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Howard W. Odum: The Implications of Folk, Planning, and Regionalism[1]

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Howard W. Odum's prolific scholarly work provides insights for contemporary regional planners. Odum spent a lifetime evolving a philosophy of regionalism from his studies of folk behavior and the South. His emphasis on the indigenous characteristics of the people in a particular region, the patterns of adaptation of those people to social change, and the practical application of particular planning techniques bear attention by those concerned with directing physical and social growth. The genesis, evolution, and importance of Odum's ideas on regionalism are examined in this study.

The decade of the 1920s marked a watershed in thought regarding the subject of regional development in the United States. The urban planning profession had reached a sufficient stage of maturity to realize that extending the boundaries of their concerns to include the entire metropolitan region was a logical and practical extension of the work they were doing in the city itself. Thus enormous projects like the Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs were begun in the twenties (Kantor 1973). The regional ideal also imbued such men as Lewis Mumford, Benton MacKaye, Clarence Stein, and Henry Wright. Influenced by ecologists, geographers, and conservationists as much as by planners, these men and some of their colleagues formed a little group known as the Regional Planning Association of America to promote their ideas. The Appalachian Trail and the planned community of Radburn were two of the concrete proposals that accompanied the huge amount of theoretical writing they presented (Lubove 1963). Politicians also began thinking in terms of a regional network. It was in 1921 that Senator George Norris of Nebraska began the fight over the Muscle Shoals development—a project which became the heart of the largest planned regional environment yet constructed in the United States, the Tennessee Valley Authority (Hicks 1960, pp. 62–64).

The man who was to synthesize all of these major strands of regional thinking and who was to become their leading promoter also began his studies of regionalism during the 1920s. Howard W. Odum came to recog-

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nize the potential of regionalism through an unusual, yet logical route. A sociologist by profession, Odum originally was interested in the interpretations of dialect and song of Negroes in the South. From this point he gradually expanded his thinking into studies of folkways and recognized the similarities in patterns of behavior that were indigenous to particular areas. These distinctive attitudes and habits, Odum began to see, could form the basic unifying themes in studying, and even developing, specific locales. Initially concerned with limited community studies, Odum was one of those rare persons who could expand his thinking to encompass an entire range of possibilities. He soon became the definitive expert on all of his beloved South. Then, through years of writing and constant refinement of social science techniques, he developed a full-scale philosophy of regionalism, grounded on folk behavior, that would have major effects on scholarship, Southern pride, and land-development attitudes in general. Today, nearly 20 years after his death, the writings of Howard Odum seem to have renewed significance in considering the physical growth of the nation.

ODUM'S BACKGROUND

Odum's background highlights his tendencies toward broad interest and diversity of thought. Born on a farm near Bethlehem, Georgia, he began his formal higher education in the classics at Emory College. Upon his college graduation in 1904, he went to rural Mississippi to teach school in Toccopola. Instead of becoming lost in the backwoods of Mississippi, Odum began to gravitate toward Oxford and started taking courses at "Ole Miss." Here he began collecting data on the Negro life that he was constantly observing and studying. After earning a master's degree in the classics, he followed the urging of his teachers to pursue his new-found interests in the social sciences. Odum then won a fellowship at Clark University, and, taking his collection of notes on Negro folk songs and studies of Negro town life, he went North. He studied for his doctorate in psychology with G. Stanley Hall at the time when Clark was the seedbed of Freudian thought in the United States; and then a year later, in 1910, he received a second Ph.D. in sociology at Columbia University under the master, Franklin H. Giddings.[2]

Possessed of what was probably the finest social science education in the United States at that time, Odum then went on to make his mark in this growing field. He studied Negro public education with Philadelphia's

[2] The basic source of information on Odum's life is Vance and Jocher (1955). This article along with a complete bibliography, and selections of his basic writings, may be found in Jocher et al. (1964). See also *Raleigh News and Observer* (1954), *New York Times* (1954), Ogburn (1955), Bogardus (1955), Blackwell (1955), and Johnson (1955). For the most recent estimation of Odum's life see the excellent article by Tindall (1958).

Bureau of Municipal Research, taught education at the University of Georgia, became professor of sociology at his alma mater, Emory, and worked to move that school to Atlanta and secure its university status. Then, in 1920, he made his last and most important move to the University of North Carolina at the behest of its new president, Harry W. Chase.[3]

In his 34 years at North Carolina, Odum filled his time with an almost continuous succession of scholarly and administrative accomplishments. He published over 25 books and monographs and close to 200 articles, pamphlets, and brochures. In addition, he organized and staffed the Department of Sociology, developed and became first director of the School of Public Welfare, established the Institute for Research in Social Science, founded and edited the important sociological journal, *Social Forces,* edited the Social Study Series for the University of North Carolina Press and the American Social Science Series for the Henry Holt Company, and in 1946 capped his brilliant organizational career at North Carolina by helping to develop the distinguished Department of City and Regional Planning at the university. In addition to all of this, Odum received four honorary degrees, served as distinguished visiting professor or lecturer at 10 schools, and in 1930 was president of the American Sociological Society. He was also a master breeder of pedigreed cattle (Jocher et al. 1964, pp. xi–xiv).

The flurry of activity that Odum engaged in during his lifetime illustrates the capabilities of a man of vigorous physical and mental energy. He was a teacher and a professional scholar, a folklorist and prose poet, and an editor and administrator; yet he had the ability to integrate all of these roles into a productive career. A man of such bristling activity was bound to gain a reputation on any college campus; and soon Odum's rumpled clothing, determined gait, voracious reading habits, and flowery rhetoric—known as "Odumesque"—became legend at Chapel Hill. At times he occupied three separate offices on campus with a research project or book in progress in each (*Time* 1942). During these intense work periods, he would many times sign his letters, "Hurriedly yours."[4] But the most important thing about the man was that, although he was deeply committed to sociology, he never bound himself intellectually to the narrow confines of a single discipline. His ability to cut across established academic boundaries allowed him to become the leading spokesman for a vibrant regional thinking, which Lewis Mumford described as a "dynamic doctrine of social development" (1938, p. 504). Howard Odum was indeed the leading social thinker of the New South.

[3] See Wilson 1957, pp. 445–49. Although opportunities presented themselves for Odum to leave UNC and the South, he always felt it was "the best environment to work in" (Howard W. Odum to H. L. Mencken, May 13, 1930). All correspondence referred to hereafter is from the Odum Papers, University of North Carolina.

[4] Odum to French Strother, January 1, 1930; Odum to William Ogburn, July 17, 1931.

ODUM'S EARLY WORK

A brief look at the maturation of Odum's ideas can give further insights into the meanings he gave to the concepts of the folk, social planning, and regionalism. Such a survey will highlight the evolution of his basic philosophy and interpret the implications that Odum's brand of regional thinking have for contemporary America.

Odum's early research into the culture of the black people in the South was from the beginning more than mere intrigue about folklore. He quickly saw that patterns of speech, dialect, and song were manifestations of larger cultural traits. Throughout his basic writings on *The Negro and His Songs, Negro Workaday Songs,* and *Social and Mental Traits of the Negro,* Odum struggled to conceptualize everyday behavior as examples of a folk tradition in a singular area. These larger formulations of folkways, as popular habits and traditions of a people integrated in a distinct cultural and areal setting, became the basis for Odum's later writings on the indigenous characteristics of regions (Odum and Johnson 1925, 1926; Odum 1910).

While he was culminating his more that two decades of study of the Negro with a trilogy on black folk culture, Odum began to shift his writing into the broader subject of general social science research. He possessed a basic belief that the social sciences offered great potential in solving the increasingly complex political and social problems of the day. Odum was unique, however, in warning the scientist, technician, and scholar to avoid getting so wrapped up in his own work that he would forget the well-being of the subjects he was attempting to aid. He chastised his fellow professionals for judging people by iron conformity to "high standards and ideals and by abstract concepts of achievement," and bade the social scientist to avoid thinking and working "in terms of plans rather than people" (Odum 1925, p. 417).

This important dictum—that people are the most important ingredient in any research consideration—pervaded all of Odum's first major survey of the social sciences published in 1927 and entitled *Man's Quest for Social Guidance: The Study of Social Problems. Man's Quest* is significant in the development of Odum's thinking, not for its original qualities, but because it served as a major synthesis of the thought of the day and represented a starting point from which he could develop his own ideas. The work is noteworthy also for the position it takes that social planning is the ideal means toward providing for balanced growth in any area. Odum also applauded the work done by the Stein, Wright, Mumford group and expressed optimism that much good effort was being made toward urban betterment and that new standards of excellence could be reached through regional planning schemes (Odum 1927, pp. 421, 515).

Two years later, in 1929, Odum attempted to delineate the methodologies of the social sciences which he had been studying. This work, written with

his associate, Katharine Jocher, was entitled *An Introduction to Social Research* (1929). Now with these two books, *Man's Quest* and *Introduction to Social Research,* in which he had described the social science scene and commented on the validity of its methods, Odum was ready to apply these methodologies to his own larger studies of the topic which he knew the best—his native South.

This was done in 1930 with the publication of *An American Epoch: Southern Portraiture in the National Picture.* This work was the first of several general surveys of the South that Odum was to produce during his lifetime. A large, very personal book, *An American Epoch* sketched in details of the immense economic and physical resources the South had available to it. Odum was optimistic that the people of the South could do whatever was necessary to play a much more significant role in the nation as a whole. Trade, manufacturing, and the growth of cities were examined as examples of the region moving into a strong industrial, urban economy. Broad as it was in scope, this work seemed to be laying a foundation for a more complete scientific analysis.[5]

PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY

In the same year that *An American Epoch* appeared, Odum spoke before his fellow sociologists in his presidential address at the American Sociological Society. The presentation Odum made at that time marked his decision to present the concept of the folk region as the major unit by which one could study the behavior of a people. Odum spoke eloquently for an understanding of the organic and natural behavior of a community which transcends the organizational or technological constraints placed upon it. "Such folk society," Odum believed, offered "a medium for isolating constant processes in the development of . . . [a] concept of culture as the human and social side of society as opposed to the technical" (1931, p. 244).

Odum's presentation of the folk-region unit in 1930 crystallized the initial work he had done in grappling with the ideas of regionalism. His intellectual development to that point reflected the mind of a careful social scientist who was nonetheless bold in the subjects he attacked. Odum had expanded his initial research of black folk songs into a full portrait of the entire South. He had done this without forgetting the strong methodological underpinnings his discipline offered. Then he conceptualized his own yardstick for future study with his analysis of the folk-region culture.[6] Odum's next step would further show the intensity of his belief that sociology had

[5] Odum 1930. Odum was criticized for not making this work "scientific" enough in Edmund E. Day to Odum, May 20, 1930.

[6] Odum would later come to refer to this concept as his "pet theory" (Odum to Harry E. Moore, October 16, 1939).

to be practical, as he became an active member of President Herbert Hoover's Research Commission on Social Trends from 1929 to 1933.

Hoover's commission, named in December 1929, was appointed to survey the nation at that time and report on all facets of its social development. Besides Odum, other leading social scientists such as Wesley C. Mitchell, Charles E. Merriam, Shelby Harrison, and William F. Ogburn were asked to serve. Odum was both a member of the commission and assistant director of the executive staff under Ogburn. In addition, he did much of the organizing in setting up the entire project.[7]

When the two volumes of *Recent Social Trends in the United States* were published in 1933, the work reflected the high caliber of analysis one could expect from such scholars as R. D. McKenzie, Leonard White, Robert Lynd, and many others. Odum had helped to edit the volumes and contributed the section on Public Welfare Activities (President's Research Committee 1933, vol. 2, pp.1224–73). More important than the contribution of this single essay, however, was Odum's overall experience in working with the president's commission. Being engaged in a national project made Odum more acutely aware of the problems of national development. Also, the commitment Odum had made to working on practical applications of social theories continued for the rest of his life. It was after his service on the president's commission that he began to understand the problems of national social planning and began to integrate his conceptual motifs into a workable plan of action. This decision to relate the theoretical to the real further raises Odum's significance to contemporary analysts (Odum 1934*a*).

THE PUBLICATION OF *SOUTHERN REGIONS*

After several years of work on the president's commission, and several years since writing a major book, Odum produced what in many ways was his finest work—*Southern Regions of the United States,* published in 1936. This huge survey, running over 600 pages, was Odum's most scientific work. It was clearly the effort of a man who possessed great knowledge of a subject and who was ready to use it. Although the book was encyclopedic in scope, it nonetheless went through four printings and was used to a great extent throughout the school systems and governmental offices in the South.[8] It gained Odum a national reputation as a leading thinker on the subject of regionalism.

The narrative of *Southern Regions* was divided into two major parts. The first was a composite picture and summary of virtually all the char-

[7] Odum to William F. Ogburn, May 12, 1930; July 17, 1931; July 19, 1932. See also Ogburn 1955.

[8] Maury Maverick to Katharine Jocher, March 28, 1936.

acteristics of the South. It was an objective portrait itemizing geographic and physical factors; agricultural, industrial, and technological components of the South; as well as details on life-styles of the people, education, government, and culture. It was indeed a massive investigation (Odum 1936, pp. 1–205).

In the second part of the work Odum attempted to integrate his raw data. In this section, he moved beyond one of his original premises that regional-national cooperation was a minimum essential for developing a region to a point which accepted broad social planning. The interrelated forces of state, region, and nation had to be combined further, Odum believed, to form a new "motivation and realistic design with adequate stabilizing and permanently reinforced agencies of action" (1936, p. 603). Balance was a keynote of Odum's philosophy—a balance between the new and the old, the rural and the urban, the agrarian and the industrial, the folkways of the people and the technicways formed by new advances in science. All of this, he maintained, could only be accomplished through an adequate social planning that was "based upon the actualities of both cultural development and scientific principles and upon practical, workable techniques growing out of factual inventories" (1936, p. 580).

Odum had indeed presented a valuable "factual inventory" for one region of the nation, and his endorsement of the principle of regional planning added an important spur to the growing national push for more enlightened planning techniques. The cultural-statistical approach he employed offered such a solid endorsement of the planning principle that its importance could hardly be ignored. By the sheer weight of significant statistics and synthesis rarely reached by promoters of any cause, Odum's work was hailed as nothing short of "a social philosophy, a technique, and a blueprint for relating a planning program based upon scientific research and technical knowledge to practical social action" (Lebrun 1925, p. 417). What was valuable in Odum's proposals also was his insistence once more that the "expert" design the program but never lose sight of the "folk psychology" he is dealing with in instituting his plans for the area. The laboratory for designing planning principles must not be the closed office of the technician, Odum believed, but the region itself.

THE CONFLICT WITH THE SECTIONALISTS

Although Odum's *Southern Regions* won a great deal of critical acclaim it also became embroiled in a strong ideological controversy. Odum and his North Carolina associates stood in direct opposition to the southern agrarian group at Vanderbilt University, which had launched the *I'll Take My Stand* testimony to the value of southern agrarianism (Twelve Southerners 1930). It was as if all the liberals were at North Carolina and all the

conservatives were at Vanderbilt (Watters 1969, pp. 208–9). Odum's book was a direct thrust into the future, and the agrarians did what they could to discredit it (e.g., Davidson 1937).

In hopes of strengthening his position against this type of criticism and also of enlarging his own views of regionalism, Odum joined Henry Estill Moore in publishing, in 1938, the most complete statement of regional thought yet produced, the classic *American Regionalism*. This volume, the culmination of Odum's thoughts on the subject, was both an extension of principles applied heretofore only to the South and a refinement of his basic meanings (Odum and Moore 1938).

Odum's regional philosophy presented several striking implications. First, he maintained that decentralization was inherent in regionalism. Thinking of land in terms of regions led one almost implicitly away from a concentration of wealth and power. Cities, therefore, would not grow at the expense of the hinterland but would work in concert with it. Decentralization was vital in order to reach a balanced rate of growth.

A second element was that the dispersion of resources caused by decentralization would create better balance in the area, thereby allowing it to be considered as a totality. "Unity," "homogeneity," "comprehensiveness" were all adjectives that Odum could apply to regional development. He made it clear that he agreed with Lewis Mumford that "regionalism is the antithesis to false cosmopolitanism" and believed strongly that regionalism would counteract the tendency of cities to monopolize resources and wealth (Odum and Moore 1938, p. 11).

A third characteristic of Odum's regionalism is its organic quality. In the region, time, space, and people are considered together. No group of people would be separated from their natural geographic or cultural base. The feeling of security resulting from this state, would, Odum felt, allow individuals to achieve their full potential.[9]

A fourth component of the regionalism Odum stressed was the distinct difference he saw between regionalism and sectionalism. He acknowledged the strong influence of Frederick Jackson Turner in interpreting sectional differences in American history, but he felt that the geographical, economic determinism of Turner's sectional thought had to be supplanted by the new notions of regionalism. Odum saw in sectionalism the potential of divisiveness. Sectionalism meant competition and bred separatism and isolation. Sections were rigid, mechanical divisions that were self-seeking and bent upon a clash of interests. All of these characteristics were antithetical to Odum's notion of the region. To him the region had an integrative rather than divisive quality; it begged for cooperation rather than strife;

[9] Odum and Moore 1938, p. 16. Odum tried to align himself as closely as possible with Mumford's views in *The Culture of Cities* (see Odum to Lewis Mumford, December 16, 1937; Odum to Richard H. Thornton, March 10, 1938).

it could be easily aligned with other regions rather than become isolated and inbred. The distinctions which Odum made between the region and the section were more than just splitting hairs. For while sectionalism may have been a valid interpretation of 19th-century America, it should in no way be confused with the regionalism which he had so much faith in for 20th-century America.[10]

THE PUBLICATION OF *AMERICAN REGIONALISM*

After distilling his major thoughts on regionalism in the first two chapters of their book, Odum joined Moore in comprehensively analyzing the various types of regions (the natural, the cultural—such as metropolitan, rural, and literary—and the service regions—both governmental and nongovernmental). Next they described the ways various disciplines had approached the historical and theoretical aspects of regionalism, and then they drew small portraits of each of the six major areas of the nation—the Middle States, the Northeast, the Southeast, the Far West, the Northwest, and the Southwest. (Although this is a very orthodox division, almost every author who has written on regionalism or has criticized Odum's work has come up with a different map; e.g., Zimmerman and DuWors 1952; Martindale 1960, pp. 145–52.) So complete a treatment did Odum and Moore present that in reviewing the work, N. S. B. Gras maintained that *American Regionalism* was a compendium indispensable to the political scientist, historian, and economist (Gras 1938, p. 781).

The one salient point that stands out amidst the sometimes overly burdened narrative of *American Regionalism* is the authors' belief that regionalism belongs to the future. The New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt was directing the country toward increased economic and political nationalization; and Odum, acutely aware of this centralizing trend, did not feel it jeopardized his notions of regional importance. Indeed, it was precisely the move toward collectivization, the move toward the center, which rendered regionalism so vital. If the United States were to achieve "national reintegration," as Odum phrased it, it could be done most effectively through a recognition of the strengths of particular regions and the ability to allow regional diversity within the coordinated whole. This could be done, Odum believed, and the nation and its people would be richer for it. It was clear also that the tool by which "reintegration" could be accomplished, was a sophisticated form of physical and social regional planning (Odum and Moore 1938, pp. 253–74). Thus, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Odum

[10] Odum and Moore 1938, pp. 35–51. Also see Odum 1934*b*, 1937, 1949. This point was also stressed very strongly in a personal interview with Odum's student, friend, and colleague, Rupert B. Vance, April 29, 1972, at Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

turned to the task of formulating a practical program through which his regional theories could be carried out.

In extrapolating a viable planning scheme from his huge body of abstract knowledge, Odum took the same steady, methodological approach that characterized all of his work. Each article he wrote and each talk he delivered reflected a systematic evolution of ideas and basic assumptions about planning (e.g., Odum 1934, 1935, 1939). Because he had done so much work on public welfare, because he saw the urban areas continuing to grow at the expense of the adjacent rural areas, and because he wanted so deeply for the South to take again a leading role in national development, Odum came to accept social planning quite easily.

Odum also believed planning would be accepted by the majority of Americans, for it was a natural process, an almost organic response to the future. Because it would take into consideration the will of the people being dealt with and because it would concern an area which already had a good deal of homogeneity, the planning process would fit well into the living patterns of the people.

PROPOSES A PLANNING AGENCY

Once he became dedicated to the idea of planning, Odum proposed a planning agency as a model for work that could be done in this field. The agency would be a three-tiered organization for the national, state, and regional levels. Odum hoped that it could be established with the same prestige of a distinguished national body such as the Supreme Court. Nine full-time members would be chosen by the president, approved by the Congress, and would represent each region and the nation at large. Although Odum did not give the agency specific powers, it nonetheless was assumed that it would be called upon "to insure a continuous scientific inventory of the state of the Nation." The state and regional agencies would also have advisory and planning functions in developing natural resources and promoting conservation programs. Odum outlined the plan to work for either six or eight regions and listed the states to be included under each.[11]

The concept of a national planning board has, of course, never been realized. Odum's attempts to urge concrete action in the late 1930s and early 1940s ran afoul of the political exigencies of the time. The recession of 1938, the Supreme Court packing plan, and Roosevelt's congressional election purge all had the effect of dampening the New Deal program. If Odum's plan was not New Deal sponsored, it was nonetheless close enough to its philosophy to suffer along with the waning appeal of Roosevelt's

[11] Odum 1943*b*. For a summary of this proposal and other aspects of Odum's career see Simpson (1955).

national political program (Green 1956). Then too, Odum's enemy "sectionalism" was enjoying a resurgence at this time, and thus any attempts at unification were looked upon with distrust. It was at this time that the National Emergency Council made the notorious assessment, repeated by Roosevelt himself, that the South constituted "the Nation's No. 1 economic problem" (Tindall 1958, p. 300). This also hurt his planning agency proposal.

With his ideas thwarted at the national level, Odum personally undertook to establish a regional planning council just in the South. These efforts, too, fell short of complete success, as like-minded individuals vied over powers and responsibilities. In the end, his unified scheme had to yield because there were "so many diversified groups in the South each one bent on doing the whole job in its own way" (Tindall 1958, p. 300).

The establishment of a National Planning Agency or even a Southern Regional Development Council would have been a sweet triumph for Odum. Although these hopes were not immediately realized, the Carolina sociologist only slightly dampened his activities on their behalf. His writings turned once more to general discussions of sociology and race relations, but he also continued to refine his thoughts on regionalism (see Odum 1943*a*, 1947). In 1945, for example, he published a 20-year anniversary issue for *Social Forces* titled "In Search of the Regional Balance of America."[12]

Odum himself contributed three articles to this work, seizing the opportunity to consolidate his thoughts and reflect on their importance. In 11 points (a favorite way of expressing his thoughts) he succinctly spelled out his theory and philosophy of regionalism. The folk society is the elemental and basic cultural definitive of all societies in process. These characteristic folkways may be best observed in the folk regional society, which is the smallest comprehensive unit of society. Over against the folk society has been the universal trend toward the state society, characterized by stateways and technicways. Whenever the folk society and the state society conflict, in the long run the folkways will always predominate. When the two societies work in concert, change and achievement result; when they are at odds, there is tension, disorganization, conflict, and ultimately decay. The definitive, evolving society will be a reality when there is balance and equilibrium between folkways, stateways, and technicways. All of this may be generally accomplished through social planning. The resources of the social and physical sciences must be brought to bear in bridging the theoretical and the practical and in conserving the folkways which help the society adapt to the new state and technicways (Odum 1945, pp. 15–16; Vance 1972).

Thus did Odum lay out more than two decades of his thinking. He

[12] This was reprinted as Howard W. Odum and Katharine Jocher, eds., *In Search of the Regional Balance of America.*

justifiably took great pride in the three articles and six pages of documentation on southern regional subjects in this anniversary issue (Odum 1945, pp. 3–66). Although nothing concrete had yet evolved, Odum could take heart in the knowledge that he had inspired an important discussion of the regional theme and had impressed his fellow sociologists with the validity of using the region as a major tool in social analysis.

In his next two works, *Understanding Society* (1947*a*) and *The Way of the South* (1947*b*), Odum stressed the regional qualities of balance and equilibrium. Then in 1953 he presented a last attempt at placing his general notion of the region into the larger study of society with an article in *Social Forces* entitled "Folk Sociology as a Subject Field for the Historical Study of Total Human Society and the Empirical Study of Group Behavior" (1953). This work was to form the nucleus of an updated version of *Southern Regions,* a book to be published under the tentative title of *The South at Mid-Century.* But because this work remained unfinished at his death in 1954, it appears in retrospect that the highlight of Odum's career-long study of regionalism came in April 1949 at the University of Wisconsin, once the home of Frederick Jackson Turner. At a symposium sponsored by the Committee on the Study of American Civilization, Professor Merrill Jensen led the assembled scholars in a discussion of American regionalism. After two days of debate and analysis by such distinguished students of regionalism as Fulmer Mood, Rupert Vance, Vernon Carstensen, William Hesseltine, Francis Butler Simkins, John Gaus, Merle Curti, and Louis Wirth, it fell to Howard W. Odum, Kenan Professor of Sociology and Head of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of North Carolina, to deliver the final paper—"The Promise of Regionalism." Odum approached his topic with all the heady enthusiasm of a young student taken by a strong idea. He deftly rebutted Louis Wirth's assigned paper on "The Limitations of Regionalism" and went on to promote the positive aspects of his program. Indeed, regionalism still had the element of promise in it, and Odum reached a moment of eloquence among all his professional definition and personal jargon when he stated that promise:

> There has never been a time when the individual and group were so important, when the specialized values inherent in humanity were so articulate; and when the distinctive folk personalities of the peoples of the world clamored so much for recognition, appreciation and participation. It must be clear that the one undebatable strategy that is needed now is somehow to equalize opportunity and to redistribute resources and the good things of life to the end that we may have a genuine regional equalization and balance of men, instead of the powerful conflict of peoples in nationalistic and economic competition and war. [Jensen 1951, pp. 401–2]

To Odum his vision of regional balance was indeed the promise of an integrated and progressive American future.

EVALUATING ODUM'S CONTRIBUTION

After a lifetime of work and organization promoting this concept of regionalism, what, finally, is Odum's contribution? How can one evaluate this huge body of literature so energetically presented? How do Odum's thoughts hold up almost 20 years after his death? In placing Howard Odum's ideas in the context of the early 1970s, it seems that his insights have renewed importance and speak pertinently to many of the problems of contemporary America.

About several aspects of his career there can be no debate. Odum was instrumental in establishing the University of North Carolina as one of the nation's as well as the South's leading institutions of higher education. In bringing clarity and sophistication to the methodology of his profession, Odum was also highly successful and must be considered one of the central theoreticians of 20th-century sociology (Bogardus 1957; Brooks 1955). And finally, for interpreting his beloved South to its own residents and to the country at large Odum deserves much credit (Grantham 1968; Tindall 1967). His success in launching a massive social science investigation of the region earned him the appellation "Sociologist of the South." His concepts of the folk, of social planning, and of regionalism have endured the immense social and technological change which has transpired since his death, and his specific ideas have renewed importance for social scientists today, even though they are not always recognized.

That folkways stubbornly dominate the patterns of behavior directed by new technology is a valid concept too often ignored by present-day planners and social theorists. In times of rapid technological advance, individuals frequently experience conflict in assimilating the outside events into their inner personality. This condition, analyzed in William Ogburn's brilliant theories of "cultural lag" (1922), and popularly referred to as "future shock" (Toffler 1970), is exacerbated by politicians and planners who do not allow people the opportunity to respond to technological changes before making adjustments in the institutional framework of society. For instance, it is ordeal enough for rural whites or blacks merely to attempt to cope with the contemporary urban environment. But to be excluded from major governmental determinations regarding their life-style many times proves inordinately destructive. Folkways, the established patterns of people's lives, Odum would point out, must be considered before altering living standards. Otherwise, stress, conflict, and disorder are imminent. The defaced interiors of urban-housing projects and the backlash of welfare recipients repudiating government subsidies are just two of the myriad responses to inconsiderate policy. While it is true that too much reliance on folkways would move against any sort of change, a complete disregard for them can be disastrous. The key issue is the individuals' adaptability to environmental change, and

that adaptability is notoriously slow. While it is possible to stem the technological surge and thereby relieve the necessity for personal change, it is far easier to attempt to mitigate individuals' reaction to it by taking into account the powerful folkways in designing institutions and policies to meet change. For instance, because we have the know-how and resources to tear down a particular slum area and remove its residents to a completely new locale does not mean that this is the best mode of action. All too often it has been government policy to make this kind of move, one which has increased, not decreased, the problems and frustrations of the people it was intended to aid.

Herbert Gans has adeptly illuminated this destruction.[13] His very terminology, "the urban villagers," makes the point that within the great metropolis people can and do live in community style, indeed in almost village style. What appears to outsiders as a "slum" is many times a tightly knit community that would not like its life-style reorganized by anyone. Many such pockets of black and white poor, immigrant groups, and just plain long-standing communities still exist and should not be changed without strong consideration of the group's established mores. These factors, implicit in everything Odum wrote, are just now becoming a part of government and planning policy decisions.[14] While folkways are today not as strong as they were even a decade ago, that they still influence behavior may be witnessed in resistance to busing of schoolchildren, prayer-in-public-school controversies, sex-education disputes, hostility toward counterculture styles, etc. To ignore their power is foolhardy, whether planning a new highway route or locating publicly financed housing. Contemporary America has created many of her own problems by replacing folkways solely with technicways rather than allowing each to exist side by side in the balance which Odum found so vital.

PLANNING IDEAS ARE GERMANE TODAY

The second major element of Odum's general philosophy which has implications for today's living is the notion of social planning. This to Odum was the means by which the balance of population and resources in the region could be accomplished. Of the need for such planning today there can be little doubt, but the idea has not been adopted on a large scale. The primary opposition has been the tradition of the free marketplace and the fear that planning works against personal liberty. Here, too, Odum is instructive,

[13] Gans 1962. Also see Ryan 1969, pp. 135–50; Fried and Gleicher 1961, pp. 305–15.

[14] See, e.g., Kotler 1969 and Altshuler 1970. Also, "Planning and Citizen Participation," a special issue of *American Behavioral Scientist*; "Symposium on Neighborhoods and Citizen Involvement," special issue of *Public Administration Review*.

offering a powerful rationale for a type of planning that could be palatable to a majority of Americans.

Odum's brand of national planning was modeled to a large extent on the New Deal's National Planning Board. Odum, however, added the regional layer of involvement to the federal and state levels. This three-tiered coordination presaged the rise of regional councils of development that are in operation today in such areas as Miami and Detroit.[15]

Odum's planning ideas also held that people be at the center of any proposed scheme. This notion too is finally catching on as more and more communities are speaking out, organizing, and gaining control of their destinies either through citizen-participation groups, community-planning corporations, or advocacy-planning techniques (Kotler 1969, pp. 39–61).

And finally, Odum's formula of regionalism is highly instructive to anyone seriously thinking about physical growth today. Although regionalism has been considered by some as a temporary program useful only to bring underdeveloped sections of the nation, like the South of the 1930s, into a national integration with other regions, this integration has not been reached in any balanced sense (e.g., Tindall 1960). "Metropolitan dominance" is really the term most accurate in describing the United States today. The strong tide of urbanization has resulted in lopsided development precisely because the admonitions of people like Odum for regional balance have been ignored.[16] Today most metropolitan areas in America are suffering major physical and social problems, not entirely, but to a large extent because their growth has been at the expense of the rapidly depleted rural areas surrounding them. The pattern has been toward a centralized hoarding of resources. The result has not benefited either area.

If government officials, planners, and other urban thinkers would expand their visions of territory to include the outer region, the patterns of development would most assuredly become more even. Cities, to be sure, have indigenous problems, and these need to be dealt with; but the consideration of regions as a whole would mitigate overloaded population, housing, and traffic problems. The troubles of the farm, of sprawling suburban development, and of the inner city are not unrelated phenomena. Once this basic fact is recognized, political moves must be made to accommodate planning and action to insure a more consolidated view of caring for what Howard Odum referred to as "the folk-regional basis of society."

[15] A general review of such attempts may be found in Bollens and Schmandt (1965), pp. 439–90.

[16] While Odum never interpreted regional development on a metropolitan basis, his "natural region" called for a balanced growth which would have avoided the hoarding of resources by large urban areas. He has been criticized for avoiding the conceptual model of the metropolitan region in Friedmann (1964), esp. p. 512.

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