It seemed proper that the mass of data accumulated by the institute during the 1920s should receive a preliminary synthesis by its director. Rupert Vance, Harriet Herring, J. J. Rhyne, Jesse Steiner, Roy Brown, Clarence Heer, Guy Johnson, and Claudius Murchison had looked into many things: the rural economy of cotton, the mill villages, interracial relations, Negro folk songs, Southern income levels, the prison system of North Carolina. These had broken new ground, but their findings had not been brought together. Odum's *An American Epoch*, published in 1930, implicitly was an effort to do this. But it was more, for Odum was deep into his most rhapsodic flirtation with "art." Much of his time in the late 1920s was spent in finishing a trilogy of folk novels on Left Wing Gordon, an itinerant black laborer and teller of tall tales. For several years, Odum would interrupt Gordon's road digging activities in Chapel Hill, lightly grease his palm, and note down the stories that followed. In these, Odum tried to fuse sociology and literature. Many thought he had succeeded, including Mencken and Ulrich Phillips. The first of these, *Rainbow Round My Shoulder*, enjoyed some popular success. In such a mood, Odum approached his first sustained effort to analyze the South.

It was interesting, and not unusual, that Odum used familiar personal experiences to comprehend and integrate his narrative. Understanding the South meant, to some extent, coming to grips with his tangled family history. Throughout *American Epoch*, he used thinly disguised portraits of his grandfathers as metaphors for the divergent democratic and aristocratic traditions of the region. It was clear that, in retrospect, Grandfather Odum had won his greatest sympathy. At the heart of Odum's normative definition of the South lay the old man, a symbol for the honest rural middle class. If Philip Thomas had lost out to his poor relation, it was partly his own fault. He had not argued the case for the ancien régime to his grandson with total conviction. For him, the "aristocracy" had always been but a step from the frontier rudeness that still marked his daughter's father-in-law. "The old Major," Odum recalled, "had often maintained that the whole economic and cultural system of the South, although having many admirable features in it and at times approximating great possibilities, was neither well thought out nor well balanced." Thomas had doubted the value of slavery, though he had been an adamant racist. Like Jefferson, he had deprecated the loose and violent ways of plantation owners, and deplored the hypocrisy that had lauded the sanctity of family life but dallied in the slave quarters and sent blood relations to a dividing auction block. Reduced in later years to a grubbing existence as the local tax receiver, Philip Thomas had maintained a cynical detachment at the "gentle
folk” who retired to an isolated and injured pride. With such instruction, it is little wonder that Odum could endorse the lessons of a Darwinian social science and write that the Old South “could not survive an evolutionary world. Its philosophy and religion were not consistent with the development of social justice and democracy.”

This idiosyncratic family history impelled Odum to endorse the New South’s social theory about its own rise, though Odum’s middle class had more mud on its boots. Warmly he wrote of “the millions of middle folk not commonly recorded in the annals of the heroic or in the stories of submerged groups.” If their fortunes had wavered, not only the war and Reconstruction had been to blame, but the inherent instabilities of the Southern economic and social structure. They themselves had been a stable bedrock for both rural and industrial society. Industrialization had not destroyed their vitality, for the plain folk had just packed their bags and gone to the mill villages. Around this transition, Odum composed the statistical information gathered by his colleagues. Although his narrative was allusive and impressionistic, he buried great quantities of data in its flow. A reference to his grandfather Odum would lead to a mention that one of his grandchildren was “among the commercial boosters of the South.” This unleashed figures about the resources and economy of the region: that it was 32 percent of the American land, and 30 percent of its population. Did the reader know that the South had only 14 percent of bank deposits, or 24 percent of developed water power? A description of his grandfather’s somewhat wobbly tenor voice led to a chapter on the region’s folk music. Reminiscence about the country revivals of his youth started a discussion on regional religion.

In this way, autobiography became sociology. Subjective experience was the core, but it was amplified by more sophisticated information than had been granted to any previous New South critic. And on two issues, the social psychology of sectionalism and the religiosity of Southern politics, Odum came close to breaking fresh conceptual ground.

In his many travels, Odum had been impressed by the variety of opinions expressed about the South. He recalled his graduate school days in the North and “a distinguished man who expressed the opinion that the southern people were so different from the rest of the country that they always would be different and would never really become a part of the Nation. This, he [Odum] thought, was unreasonable . . . . He recalled the earlier beginnings of the South, how its leadership was national in scope, how its population was recruited from all parts of the country and from European sources, even as was the North, and how so few years had intervened that a verdict of permanent differences between two such peoples, ascribed to so brief an evolution, was manifestly absurd.” But Odum also remembered that this intellectual conviction was contradicted by the instruction of
his youth, “the fact that all he had ever heard, from his childhood up at home, was that the South was different and, please God, would always be different.”

This tension had made Odum acutely conscious of the subjective awareness of sectional reality. It loomed enough in his mind to devote three chapters to the North’s image of the South, the South’s awareness of the North, and the South’s view of itself. He was, one ventures, the first Southerner to consider seriously the problem of this particular social psychology.

He paraded all the images he had come across in his many years. Recalling the bitterness towards the North he had learned at his mother’s knee, Odum sketched the Southern legend of Reconstruction, the mold in which he insisted its prickly self-consciousness had been formed. But he pointed to the Northern images of the South, which seemed to divide into two contrary versions. The first mirrored the myth of the Old South. The second excoriated or mocked a flawed New South, a Menckenian Sahara, a “Bible Belt, ruled by morons and cowards, manacled by clergymen and politicians, void of intellectual or cultural contributions.” Odum took a melancholy pleasure in remembering the visitors to Chapel Hill, who had marvelled at the existence of intelligent men below the Potomac, and those who believed that “a chief pastime in the South was the lynching of Negroes, the massing of night riders, the marching of the K.K.K.’s, the working of women and children, the drinking of moonshine liquor. . . . Or else, again, gentlemen’s estates, beautiful women, courtly manners. . . .”

Odum identified the subjectivity and assumed that it was the distorted vision of a more complicated reality. The images were rehearsed rather than evaluated, though he was sure that the indigenous school of social critics, exemplified by a Walter Hines Page, would eventually sift truth from fiction. Romance would give way to the hard accuracy of sociological insight. But he remained the American positivist. He had distanced himself from the confusions of social psychology, but he felt obliged to assert his own version. Nowhere was this more clear than in his harping on the election of 1928.

While he had travelled the South on his sabbatical, the scathing presidential election of 1928 had been taking place. The fulminations of Bishop Cannon against Al Smith, the whole outburst of bigotry, xenophobia, and provincialism had appalled him. It weighed on his mind in *American Epoch*. Time and again, in unlikely places, he would recur to it. It was not that Odum was a zealot for Al Smith. On the contrary, he had some prohibitionist sympathies and even acknowledged a certain suspicion of Roman Catholicism. But he hated the hypocrisy of Cannon, just as he had despised the Klan’s claims to Christianity and Americanism. The inconsistency of Southern behavior seemed to turn his stomach. “Many southern
critics,” he was to write, “regretted the fact that the South could not see the inconsistency of its clamoring for states rights with reference to the Negro and child labor, but clamoring for federalism for the enforcement of prohibition... of the South's individualism and its well known tradition for rich eating and drinking alongside its extreme damnation of all those who questioned the perfection of the National Prohibition Law... of the churches clamoring for law enforcement and ‘righteousness’ with reference to prohibition, and silent on injustice to Negroes and mill workers. And southern Protestants recommending that the United States interfere in Mexico to free the Mexicans from ecclesiastical domination!” While Odum had been careful to preserve his neutrality during the Dayton trial, 1928 moved him towards an outright condemnation of the fundamentalist influence on Southern life and unquestionably sharpened his sense of the intimate links between the two. For a while, the sociologist came very close to echoing Mencken’s anticlerical theory of Southern decline. It was an uncharacteristic moment.

It was worrying that Odum had joined the growing band who were writing about the region, for he feared the taint of popular polemic. Not wishing to be labelled a professional Southerner, he began to insist that even when he was writing about the South it was the South in a national setting. These were Southern pictures, but American too. Equally, his descriptions of Southern diversity did not undermine the organic unity of the region. “Both the old and the new culture abounded in sharp contrasts and logical paradoxes,” he admitted. However, “There were many Souths yet the South. It was preeminently national in backgrounds, yet provincial in its processes.” This conundrum was not explained, but merely asserted. “The South was different, and it should be different,” he announced. “But it was the normal difference of an important region of a great Nation, and should not continue to develop a sectional difference as of one section over against another.” This was puzzling, even as it was traditional. The nationality of Southern character was an old New South doctrine. But Odum had extended its lines by a more eclectic sociology and a more skeptical attitude towards the mythology, not only of the Old South but even of the New.

For the moment, he remained unchallenged. He seemed unaware that he might be challenged by anything other than the odd proponent of Mencken’s boobocracy. He gathered that a few dabblers in belles-lettres in Nashville had hazarded objections, but I’ll Take My Stand didn’t seem serious. To Mencken, he observed that “what these brethren do not sense: is the fact that all of the old southern romanticism has been thoroughly interwoven with a realism, which, even though in the long run may develop a fine culture, is at present a pretty sordid fact, and that even before the War Between the States it was being rotted into from various
sources.” It was true that Stringfellow Barr, editor of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, had suggested in a review of *American Epoch* that Southerners should struggle to preserve parts of their culture. “Virginia would be like that, wouldn’t it?” Odum complained. “I have emphasized southern qualities as distinctive and powerful contributions to the national fabric so much already that I have almost become an apologist. And how one section can keep on trying to build a wall around itself and be different from the rest of the world is more than I can see.”

Neither the Agrarians nor the more indistinct flutterings of Charlottesville unduly bothered Odum. They were publicists; he was a scientist. In material resources, there was no contest between Chapel Hill and Nashville. William Couch, director of the University of North Carolina Press and no friend to Odum, grumbled to Donald Davidson in 1932 about the relative poverty of the humanities. Davidson backed him up, from his own experience at Vanderbilt University: “The sole important instances that I know of in our Division of Humanities where aid has gone to a professor is the case of Ransom, this year on a Guggenheim fellowship. What others have done has been at their own expense, unencouraged by foundation interest. On the [other] hand, I know of several important instances in the field of the natural and social sciences where very generous aid has been given. One professor that I know of has received repeated grants. It is seemingly easy for scientists and social scientists to get help.”

Nonetheless, versions of agrarianism were to give Odum trouble. For he was exposed on several flanks. Although he was the most important duct down which foundation money flowed to the Southern intelligentsia, especially in social science, he was not the only one. Nor could he control all the tentacles of his network of organizations. The pell-mell of undisciplined and uncoordinated scholarly research was unnerving, and he liked to restrain it. In 1924, he had complained of the rush of studies on the cotton mills. In 1926, his concern had been a plethora of work on the Negro: “There are so many cross currents and different people wanting to work in the field the situation will soon be literally unbearable.” His reasons were understandable. He had learned that sociology was a disrupting new discipline and prudence was more easily attained within a small group of like-minded thinkers, such as he had in the institute. An imprudent stranger could destroy his careful groundwork overnight.

In the event, the disruption came from North Carolina. At the Woman’s College of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Benjamin Kendrick, late of the historical seminar of William Dunning at Columbia, had proved himself occasionally useful to Odum. This historian had offered detailed and shrewd criticism of the manuscript of *An American Epoch*. When members of the Southern Regional Committee had been selected, Odum had put forward Kendrick’s name. Upon Odum’s surrender of the
position, Kendrick had advanced to chairman of the committee. In January of 1934, Odum received an official letter from Kendrick under the letterhead of the Southern Regional Committee. Unexpectedly it told him that the recent Gainesville conference of the committee had “voted to go ahead with the organization of a Southern Council for the Advancement of Knowledge,” and that Kendrick expected Odum to “give me the benefit of your full cooperation and influence in putting the thing over in the South in general and in North Carolina in particular.” It must have been with surprise and trepidation that Odum turned to an enclosed reprint from the *Southwest Review*, in which Kendrick laid forth his views.

Ominously, it began with a questioning of the New South’s materialism. A brief account of the New South movement was followed by this remark: “During the past four years a larger and larger number of Southern intellectuals and some few Southern business leaders have begun to wonder if the prophets of the New South were altogether true prophets. Was there not something in the Old South which after all is worth preserving and revivifying? These questions do not point toward a resurgence of the old sectionalism, but toward the creation of a new regionalism.”

Kendrick wanted to create a public opinion that would support enlightened change within the region. To this end, he proposed that curricula in Southern colleges be reorganized to make an educational system more socially relevant and less bent on producing professional scholars. In addition, he foresaw a periodical that would provide the Southern undergraduate with discussion of Southern problems. There should be correspondents in each state capitol to report on political and legislative events. This journal would be sponsored by the council or “confederation,” as he called it in the article. 1300 charter members would be found, 100 from each Southern state: these would be “socially-minded men and women of intellectual ability, of scholarly attainment, and most important of all, of good will.” Colleges would be expected to have an institutional membership in the “confederation’s” drive to reorganize and improve graduate education. Kendrick hoped that Southern universities might delegate their degree granting powers to the “confederation,” or three divisions of the “confederation.” Aspirant scholars would apply, not to individual universities, but to the “confederation,” which would organize courses of instruction that combined the facilities of several colleges.

Optimistically, the historian hoped the scheme would be inexpensive. For an executive director and a small staff, a budget of about $25,000 a year was envisaged. However, Kendrick was eager for a central research fund that might promote study, “purposive in character and local in conception.” Kendrick did not want scholars too fastidious to enter the arena of public debate.
These proposals had been put to the Gainesville conference and received its cheerful endorsement. It seemed worth exploring. And it was natural that, in trying to implement a controversial policy, Kendrick should have turned to Odum. Foundations had to be cajoled, universities persuaded, founding members located. Moreover, Kendrick was involved with Odum’s new regional study. He and a fellow Greensboro historian, Alex Arnett, had been commissioned to write a brief historical preface to Odum’s magnum opus.15 Knowing Odum’s views, Kendrick was confident that they were in substantial agreement. Both had doubts about the speed of industrialization. And, although Kendrick had paid his respects to the Agrarians for stimulating a useful debate about the shortcomings of the New South, the extensiveness of the “confederation” barred any Agrarian monopoly.

Odum’s response was immediate. He disagreed about the need for a southern periodical and rehearsed his old decision to make Social Forces a “national” journal. Kendrick’s ideas were “diametrically opposed to the conclusions of the Southern Regional Study,” and no action should be taken until its results were available. His help was summarily refused, though he did suggest that the Social Science Research Council might publish Kendrick’s views as a minority report or “your and Arnett’s little volume might give you a chance to set forth your conclusions.”16

Kendrick was puzzled and insulted. After all, he had come with the official mandate of a not inconsiderable body, the Southern Regional Committee. Although Odum had been so kind as to say that he didn’t mind if Kendrick and his committee “wish to join the Nashville group,” Kendrick knew he was no Agrarian. Odum had been cryptic, asserting airily that the scheme was “opposed” to his own regional study, which seemed to have a necessary priority. Incensed, Kendrick wrote back: “I cannot to save my life understand how you can say that the ‘New Regionalism’ as I described it in my article is contrary to all your group has been standing for for the last ten years. . . . So far as my article was concerned it was entirely in keeping with the outline in your ‘Work Book’ which I prepared two years ago and which I understood you approved. . . . I had been under the unfortunate delusion that in this volume we were laying the historical background for your Southern Regional Study and it had never occurred to me before that it offered any ‘diversity of viewpoint.’”17

The argument thus joined, Odum decided to check around the Southern intelligentsia to see how matters stood. Through John Wade, whom he had known for many years, he inquired of Donald Davidson whether Kendrick might be considered an Agrarian. The poet thought, on the whole, not. George Fort Milton told Odum that he had attended the Gainesville conference and voted for Kendrick’s proposal. It seemed to him “a really useful idea.” Moreover, he could not “at all see how Kendrick’s background
or general organization of ideas can be likened to that of Donald Davidson.”

Despite these reactions, Odum grew increasingly convinced that Kendrick should be relegated to the “moonlight and magnolias” school of social critics. His characterizations of the historian became more savage. To Sydnor Walker of the Rockefeller Foundation, he was to refer to “this southern confederacy of learning and goodness and the resurgence of a ‘new sectionalism’ rationalized into the ‘new regionalism’ and sponsored by sundry charming, eloquent, rosy-cheeked gentlemen and scholars, my overlords of the Southern Regional Committee.” Hyperbolically, he insisted that this was “the most critical situation that the southern so-called intellectuals have faced since the aftermath of the reconstruction period.” He was even to draw a sinister parallel, when mentioning Kindrick’s interest in the religious basis of Southern society: this “religious zeal . . . comes extraordinarily near the Nazi mode.”

In his correspondence, Odum hardened his commitment to the absolute distinction between sectionalism and his own regionalism. He insisted that sectionalism was egocentric, while regionalism was unselfish integration into the national scene. Davidson and Kendrick argued that practice would muddy the theoretical distinction. If one conceded the South’s distinctiveness, as Odum did, and attempted to devise a localized infrastructure of power, as Odum wanted, you could not control the eventual relationship to the nation. It would appear, from the general reaction, that Davidson had rather the better of the argument. Odum was reduced to a shrill dogmatism, determined to separate himself from the old and new sectional traditions. Milton would not accept his case, and even Sydnor Walker puckishly told Odum: “Both Mr. Day and I read the . . . material which makes it evident that there is trouble brewing in the Old South. The worst of it is that if one has not considerable background on this subject, the argument of these gentlemen [Kendrick and Davidson] sounds quite reasonable.” Later she was to observe more awkwardly: “I should be inclined to think that you and Mr. Davidson could unite on most practical questions of policy. I have felt from the beginning that your definition made sectionalism and regionalism seem farther apart than they necessarily are, and that some of the individuals concerned in the controversy may not be at all certain of their position in relation to the invisible line.”

Even as he lost the intellectual argument, Odum won the institutional battle. With an instinct for the jugular vein, he simply cut Kendrick’s hopes of raising money for the scheme. To the Social Science Research Council, to the Rockefeller Foundation, to the General Education Board, to Harry Chase, now President of New York University and influential with both the SSRC and the foundations, Odum dispatched a series of crippling letters. Despite some doubts, the powers listened to Odum and denied Kendrick funds. The project withered. It was significant that the only money Kendrick
could lay his hands upon came from the Carnegie Foundation, which lay outside the Odum network.22

Seeking an explanation for Odum’s agitation, Davidson hazarded this guess to John Wade: “I gather, from direct remarks as well as from reading between the lines, that Odum fears that Kendrick and Pipkin, now suddenly and perhaps strangely talking in tune with some of the ‘Agrarians,’ are about to commit some form of sociological sabotage, and set awry other plans, perhaps Odum’s plans, for fostering the kind of regionalism in which he is interested.” And it was true that when Kendrick’s first letter dropped on Odum’s desk the sociologist had barely finished unsuccessfully scouting in New York for a centralized Southern Institute.23 The new Confederation posed a threat. There were, in addition, good reasons for opposing Kendrick. Odum knew, better than most, that funds would not likely be forthcoming. It was improbable that universities would be persuaded to yield up their autonomy, and quixotic to challenge the tide of scholarly professionalization. But Odum did not use these arguments extensively. He attacked the rhetoric. For several years, he had been easing himself into the regional movement and grown used to seeing the word “Southern” in his own books and speeches. He had felt secure in the stability of the New South consensus; but the ideological context had begun to change around him. By 1934, “Southern” was a word in the process of being annexed by the Agrarians. Odum was determined not to let it go.

And, in his plans for the Southern Regional Study, the political context was exerting different pressures. The New Deal had begun to transform the relationship between social scientists, government and social planning. While Odum had talked in the 1920s loosely about rationalizing the social order, he had had only reluctant and imperfect political instruments to hand. By 1934, he and his fellow sociologists at Chapel Hill were bound up in the actions of the Roosevelt administration. For Odum, it was a reluctant change. In 1931, he had approved of Hoover’s veto of the Muscle Shoals Bill. By 1933, he was confronted with the reality of the Tennessee Valley Authority. He had not changed his views, as he told Sydnor Walker, “but the present bill has passed, it is a law, it is an actual regional-national experiment, and one of the most significant ever proposed... Mr. Roosevelt has projected this thing on the basis of a human welfare experiment in social planning, whereas Mr. Hoover interpreted it largely as government entering the field of private business.”24 Odum never wasted time on arguing with a fait accompli. He was to send T. J. Woofter off to Knoxville to make an emergency study of the Tennessee Valley subregion, and latterly threw in Harriet Herring and Rupert Yance to help. Odum himself accepted from Harry Hopkins the job of North Carolina rector of the Civil Works Administration and agreed to sit on the State Planning Board. Woofter was later to move to the Federal Emergency Relief
Administration. Members of the institute were pressed for memoranda by the National Resources Board, the Rural Resettlement Administration, as well as FERA. In due course, they were to have influence on federal policy towards farm tenancy. In all this, however, Odum—unlike his younger colleagues—was a reluctant New Dealer.25

The social melting pot of the 1930s put Odum under fresh pressures. He felt that the Southern Regional Study had to serve two masters, sociological description and administrative recommendation. Even as he gathered the material for *Southern Regions of the United States*, his responsibility seemed to deepen. The 1936 publication was nothing scanty. It was a volume to test the stoutest bookshelf: nearly 700 pages, 340 maps, 270 charts and tables, a dizzying compendium of data.26

*Southern Regions* seemed to offer something new. All the old disputes about the region had rendered impressionistic definitions. The South was race, or it was the land, it was manners or it was kinship. Odum presented an apparently scientific system for defining, classifying, and planning for the South. More than that, he split the whole United States up into six neat regions. There was the Southeast consisting of Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas; the Southwest of Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona; the Northeast of Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, and New Hampshire; the Middle States of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri; the Northwest of Montana, North and South Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Utah; and the Far West of California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. Around this sixfold division, the book's maps and statistics were grouped.

How had Odum cut the Gordian knot of impressionism? He had a system of indices, listings of statistics that showed the cultural, economic, and social life of individual states. Agricultural production, the numbers of schools and colleges, the lengths of highways, the quantity of insurance policies, the size of libraries, anything and everything that Odum's staff could quantify. As they were the only figures readily available, statistics from states formed the basis. Odum, however, admitted that states were an imperfect reflection of socioeconomic divisions. These indices were correlated and made to produce six comparatively homogenous regions.27

Many contemporaries were puzzled by anomalies. Delaware and Maine, for example, were deemed more alike than Delaware and Virginia. Gerald Johnson, writing from Baltimore, wanted to know why Maryland had
been read out of the South. Odum referred to his indices. "I need scarcely call attention," he replied, "to the unreality of Maryland as a southern state when it comes to such items as farm tenancy, the size and nature of farms, nature of crops, percentage of Negro population, bank deposits, savings, purchase of automobiles" and so forth. In short, Maryland was too rich. Odum was obliged to admit that this rubric was slippery. Virginia, after all, was taking the path of Maryland. Florida was going the same way. But Odum could remove Maryland from the Southeast, while he was stuck with Florida, for one of the principles of regionalism was contiguosity. Florida, as Rupert Vance was to admit, was unquestionably "embarrassing." By the same token, Delaware could not be part of the Southeast, because Maryland interposed a barrier.

It was natural that border areas posed Odum's greatest problem. Kentucky and West Virginia had a confusing set of indices. Of West Virginia, Odum observed, "In perhaps forty indices commonly denoting deficiency in culture and institutional standards it tends to rank with the Southeast. Thus in value of farms, lands and property; in horse power per worker, machine farming; in population under twenty years, over fifty years; in wage earners and wages paid; in value of manufactured products; in rank in education and other services. On the other hand, in its industries, its educational institutions of higher learning, its Negro population, its foreign born, its wealth and income, its fertilizer consumption, and many others it ranks with the Northeast." With Kentucky, the dilemma was similar. But they had to be assigned somewhere. So West Virginia went to the Northeast, and Kentucky to the Southeast. Odum offered no explanation for the former decision, but observed that Kentucky's "population, folkways, culture, history, cities, rank it without serious question in the southeastern group."29

This was the effect of indices, but he was asked how he evaluated the indices themselves. When Gerald Johnson was asked to write a popular condensation of Southern Regions, to be called The Wasted Land, he faced this methodological problem. As the journalist put it, "A blind man can see that some of these questions are more important than others. The total population of a State, for example, is more important than the number of illegal distilleries seized in that State." But Johnson was convinced of Odum's scientific credentials and reassured the reader that "the statistics ... had to be 'weighted' by complicated mathematical operations familiar only to statisticians to balance this varying importance."30

One can look through the long pages and many numbers of Southern Regions without finding an exposition of this mathematical alchemy. Embarrassingly, Odum had no such technique, though he admitted to wanting one. To G. W. Forster of the State College in Raleigh, a reviewer of Southern Regions, Odum wrote: "I agree with your criticism of the
statistical technique. I tried hard to get one or two of the statisticians to give us a refined scale of indices. Like the delineation of regions in which we are just beginning, so also the utilization of these indices must be approximate till the time the statisticians will come in and attempt some real methodological study. I need scarcely add that one of the tasks which appears necessary from this study is a series of methodological studies of indices and homogeneity groupings of likenesses and differences." In Southern Regions itself, Odum seemed to give away the game. "Like the old fallacies of aggregate figures," he conceded, "... measures fabricated from arbitrary comparative indices fall short of either scientific accuracy or practical application of living society."

Odum had achieved a circular argument in one respect. He had examined a number of indisputably southern states. From these, he had derived a rough norm in which poverty was an important common denominator. Then he had worked outwards until the levels of wealth grew incongruous. This had obliged him to cut off Maryland. As significantly, it had led him to sever the Southwestern states of Texas and Oklahoma from the Southeast. But this left a worrying question mark. If the economic revolution, in which—despite the Depression—he remained confident, was to be consummated and the affluent edges of the region worked inwards, would the South shrink to a patch of exhausted shrub on the border between Alabama and Mississippi? Odum had tried to nail firm boundaries on a fluid social reality. His Southeast had to be static, or it would have to disappear.

In An American Epoch, Odum had cast his lot with the impressionism of social psychology. He had taken historical evidence seriously. In Southern Regions, he admitted, "The cultural equipment of the Southeast is not only powerfully conditioned by its geographic factors but can be understood only through a knowledge of historical backgrounds and regional incidence which have played an extraordinarily dominant rôle in the development of the civilization of the South." But the new book made no serious effort to integrate history into the attempt to understand the region. Odum offered only a shallow listing of "crises" that bore little functional relationship to the sociology it was intended to underpin. These had been casually requested of Kendrick a few years earlier, with the remark that research into primary sources was unnecessary, that "it was the 'sweep' that we wanted rather than exhaustive research."

His indices bore only a haphazard relationship to the inscrutable facts of social psychology. Could one measure culture by figures about libraries and universities? In some ways, yes. In others, equally as crucial, no. For planning reasons, Odum needed to distil precise regional boundaries. One cannot draw up blueprints of social change if one doesn't know where a place is. Odum might begin to quantify human activities, but no figures
told him what people felt and no sociology instructed how emotional identity should weigh in administration.

All these were weaknesses, most apparent in a long retrospect. From the standpoint of 1936, the book's impact was more striking. Odum's regional theory, although it was to affect his empirical planning, did not much limit the reader's ability to use the book with profit. The mass of statistics was overwhelming and impressive. Although they were grouped into Odum's six regions, and his maps bore thick lines that divided region from region, the underlying data was accessible. With *Southern Regions*, the New South intelligentsia had taken a precise stock of its milieu. It stripped away the woolly optimism of boosting chambers of commerce, and defined the immense task that Southern poverty still imposed. All those maps and charts were to provide the cannon fodder for informed discussion about the South for decades.

But there was more than figures, there was also a commentary. Here Odum returned to many of the themes of *An American Epoch*, especially his emphasis on the middle class and education. For Odum, the non-slaveholding whites were the backbone of the reconstructed South. "They illustrated," he insisted, "the Sumner theory that 'the share that the upper strata (the large middle group) of the masses have in determining the policy of the masses is therefore often decisive of public welfare. This group stands out in contrast to the 'planter class,' to which so much attention has been given . . . Yet in all the averages and distributions of deficiencies and lags this group still constitutes the norm around which judgements should be made and plans developed.'" This large claim was coupled to another: "Any region which has the will and capacity to support educational and scientific institutions of the highest order, because of this desire and capacity and because of what the institutions achieve in leadership and technology in economic and political direction, in upraising of standards and in social guidance, will automatically develop increasingly an adequate culture." And both claims were linked to the nationalist enthusiasm which the fracas with Kendrick had strengthened. But now Odum offered a sterner reason for "integration." Their money was needed: "The evidence would seem to indicate the inability of the southern regions to develop their capacities independent of resources, cooperative effort, and conditioning attitudes of other regions and of the nation as a whole."33

"Conditioning attitudes," by which he meant social values, were left prudently obscure. It raised, for one thing, the prickly issue of race. *Southern Regions* did not dwell on the problem, though it said a little. One courtesy Odum paid to Southern blacks. He did not segregate his figures. "The Southern Regional Study," he observed, "has been projected and carried out on the assumption that the Negro is an integral, normal, and
continuing factor in the culture of the Southeast. Consistently the study, whilst recognizing the Negro as one of the chiepest of economic problems, has refused to set up a dichotomous framework in which one set of figures would present the whole southern picture and another would present the picture of what would be if the Negro were not included.” Quietly, Odum has dissented from Ulrich Phillips’s claim that Southernness consisted in precisely that dichotomy.34

Aware of the economic and social cost of segregation, Odum assumed its permanence and believed that the Negro could progress under its aegis. He made a point of repudiating the old notion of inherent racial inferiority, but left untouched the more perplexing issue of an inferiority rooted in cultural conditioning. Instead, he confined himself to endorsing the report that Guy Johnson had made for the Interracial Commission in which the participation of Negroes “in the rights and duties of citizenship in the broadest sense” had been recommended. But he was ominously careful to add: “this step can be taken without destroying the integrity of the races. Negroes and whites have been meeting together in various organizations in the South for years now, and there is no evidence that either race is any the worse for the experience . . . . Furthermore, the increasing race pride among Negroes will act as a conserver of racial integrity.” Odum had not, after all, abandoned his substantial respect for the power of genes.35

It was most striking that Howard Odum’s vision of Southern development was almost as agrarian as Nashville’s. When the sharecropper and tenant problem was uncovered during the 1930s, Odum and Rupert Vance, Arthur Raper and T. J. Woofter had gathered the data to feed the New Deal debate. By comparison, the institute’s work on race was less influential, despite Guy Johnson’s role in helping Gunnar Myrdal to write An American Dilemma.36 Even weaker was the Odum school’s grasp of politics: V. O. Key’s Southern Politics in State and Nation paid little heed to them. On agriculture, however, the institute had deepened and enriched the tradition of rural sociology that had begun in Eugene Branson’s days.37

“In fine and in sum,” Odum wrote, “the agrarian problem is the region, for better or for worse, and the agrarian statecraft which is involved.” This sounded eminently Nashvillian, and, indeed, Benjamin Kendrick had once told Odum: “Insofar as they [the Agrarians] believe that the farmer should be more nearly self-sufficing than at present is the case I do agree with them and I suspect you do also.” For Odum did put together passages of skepticism about industrialization. “This region,” he said in Southern Regions, “need not lag, on the one hand, nor, on the other, follow blindly the paths of a hectic, urban, technological, transitional period of civilization.”38 Partly Odum was repeating the old New South theory of the “belated section” that could learn from the mistakes of its industrializing predecessors, but it ran deeper than this. For a Henry Grady, this meant little more
than the inconvenience of labor disputes and grim working conditions so notable in New England. Odum's sense of industrialism's abuses was richer. And while the Agrarians attacked industrialism from without the assumptions of scientific theory, Odum was a fifth column that peppered it from a hiding place in the sociology of a William Graham Sumner.  

Odum had dabbled intermittently in a grand theory of social change that might fuse the viewpoints of Sumner, Wundt, and Giddings. In his presidential address to the American Sociological Society in 1930, he had suggested that Sumner's distinction between the folkways and the state was still a fundamental premise. But it no longer served to restrict the meaning of a "folk" to rural classes. New York City had its folkways: the world of the "cultivated classes" was not apart. A folk society was, for Odum, present "in any stage of culture or civilization whenever the major conditioning factors are extra-organizational or when a synergy of conflicting forces and processes results in an integrated transitional society." The proper study of sociology was the conflict between the homogeneous world of the folk and technological change.

In a 1937 article, Odum was to elaborate the point. As he saw it, from the basic Wundtian folk society developed "stateways," the formal legal structures that regulated the informal ways of the folk. With the inruption of scientific technology, there came "technicways." These were not the technology itself, but the ways of adjustment to the technology. These "arise from the pressure of technological forces and procedures to impel conformity of individual and group to quick-changing patterns, regardless of empirical considerations or of mass sanction. Thus," Odum explained, "'fashions' superimposed through the technics of advertising do not represent the tastes of individuals or groups, nor do they reflect the gradual evolution from one style to another. Such fashions are not folkways to meet needs but technicways to fall in line with pressure or gadgets of the market place."

There is no doubt that Odum regarded the technicways with profound distaste. Paradoxically for a bureaucrat and social planner, he feared bureaucracy and imprudent social engineering. Man was not plastic, to be molded at will. If ill-considered change outran the folk society, the folk would turn upon it and crush the good with the bad. The sociologists's job was to find the middle way, to establish an "orderly transitional democracy."

This perspective informed Odum's thinking in *Southern Regions*. He complained that material technicways were speeding up evolution in a helter-skelter way. The South had to look for a "balanced economy which is also primarily a 'culture' which will serve as a medium for the continuing sweep of science and technology which in turn can be made to serve mankind rather than exploit it." For Odum, American society was dangerously imbalanced by the preponderance of urban industrialism over
“the natural agrarian elements”. City and country needed to succor each other, not vie to destroy the best in each. Thus it was vitally important that a palsied Southern agriculture be restored to health.43

With his feeling for the underlying strength of the nonplantation South, Odum saw a Southern history, not where a decaying plantation world was being replaced by industry, but where a white frontier society, lately shackled by the plantation, retained the capacity for great development. As he frequently put it, “southern culture is immature rather than decadent.” Often he pointed to the demographic strength of an area, whose birth rate was the highest in the nation and which exported many of its offspring. Odum’s South was “rich in folk reserves, where resides a great seed bed of population for renewing the national stream . . . rich in the sheer organic vitality of the folk life and society which has always been a definitive force in the rise of new cultures.” This sentiment echoed Odum’s interest in the cyclical historical theory of Oswald Spengler. Like the German, Odum felt that cultures tended to degenerate into mere civilization, whose most destructive agent was the megapolis. The South was yet a culture.44

One must stress that, despite Odum’s prudent regard for the brutal censorship in Southern society, he retained a deep faith in the common man. Even in the evolution controversy of 1926, he had confided to Harry Chase: “The bulwark of this State and America is the great integrity of the mass of the people. We may exclude, of course, the socially deficient and the demagogues. Likewise the people are, contrary to some opinions, open and eager to hear the truth if presented before they have been driven into emotional states and if and when presented in terms of truth and not shibboleths.”45

But who were the folk? Odum was vague on this point. In 1930, he had adapted Sumner in this way: “The after-war society of the South was preeminently folk society in that this region, although conquered and outwardly controlled by organized stateways and state force to the nth degree, had its culture and its future primarily conditioned by a folk society which was organic, natural, and material, such that its mastery was almost complete.” This implied that the whole South was a single folk, with the exception of the blacks who formed a folk group of their own. But a footnote made the position opaque: “For the purpose of this discussion ‘region’ is not an entirely separate concept but an extension and attribute to the ‘folk.’ . . . ‘the South’ as a section would comprise the technical, geographic, and political ‘Confederate States of America’; as a region it would vary, with subdivisions according to the fusion of culture and geography—the Piedmont mountain folk, the Piedmont mill folk, Saint Helena Island, the Black Belt, the Southwest, etc.”46 This was confusing. Was the folk the small social group, such as the Piedmont, and the region a congregation of folks? Or was the region the folk, and the smaller groups but subdivisions? Was the South a
section, with smaller regions? If so, why did Odum call the post-Civil War South both a region and a folk?

_Southern Regions_ dispelled a little of the fog. He was careful to insist that differentiating evidence about the Appalachians made it clear, "just as there is no longer a 'South,' so any blanket classification, 'southern people,' no longer constitutes an authentic characterization." Elsewhere he reiterated the paradox that "the South not only differs from the rest of the country, but also, and radically, within its former bounds. . . . There is no longer 'the South' but many Souths." So it was that his book was titled _Southern Regions_, not _The Southern Region_. However, this clarification introduced an instability into Odum's case. If the South was dismembered, why was it proper to analyze it as an entity? His answer was "folkways." But he had still not defined the boundaries of his folk group.47

Believing that this was an essentially vital folk society, Odum's planning proposals were directed at unshackling the South. Agriculture must be restored to health, with aims such as these: the reform of the tenancy system; the development of an adequate credit system for farmers; the readjustment of crop land uses, especially by the promotion of more food and feed crops; the raising of commodity consumption in the region; the improvement of the comforts and conveniences of farm life by electrification; a method for the redistribution of submarginal lands and people within the present submarginal areas rather than the wholesale retirement of such land and the relocation of its population; the increase of agricultural exports; the pooling of rural labor and farm machinery in cooperative ventures; the development of small industries to serve agricultural needs; reforestation and erosion work; the promotion of livestock and dairy industries; the reparation of housing deficiencies; the equalization of facilities for blacks.48

If all this could have been done, it would have wrought a minor social revolution. But this was not a revolutionary program, so much as an attempt to make a Platonic agrarian ideal workable and eliminate the immense waste in Southern society. It was the old progressive message of efficiency, echoing with a chastened Jeffersonianism. For Odum was noticeably silent on urbanization and heavy industry. These plans were aimed at putting industry back to work for agriculture, and at reversing the historic trend of agriculture becoming the handmaiden of industry.

It was obvious to Odum that none of this was possible in the existing Southern political structure. Candidly, he admitted that "modification of the political culture of the region . . . lies at the base of any planning approach." Knowing this, he had no convincing solution save for a few technical suggestions about public administration and the bold, if quixotic, suggestion that the Theodore Bilbos might be simply bypassed. Education might be the answer. Thus Odum wanted a series of strong centers of
education, in which social research, technological development, and training for public administration might be concentrated. These institutions would agree upon and cooperate in projects of social change. More than this, Odum wanted an extended system of adult education. "There can be no success without an extraordinary effort in adult education," he insisted, "carrying to the people the power of fact and thinking." Thereby the strain of the technicways might be eased. One might produce "a powerful regional motivation and also a spontaneous folk movement". In this way, one could sneak behind the political inertia of the Eugene Talmadges and give the people "the truth," before they had been "driven into emotional states."

All this would require a high degree of coordination. To this end, Odum proposed a series of planning councils, funded by Washington, state governments, and private philanthropy. A national planning council and regional planning councils would be superimposed on the existing state planning boards. The myriad of regional divisions employed by federal agencies would have to be standardized around his own sixfold division. On the Southeastern Planning Council, there would be twelve members, of which eleven would come from each state and the twelfth would be an ex-officio representative of the Tennessee Valley Authority. In addition, Odum foresaw "certain national-regional advisory councils in which private agencies and institutions can formulate programs." These would cooperate with the government boards. Lest all of this should produce an immense and unresponsive bureaucracy, Odum suggested a progressive touch. There should be provision for referenda on proposed reforms. And, out of all this, Odum wanted two six-year plans to be fashioned.

This was the vision. It contained elements of nearly all the instruments of social planning he had ever experienced; the university, the foundations, the state planning board, the New Deal agencies. This Comtean blueprint was mated to his intellectual conviction of the social reality of regionalism. He was confident that his data proved scientifically that regions were a firm basis upon which to rest a superstructure.

*Southern Regions* was widely publicized and enthusiastically received. Copies went to Franklin Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, Senator Josiah Bailey of North Carolina, Maury Maverick of Texas, Rexford Tugwell, Governor O. Max Gardner of North Carolina, Arthur Morgan of the Tennessee Valley Authority, Louis Brandeis, and David Lilienthal. Brandeis was very pleased. George Foster Peabody was sure that the president ought to read it, and duly sent a copy to his old friend in the White House. Odum got polite notes from the president's secretaries, though it is doubtful that Roosevelt ever read it.

The intellectual community took it well. Only Donald Davidson, from Odum's right, and Broadus Mitchell, from his left, offered substantial dissents. Most reviewers were overwhelmed by a large and complicated
book. Gratefully, they praised it. It is doubtful that many actually read it with thoroughness. As a study of the South, it was never to receive a substantial assessment. Its theory of regionalism had to wait several years for real criticism, when Odum extended his ideas to the whole nation in 1938.51

_Southern Regions_ was a hybrid of planning and description. As such, Odum awaited two verdicts on the study. Was it intellectually convincing? Could any of its plans be put into effect? In the years between 1936 and the Second World War, Odum was to receive judgments on both.