacity for progressive adaptation." In this vein, his election to President of the American Sociological Society for 1930 was a major event. First, it brought, according to the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, the presidency of the American Sociological Society to the South (Wilson Gee to Odum 1/7/30). Secondly, it provided Odum an opportunity to draw the relatively few black sociologists into the sociological mainstream. Two such persons were Charles S. Johnson, Director of Social Sciences at Fisk University, and E. Franklin Frazier, sociologist at Howard

University, both of whom Odum held in highest esteem. Guy Johnson recalls that Odum attempted to gain recognition for these sociologists whenever he could. In May 1930, as he developed the agenda for the American Sociological Society's December meeting, he launched an all out search for "Negroes who have the real goods" in sociological subjects (To Ogburn 5/22/30). He wrote to Ernest W. Burgess at the University of Chicago stating that he was trying to have, where good men could be found, a larger number of Negroes on the program. Odum planned to open the first session with Charles Johnson's discussion of attitudes and conflict (To Burgess, 5/21/30), having once gotten Hornell Hart of Bryn Mawr College to extend an invitation to Johnson to appear on the program (To Hart 4/15/30). He further proposed having Fraizer speak on the Negro family. Seeking also to broaden the program agenda with fresh perspectives, he indicated that he was searching for someone to discuss either the teaching of sociology in Negro institutions or aspects of rural life among the Negro (To W. A. Anderson, North Carolina State College of Agriculture 5/22/30).

Thirdly, as President of the Society he could direct the course of the convention toward a greater balance between "the scientific and practical application of social theory" (To Edmund E. Day, Rockefeller Foundation, 1/29/30). It was a unique opportunity to penetrate what he called the web of "academic provincialism" entangling social research and to introduce his theories on regionalism. In his presidential address titled "Folk and Regional Culture as a Field of Sociological Study" (1931b), Odum pointed to the tensions existing between folk cultures and between regions as models of social conflict which social scientists might study. His address, moreover, was a synthesis of research interests with which he had grappled since his days at "Ole Miss." He occasionally drew from his catalogue of folk tales to illustrate his point, reminiscing anecdotes about "the hulking, mischievous black boy" and "the water-melon-eating Negro." He urged his fellow sociologists to peruse the field to find and study data stemming from

"the natural origins and processes." Here lay the roots of social, economic, and political relationships of a modern and dynamic society.

Odum held that these social processes and products may well relate to the conditioning factors that control the individual and the group. He cited the various stages of adaptation of individuals and groups in a biracial civilization as an illustration showing how traditionally unobserved "elemental folk processes of conflict and cultural transition" could be described and analyzed. By delimiting special subjects within this biracial unit, social scientists might study, for example, "the power of the Negro to adapt certain language and religious forms so completely as to make them his own . . . or the case of a conquered people dominating the culture of the conquerors."

Not only did Odum believe and express that American sociology could come to grips with the actual social phenomena and the records of those phenomena within a given social context, but that in so doing, it could even be accorded the status which the physical sciences had enjoyed.

Odum's administrative agenda reached some fruition at the 1930 meeting of the American Sociological Society in Cleveland. The central theme of the conference was "Social Conflict," and one general session focused on aspects of race and national conflict while another was on the education of cultural and racial minorities in the United States. A "special feature" of the conference was, according to Odum, the election of Fisk University sociologist Charles S. Johnson to the Executive Committee. Odum's work may have also set the stage for the 28th meeting of the Society, for in 1933 the thematic direction was "Race and Cultural Contacts."

In conclusion, then, it is no exaggeration to assert that Odum was a prime mover in the field of social research. He advocated, in an era when the very study of sociology in the South was being erroneously equated with socialism, that the discipline have a reciprocal relation between social theory and social practice. Contrary to popular notions about black-white relations in the South, Odum

protested that southern whites really knew nothing about southern blacks, and he consequently urged that the sociological study of race relations be from a sympathetic understanding of historical facts. Thus, practical theories and programs might thereby evolve from actual situations and factual findings.

From 1930-1954, Odum became even more involved with social research, activism, and scholarly productivity. Building a sociology department that rivaled most throughout the country, he also led the fight for interracial cooperation, lending a respectability to the term in the South and receiving the Bernays Award in 1945 for his work in that field.

REFERENCES

- Bailey, Thomas P.
1910 "Children differ in environment." Pp. 229-302 in Howard Odum, *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro: Research into the Conditions of the Negro Race in Southern Towns*. New York: Longmans, Green and Company.
- Boas, Franz
1910 "The real race problem." *Crisis* 1:22-25.
- Bogardus, Emory S.
1957 "Odum and folk sociology." *Sociology and Social Research* 41:441-448.
- Editorial
1911 "Colored men lynched without trial." *Crisis* 1:28.
- Gatewood, Willard B.
1965 "Embattled scholars: Howard W. Odum and the fundamentalists, 1925-27." *Journal of Southern History* 31:375-392.
- Giddings, Franklin H.
1896 *The Principles of Sociology*. New York: Macmillan.
1900 *Democracy and Empire*. New York: Macmillan.
1904 "The concepts and methods of sociology." *American Journal of Sociology* 10:161-176.
- Grantham, Dewey
1968 "The regional imagination: Social scientists and the American South." *Journal of Southern History* 34:3-32.
- Hall, G. Stanley
1905 "The Negro in Africa and America." *Pedagogical Seminary* 12:350-368.
- Kantor, Harvey A.
1973 "Howard W. Odum: The implications of folk, planning, and regionalism." *American Journal of Sociology* 79:278-295.
- Odum, Howard W.
1909 "Religious folk-songs of the southern Negroes." *American Journal of Religious Psychology and Education* 3:265-365.
1910 *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro: Research into the Conditions of the Negro*

- Race in Southern Towns. New York: Longmans, Green and Company.
- 1913 "Negro children in the public schools of Philadelphia." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 49:186-208.
- 1915a "Standards of measurement for race development." *Journal of Race Development* 5:364-382.
- 1915b "Some studies in the Negro problems of the southern states." *Journal of Race Development* 6:185-191.
- 1922 "The Journal of Social Forces." *The Journal of Social Forces* 1:65-71.
- 1923 "Fundamental principles underlying interracial cooperation." *Journal of Social Forces* 1:282-285.
- 1925 *Southern Pioneers in Social Interpretation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- 1926 "The new Negro." *The Modern Quarterly* 3:127-128.
- 1927 *Man's Quest for Social Guidance*. New York: Holt and Company.
- 1928 *Rainbow Round My Shoulders*. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Company.
- 1929 *Wings on My Feet*. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Company.
- 1930 *An American Epoch: Southern Portraiture in the National Picture*. New York: Holt and Company.
- 1931a *Cold Blue Moon*. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Company.
- 1931b "Folk and regional culture as a field of sociological study." *Publication of the American Sociological Society* 25:1-17.
- 1931c "Lynchings, fears, and folkways." *Nation* 133:719-720.
- 1936 "Southern Regions of the United States." Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- 1937 "The errors in sociology." *Journal of Social Forces* 15:327-342.
- Odum, Howard W. and Guy B. Johnson
1925 *The Negro and His Songs: A Study of Typical Negro Songs in the South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- 1926 *Negro Workaday Songs*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Ogburn, William F. and Howard W. Odum (eds.)
1933 *Recent Social Trends in the United States: Findings of the President's Committee on Social Trends*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Simpson, George L.
1955 "Howard W. Odum and American regionalism." *Journal of Social Forces* 34:1-6.
- Sosna, Morton
1977 "The silent South of Howard Odum." Chapter 3 in Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tindall, George B.
1958 "The significance of Howard W. Odum to southern history." *Journal of Southern History* 24:285-307.
- 1967 *The Emergence of the New South: 1913-45*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- 1976 *The Ethnic Southerner*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Vance, Rupert B.
1972 "Howard Odum's technicways." *Journal of Social Forces* 50:456-461.
- Vance, Rupert B. and Katharine Jocher
1955 "Howard W. Odum." *Journal of Social Forces* 33:203-217.

Note: Interview with Guy Benton Johnson took place in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, July 22, 1980; interview with William H. E. Johnson took place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, September 2, 1980. Letters cited are from the Howard W. Odum papers, housed in the Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY IN RELATION TO SOCIAL WORK*

STUART A. QUEEN

San Diego, California

PRESIDENT, 1941

The American Sociologist 1981, Vol. 16 (February):34-37

From the days of Lester F. Ward to those of Peter H. Rossi, there have been

questions about the nature, scope, and function of sociology. Many of the participants, observers, and critics have asked: Is it a well-defined discipline or a hodge-podge of odds and ends, to which a great diversity of interests, bodies of

* Address correspondence to: Stuart A. Queen, Embassy Hotel, 3645 Park Blvd., San Diego, CA 92103.