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# FOOD AND CULTURE IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS—A PRELIMINARY REPORT\*

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*Points of interest.* How food folkways are being studied to provide guidance for the national nutrition program. What some people eat in the Mississippi River bottoms. What fish means to different social classes. Food and prestige. Food folkways, urbanization, and social change. [Ed.]

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

**G**enesis. Scientific examination of food habits in American rural communities seems to date from the post-World War I period, when a number of modest studies emanated from agricultural colleges and rural sociology departments of state universities.<sup>2</sup> These studies emphasized the necessity for modifying cooking techniques and food-choices for dietary improvement, and suggested practical techniques for that purpose.

This same tradition persisted in the later attempts of various government agencies, particularly those associated with the wide-scale activities of the Department of Agriculture. Thus NYA has experimented with model cooking projects, Farm Security with garden and canning instruction, WPA with school lunch programs. The Consumer Purchases Studies of the Department of Agriculture represent an elaborate extension of this type of research.<sup>3</sup>

A second approach to the study of food habits can be seen in the various laboratory studies of the experimental modification of diet in controlled groups, by students of social and child psychology.<sup>4</sup> In many of these ex-

\* This paper is a summary of the operations of the "culture and foodways project," sponsored by the Social Science Research Council and the University of Chicago, at the behest of the USDA (Extension Division) and the Rockefeller Foundation. The authors wish to express their deep obligations to Director M. L. Wilson, of the Extension Division, USDA, who has been the staunchest friend of applied anthropology; to Prof. W. L. Warner, whose unstinting advice proved immensely valuable. The region was selected for the study on the basis of an earlier study of culture changes in the area conducted by the director of the project, Herbert Passin of Northwestern University. (*Vide*, Passin, "Culture changes in Southern Illinois," *Rural Sociology*, forthcoming.) The members of the project and their advisors felt that because of the unique situation studied there, a very full analysis could be made of the many type-factors in the cultural determination of food habits.

<sup>1</sup> The first two authors are associated with the University of Chicago. Mr. Smith is now in the United States Army, Mr. Bennett and Mr. Passin in the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, D. Dickins, *A Study of Food Habits of People in Two Contrasting Areas of Mississippi*, Mississippi Agricultural Experiment Station, Bull. 245, Agric. College, 1927.

<sup>3</sup> See *Family Food Consumption and Dietary Levels*, Misc. Public. No. 405, U. S. Department of Agriculture, 1941.

<sup>4</sup> See K. Duncker, "Experimental Modification of Children's Food Preferences through Social Suggestions," *Jour. of Abnormal and Social Psychol.*, 33: 489-507, 1938.

periments food was utilized as a medium for the demonstration of certain psychological propositions, and the end *per se* cannot be said to have been a remedial change in food habits.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years interest in food habits has tended to emphasize the essential involvement of diet and foodways within the total cultural configuration, and the obvious significance of this for remedial programs. Although rural sociologists have investigated dietary-cultural situations,<sup>6</sup> a considerable share of the credit must go to British social anthropologists, who at a relatively early period were envolving a theoretical systematization of diet and culture from data gathered in Africa.<sup>7</sup> This general approach does more than merely introduce the concept of "culture" to the field; it essentially points up the necessity for considering extra-physiological factors in the selection, production, and preparation of human foods. The illusion of an "economic man," searching out the most obscure foodstuffs from an unwilling Nature in the reasoned pursuit of complete fulfillment of his needs, must give way to the concept of a man conditioned by the preferences and prejudices of his neighbors, selecting only those foods sanctioned by the "culture." And since these prejudices and preferences are not fortuitous, but rather products of certain social processes, modificatory programs must deal with the controls and mechanisms of these processes.

The Southern Illinois Foodways Study took this point of view into the field, and subjected it to an empirical investigation.

*Purposes.* These were twofold: (1) To make a preliminary isolation of certain general propositions concerning the involvements of food habits with culture, and (2) to evolve a set of procedures or specific techniques for the modification of food habits in the area studied; and which would also serve as a working basis for similar programs in other segments of American rural society. The study was thus both practical and theoretical; specific and general.

Nutritional aspects of diet were investigated only in terms of relatively generalized features. The field party lacked the services of a trained nutritionist, but even had one been present, the length of the study would have prohibited a properly intensive investigation. It is doubtful if informants

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<sup>5</sup> These studies by laboratory researchers merge into large-scale programs of modification by University and public clinics. The work of the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station is an excellent example of practical and theoretical pursuits; similarly the University of Minnesota and the Department of Home Economics of the City of St. Paul, Minnesota, have developed both ends of the undertaking. (Summaries of various aspects of the work of these groups can be found in *Conference with the Committee on Food Habits* (held in Washington, June 27-28, 1941). Mimeographed, National Research Council.

<sup>6</sup> See M. L. de Give and M. T. Cussler, *Interrelations Between the Cultural Pattern and Nutrition*. U. S. Department of Agriculture, Extension Service Circular 266, August, 1941.

<sup>7</sup> The classical example is, of course, Audrey Richards' *Land, Labor and Diet in Southern Rhodesia*, London, 1938, and the Vol. IX, No. 2 (1936) issue of *Africa*, in which the basic concepts and procedures of such investigations were established.

would have cooperated to the extent required for nutritional studies. However, a considerable body of gross data was acquired—enough to indicate the most prominent dietary deficiencies in the various areas. These were present in sufficient degree to demonstrate the advisability of attempts at change.

*Hypotheses.* The structure of the investigation was given a preliminary alignment by the point of view expressed above, under “Genesis.” Thus: Men utilize and exploit the natural environment only to the extent allowed them by their customs and traditions. Between human beings and food-stuffs in the natural environment there exists a cultural screen, which modifies and controls the selection of available foods.

This approach may be phrased as a simple *a priori* resolution: Food habits are to be considered as part of the general cultural milieu. It is therefore assumed they are integrated within social and economic systems.

Supplementary to this are a series of procedural hypotheses, grouped under the general statement: Food habits can be modified by the manipulation of the social systems in which they are integrated. Thus as a corollary of the integration of food habits within culture, it was observed that food could be studied as one of a series of indices of various types of change within the culture. In the subareas of the region the authors found food could be used as an indicator of acculturation, status and prestige, urbanization, and other “social processes.”<sup>8</sup> Further, it was found that along with certain changes in economic or social systems occurred concomitant shifts of food habits. Thus the introduction of WPA in the area has led to a greater proportion of cash expenditures for food, since WPA work replaces the time ordinarily spent in cultivating a garden.<sup>9</sup> The direction of food changes was carefully developed, since these gave clues to just what new foods might be introduced in ways that would give a reasonable assurance of successful modification.

Some of these various principles, phrased as hypotheses, can be considered as suitable for testing in further field investigations. For example: If food is identified with sub- or superordination within a socio-economic system, it will acquire prestige values related to the classes or social groups participating in the mobile structure.

*The Region.* The study was confined to one county and part of a second in a river-bottom and upland region in southern Illinois. The region had the following ecological divisions:

a. *The River.* A major stream, marking the border between Illinois and another

<sup>8</sup> A recent paper by Cora du Bois (“Attitudes Toward Food and Hunger in Alor,” in *Language, Culture, and Personality*—Sapir Memorial Volume, 1941) illustrates some aspects of the use of food as an indicator of cultural drives, basic logics, and typical personality types.

<sup>9</sup> A tendency toward greater reliance upon a cash economy had, of course, already appeared much earlier than the introduction of WPA. The later organization has served to intensify and maintain the dependence upon purchased goods.

state. Dammed for flood control, but with sufficient fish to provide a meager living for shantyboat dwellers and riverbank squatters.

b. The Riverbank. A region of exceptional fertility, immediately bordering the stream, and occupied by small families or individuals living as squatters with permission on farmland, and making a living by fishing and/or farm labor.

c. The Bottoms. A low, flat area, marking the former channels of the river. Dissected by sloughs, and subject to frequent floodings. Flora is primarily deep South—constitutes an ecological island in this more typical northern country. Occupied by large tenant farmers and marginal sub-sharecroppers; WPA families; farm laborers. Area (b), the Riverbank, is really the southern margin of the Bottoms. Soil very fertile.

d. The Lower Hills. The first river terrace northward from the Bottoms. An area of low, rolling hills, composed of unfertile clay soil. Occupied by small farm owners who frequently rent land in the eastern end of the Bottoms, outside the tenant farmer group. Entirely different family lines are represented here, and there are few social contacts with the Bottoms dwellers.

e. The Northeast Hills. A high, rolling semi-forest area east of the Lower Hills area. Soil poor and badly eroded. Inhabited by marginal, relief, and Farm Loan farming families. Many of the tenants and sharecroppers in the Bottoms came from this area.

f. The Upper Hills and German Hills. A higher upland area north of the Lower Hills. Is geographically continuous with Northeast Hills. Soil poor, but good agricultural techniques have preserved it from depletion and erosion. Inhabited by relatively well-off farmers—representing highest economic group in whole region. Divided into two sub-areas as noted above: relative lack of contact between “English” group and Germans—also considerable culture differences. Some acculturation taking place.

g. Stringtown. A small crossroads village located toward the western edge of the Bottoms, and constituting a focus for the Lower Hills, western Bottoms, and to some extent the Upper Hills. The town is a typical example of an urbanized and WPA-ized rural community. Bootlegging during Prohibition gave it a tremendous boom and permanently removed its residents from the farm.

h. Negro Communities. These two settlements were located along the road going through Unionville across the Bottoms. One represented one of the oldest communities in the area, and was populated by older individuals. The other was a younger settlement, with an active church and social life. Both had their own Negro schools. Labor from each is hired by White farmers. At one time a few colored farmers owned considerable land in the Bottoms.

Coincident with these natural-human ecological areas were found rather distinct sub-cultures of the total regional culture. These sub-cultures were studied as interacting social units with processes of interaction most intense within each sub-culture, and less intense between the groups. More will be said of this interactive structure relative to food later in the paper.

It should be noted here that the recognition of these sub-cultural groupings within a general regional society constitutes one of the more important

contributions of the study. Previous dietary level analyses have tended to elide such divisions, grouping the data in terms of abstract economic or nutritional units. Highly significant differences in food habits and relation of foodways to social and economic systems were found to coincide with these sub-cultures, even though a basically similar dietary level existed throughout the region.

#### METHODOLOGY AND TECHNIQUES

*The Interview.* A short-term field program (3 months) plus a large-scale survey analysis necessitated an interview technique rather than participant observation. Field workers lived with the families of one sub-area (Lower Hills) and were thus able to observe food habits in these families. No consistent observation was made by those workers not directly concerned with the Hills area, however.

Interviews were initially developed by the use of an outline questionnaire covering relevant social and economic information within a subsistence context. These forms were modified after first trials. When interviewers became acquainted with their informants, these questionnaires were abandoned, save for reference, and both directed interviews and free-association techniques were substituted. Later in the study food-prestige, preference, and historical-change summary lists were prepared, in order to secure evaluative responses from informants. Such devices as the familiar paired-comparison technique were utilized.

These various questionnaires and tests were modified according to problems met in various subareas. Toward the close of the study, each of the field workers had achieved an orientation toward problems more or less unique for each of the areas. The accumulating field material, analyzed weekly, thus provided its own conceptual organization as the study proceeded. For example, the problem of culture contact was seen to be most cogent in the Upper Hills; food prestiges were stressed for the Bottoms.

During the course of the study various short-cuts for securing concise information were developed. Quantitative and other data, it was found for example, could be gathered quickly in the interview situation by naming a garden crop, then asking the informant to give planting times, yield, disposal, table preparation, medicinal value, etc. If significant attitudinal complexes were seen emerging, these could be followed immediately, or noted and introduced in another interview.<sup>10</sup>

#### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

*The Dietary Pattern.* Content of the diet in all subareas can be considered as basically similar. The three staples, potatoes, beans, and pork, were

<sup>10</sup> A compilation of these various field techniques and general methodology has been submitted to Director M. L. Wilson of the USDA, Extension Division and the Committee on Food Habits of the NRC.

common to all groups, and were culturally traditional in all. The German diet was founded on a similar triad of staples, but in this case it had been a European importation. Moreover the use and preparation of these three foods differed in the German and English groups. A somewhat similar control was at hand for the River and Bottoms, where a shantyboat river-dweller with varied cultural experiences also had the most unique diet for this general region. Again, the staples and content were traditional, but methods of preparation varied.

Some of the traditional and most frequently encountered foods for the region as a whole may be grouped here by meal-type:

*Breakfast:* Flour and/or meat-grease gravy  
 Fried eggs  
 Strips of fat pork, fried  
 Water or milk biscuits  
 Preserved fruit (jam or jelly)  
 Coffee (with cream or canned milk)

*Dinner:* Boiled or fried potatoes  
 Cooked dried beans  
 Cooked (with meat grease) green or lima beans  
 Boiled pork or fried fat pork  
 Sliced fresh tomatoes  
 Fresh lettuce, served "wilted" with vinegar  
 Macaroni with tomatoes  
 Pie or cake  
 Coffee (with cream or canned milk)

*Supper:* Food from dinner is usually allowed to stand in the dishes until supper time, when it is either warmed over or served cold. Occasionally fresh meat or potatoes may be fried, or fresh tomatoes sliced.

Children are usually given a glass of skimmed milk with each meal. In the more affluent families, the children may receive whole milk, but this was relatively infrequent. It can be seen from this brief list that the diet as a whole is over-plentiful in carbohydrates and fats; fresh leafy vegetables are little used, and when served are prepared in such a way as to destroy certain essential vitamin content. The excessive use of meat greases and fats, however, may introduce the fat-soluble vitamins.

Diet variation by economic level was at a minimum during the summer, when families on all levels and areas ate garden produce from home-tended plots. In the winter, however, differences seem to be pronounced, in that the families on the lower economic levels are forced to consume their own home-canned fruits, vegetables, and meat exclusively, while the higher income groups can buy fresh foods when needed. In the Bottoms the situation could be observed in the correlation between well-planted, well cared-for gardens with high yields, with the lower income families. Also



more attention was paid to canning supplies and techniques in these families.

In general, members of lower income levels in all subareas consumed less meat, eggs, and milk. Even if cattle and chickens were present on share-cropper or Farm Loan farms, it was necessary to sell the products to eke out bare living expenses. Families engaged in non-agricultural pursuits, such as fishing, probably had the least meat, eggs, milk, and fresh vegetable content of any diet, although the data relative to this situation are still incompletely analyzed.

To a certain extent it was necessary for families on the higher levels of the agricultural population to sell dairy and poultry products in order to secure enough cash for household and personal expenditures. In many cases, particularly in the Bottoms, much of this money was used for the purchase of relatively expensive luxury articles of food or clothing which carried high prestige values in the mobile status structure.

In summary, the dietary pattern of the whole region is basically uniform, with subareal variations in content and modes of preparation. A chronic shortage of certain "protective" foods, such as milk and fresh vegetables, seems to exist. Differences by economic level may appear seasonally, as a result of the reliance upon home gardens, and the greater supply of cash in the higher income groups.

The preceding remarks apply generally to the "Old American" families of the region, whose diets reflect a basic southern rural tradition. Within the German division of the Upper Hills area, however, a somewhat different dietary background was found. The "beans, potatoes and pork" staple triad was present, only in this case it reflected an Old Country tradition. Furthermore, the Germans raised better gardens and accomplished more home canning than the other groups; pork was less emphasized, though important, and beef was a relatively frequent part of the diet. Other items of the German diet that appear rarely or not at all elsewhere are: various kinds of soups, cottage cheese, rye bread, pickled vegetables, head-cheese, buttermilk, liverwurst, and others. The most strikingly unique article in their diet is blood-sausage or "blood-pudding," made from the blood of slaughtered hogs. This is a low prestige item and is generally spoken of with disgust by the Old American groups.

In general, the German diet was more consistent and homogeneous than the pattern for other Hills area families. This seems to reflect the greater stability and homogeneity of the German Hills culture.

*Modes of Change.* Preliminary analysis of the data has indicated that it will be convenient to discuss the topic of change in terms of variations from a "core" diet. Thus we might conceptualize (in addition to the core diet) the following: the "secondary core diet," consisting of the recent introduc-



tion of many store-purchased foods; and the "peripheral diet," comprising even more recent innovations stimulated by special economic conditions.

The core diet is equivalent to the potatoes-beans-pork basic diet, mentioned earlier, and the various modes of preparation of these foods. To the "core" context, however, must be added a number of other traditional items, like macaroni, tomatoes, biscuits, jams and jellies, turnip greens, etc. These foods also can be regarded as surviving elements of the older dietary pattern associated with the "pioneer" period of small, self-supporting farms. In this older period, which terminated about 1910, were included many foods which have since disappeared or become rare. Thus beef was a generally-utilized food in the Bottoms until the sale of beef cattle became profitable; it survives at present in the German area only. In other areas, where no beef cattle were raised, beef was purchased in the old days. It has disappeared in these areas, too.

The evidence favors the conclusion that this old pattern contained a more nutritive diet than the present: the use of unrefined flour, lean meats, home-raised eggs and milk, and a greater use of garden and wild greens are some of the more consistent interview reports.

With the disappearance of local corn and wheat flour mills, and the gradual introduction of the cash crop system in regard to both corn and cattle, a greater dependence upon purchased staples became evident. This might be called the secondary core diet. Pork (primarily fatty cuts) was also substituted for beef, since hogs were easier to raise and commanded a smaller market price. Corn bread has almost disappeared, since the corn mills are gone, and corn flour is relatively expensive. "Light bread," or ordinary white bread has supplanted the whole wheat varieties of the old pattern. Fruits are ordinarily purchased at present, whereas in the "old days" they were raised in local orchards and secured by bartering eggs or chickens, or other produce. A few "luxury" items have also become frequent enough to be considered as part of this secondary core diet, such as corn flakes and candy bars.

The changes discussed above may be related to the general economic and social shift called "urbanization." The transition to a cash crop economy in American agriculture was necessarily accompanied by greater dependence on local urban markets, and the self-supporting phase of farming life declined.

Foods in the "peripheral diet" can be classified in two divisions: (1) those introduced very recently, like potted meats, store cookies, sausage, and the like; (2) foods that are beyond the financial limits of the population, but which may be purchased whenever a little extra money can be found. Thus a farm laborer in the Bottoms cultivated a taste for oysters, and bought some in town whenever he could; canned goods are bought by all families if their own supply is depleted or if a particular "cravin" is developed. A

number of socio-economic processes have stimulated this type of change: WPA affected the use of canned meats and other sandwich-lunch preparations, since the men have to carry their noon meal. Itinerant laborers may eat in restaurants or on government river boats, and then introduce their newer tastes to the area when they return to become sharecroppers or farm workers.

It is perhaps obvious that many of the prestige foods lie in the area of this peripheral diet, since many of them represent expensive, hard-to-get items, associated with a higher economic level. This was at least the case in the Bottoms, Stringtown, and the Lower Hills.

In general, dependence on purchased foods is increasing throughout the area, particularly in subareas with urban contacts, like the Northeast Hills, the Lower Hills, and Stringtown. In the Bottoms the tenant farmers remain close to the self-support level, since they have chickens, pork, and milk from beef cattle. The sharecroppers and farm laborers, however, must buy these items if they wish them at all. Riverbank squatters without adequate gardens rely on stores to a very large degree. The single shanty-boat family had no garden, and bought nearly all of its food. An important differential in this pattern might be examined more closely: this is the tendency for tenant farmers to buy more store canned-goods, fruits, and breads, and less meat, canned milk, and the like; sharecroppers and farm laborers will emphasize the garden, and buy less canned goods and fruits, bake their own breads, but buy nearly all their meat and milk.

In the Northeast Hills we find an increasing dependence on the stores and a breakdown in home-production which reflect the fact that soil erosion has literally washed away the economic base of this group. Government money through Farm Loan and WPA have put these people midway between a "farming" and a "money" economy, as has the increasing source of income for the area from farm labor. Their food pattern reflects this condition: they are midway between living off the farm and buying all their food in town.

The German area displays changes which can be ascribed to all these various factors, plus others: specific urban contacts of an order more intense than in other areas, since many young townspeople have married and settled in the Hills; and a general process of social and biological Americanization, as a result of the gradual blending with the Old American groups. The Old Country foods and dishes, like blood-sausage, are used by the older people. These will pass away when the old people die, since the younger generations "have no time" for the detailed techniques required for their preparation. The taboo placed upon such dishes by the Old Americans has also operated toward their removal.

Perhaps to be included in the secondary core, but reserved here for special treatment since our analysis is at present incomplete, are the various high-

prestige foods used for ceremonial occasions. Potato, bean, and salmon salad, boiled ham, roast turkey and chicken, and others are made for church suppers, holidays, and during visits by the preacher, but never appear on the table on ordinary days. Some of these foods are expensive, but the majority are merely fancy preparations of staple items. Their infrequent use helps to preserve their prestige value.

These foods are to be distinguished from certain often-used items, like meat grease and fish, which in certain contexts acquire prestige weightings according to their value as indicators, for example, of farming as against fishing status.

Other sources of change in food habits have been investigated, but space does not permit full discussion. Schools, for example, were found to have little effect along dietary lines. A number of young people admitted they had received training in home economics and cooking, but the evidence showed they never followed the teaching. The only case showing such ideas remaining after marriage was that of a young woman who had worked in town as nursemaid for a wealthy family, which required her to prepare infants' food and help with the cooking—according to the scientific methods she had learned in school.

*Food and the Social Processes.* It was noted earlier in the paper that toward the close of the field study the accumulating data for each subarea had been seen to adhere in a particular configuration, which was given special study by the workers. We shall give below a very brief presentation of some of these alignments of field material. These data also represent a conceptualization of some of the more specific principles and mechanisms discussed under "Modes of Change," above.

1. *Status and Prestige in Relation to Foodways in the Bottoms.* In this subarea it was found that food in general had unusually low affect in regard to its consideration as something-to-eat. Few ideas or concepts of the nutritional side of eating were found; little homogeneity was present in the few that were found. Moreover, food and foodways were reduced to a reflex level—no provisions for the transmission of food ideas were present; the lack of female companionship and a female social organization reduced food to a non-communicable level. This general negative attitude (or rather, lack of any consistent attitude) was found in all socio-economic levels: shantyboat dwellers, riverbank squatters, farm laborers, WPAers, sharecroppers and tenant farmers.

Another type of interest in food soon became evident, however. Certain food items were mentioned in contexts of envy, desire to move upward in the hierarchy of social status, emulation of a superordinate level, and similar situations indicative of high or low prestige values. These attitudes could be related to the particular status system in the Bottoms: an emulation of and desire to achieve the tenant-farmer level by all families placed in an

economic and/or social subordination to this upper level. The single exception to this desire for mobility was the shantyboat-dweller: he insisted his diet was distinctive of his unique status as a riverman, and that it distinguished him from the agricultural population.

Thus riverbank squatters living by fishing speak proudly of their "farm food"; sharecroppers interested in reaching the tenant status assured the investigator that they ate just like the farmers; the marginal individuals in general apologize for their "poor" food and state that "some day we'll be eatin' like regular folks." One riverbank squatter declared that the "wealthy" farmers in the Hills were the finest people in the neighborhood, and that "they was fine fellers fer a human way of livin' and eatin'."

The general rule seems to be that if one can eat like the group he aspires towards, he has a right to identify with that group. One sharecropper midway between itinerant-labor and farm-tenancy felt that food was his most important link with the tenant group, and used it as a symbol of identification with that group.

The interesting reality of the situation is that qualitatively there are few or no dietary differences in these various status and economic levels—the variation is all in terms of quantity and seasonal supply. The sharecropper mentioned above had a meagre diet identical to that of a riverbank fisherman nearby, although he repeatedly emphasized how much better he ate than this latter family. The shantyboat-dweller's food differed from the farm diet only in a few relatively minor variations in methods of food-preparation.

It follows that certain foods will express this value of identification in different ways, having high or low prestige connotations. One of the most interesting of these is fish, and a brief analysis of its ramified meanings follows.

To the fisherman, fish represents a means to a living, and he concentrates on catching and selling all he can get. The fisherman proudly states, "Why we fishermen don't eat much fish. We eat less than most people. We have to sell all we can git." This reaction is especially acute if the fisherman is tied symbiotically to the owner or renter of a farm, but it was even displayed by the shantyboat-dweller. The essential fact here is that fish is a low prestige food, and this feeling is present even in the fishing group—regionally the most generally distrusted and despised group.

To the farm laborer or sharecropper, striving toward the tenant level, fish represents a low-class food, eaten only by "them river rats" and not fit for human consumption, in spite of the fact that the people do eat fish frequently.

On the tenant farming level these reactions are less conspicuous. Fish is not eaten because "the woman don't like to cook it," and because "somehow we jest never seem to git down to the river to buy none." Fish is dismissed

rather carelessly as an unimportant subject, and the investigator receives the impression that it is a vulgar food not usually eaten by "nice folks."

It is understandable why reactions to fish should involve so much rationalization and ambivalence—fish must be and is eaten (as a necessary food by the lower economic levels), in spite of the strong negative valuations applying to it.

A modest generalization may be postulated: Wherever reactions of various sorts to a specific food are especially widespread, and keep recurring, one may look for a conflict between its status value and the necessity or tradition of its inclusion in the diet.

Some specific foods and dishes assume stereotyped imagery as representing the general solidarity of the Bottoms versus the Outside. Thus, blood-pudding is a general symbol of revulsion and contempt for "them Germans in the Hills"; the eating of muskrats has come to symbolize the animal-like habits of Negroes; fish itself symbolizes the low status of "river rats," although in this case the food is actually eaten by those who use it opprobriously.<sup>11</sup>

*2. Culture Contact and Food Habits in the Hills.* In the general Hills area, the specific orientation of field problems centered around the differentials of culture change resultant from varying types of acculturation and culture-contact. Food habits were found to be involved in status, but this feature was relatively unimportant; whereas in the Bottoms any program for dietary modification must first consider the status system, in the Hills conditions of culture-contact must be manipulated.

In the Northeast Hills was found increasing dependence on store foods and a breakdown in home production, as a result of the impact of relief, WPA, Farm Loan, and the practice of "hiring out" as farm labor to Lower Hills farmers. The group as a whole may be considered as transitional between a cash and an agricultural economy.

In the Lower Hills dependence on stores was also becoming prominent, but in this case it was a result of aspirations toward urban middle class standards brought about by a consistent urbanization. These families have developed considerable contact with the Farm Bureau in town; greater mobility (through cars) and a desire for such urban conveniences as electric refrigerators have led to changes in food habits.

In the Upper Hills, culture-contact between the German families and the prosperous Old American groups has led to a process of acculturation in which the German food habits have gradually been modified in accordance with Old American standards. The "Old Country foods" are disappearing

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<sup>11</sup> The term "river rats" is never applied by Bottoms residents to fishermen or squatters within the local social nucleus—only to those living elsewhere on the riverbank. Thus riverbank fishermen in the Bottoms may use the term to describe the other fishermen living near a river town in the area!

under the pressure of outside taboos and the disappearance of knowledge in the younger generations. In addition to this type of change, urbanization has also been operative, both generally, as in the case of the Lower Hills, and specifically, in that the Germans have an unusually large number of close relatives living in town.

In the Bottoms, contact with outside cultures could be held relatively constant, since the personality-type of the area was typically that of an individual who had tried many jobs in other regions, before living in the Bottoms. Thus a general level of urbanization could be assumed, and the data indicate this was fairly uniform for all families. This situation manifestly differs from the Hills, where important variables in outside contact were evident.

*Negroes and Their Food.* The economic status of the Negroes differs substantially from that of the neighboring whites. Few Negroes own more than an acre of land, the largest holding in Shady Grove being 20 acres, and the largest in Black Bottoms being approximately 87 acres. For the bulk of the Negro population, landlessness is the primary condition of life.

The land in the possession of most of the Negroes is poor, scrubby soil, among the very poorest in the county, and does not have a large yield. Some families have one or two fruit trees, although some of the larger farmers in Black Bottoms occasionally have substantial orchards.

By comparison with that of the whites, the total gardening tends to be slight. The care of the growing plants is considerably more casual. This all leads to the inevitable suggestion that the Negroes, on the whole, are less dependent upon their gardens and more dependent upon the local stores. Here, as is clear in Stringtown, two distinct modal attitudes are found to exist. The older persons and the better farmers have as their goal a maximum of self-sufficiency for food. Younger farmers and those more directly dependent upon Government relief pay much less attention to their gardens and their ideal is to have sufficient money to buy all they need in the stores. Hence the garden is of minor importance, attitudes toward it more casual, and the yield far below their needs. In part this division of attitudes corresponds to substantial differences both in economic status and in the extent to which they have been subjected to urban influences.

In addition to the garden source of foods, the Negroes have recourse to various wild foods. The regularity with which they gather various types of berries makes these very similar to agricultural products in their reliability in the diet. Wild plants which are regularly collected in the appropriate seasons include grapes, polk, elderberry, wild mustard, strawberries, dewberries, blackberries, broom sage, berry briar, and various docks. In the Bottom country different types of nuts are gathered, including hickories and pecans, stored for future use and even occasionally sold. Dandelion is used for boiled greens, wine, and stock feed.



Most Negroes are very fond of hunting and, both in and out of season, this provides substantial additions to the meat larder. The most common wild game are squirrel, rabbit and quail. These appear regularly on the table during late summer and fall. Squirrel is sometimes canned and put up for the winter, but most persons feel that there is too little meat to warrant the expenditure of energy. To these fairly staple wild game must be added wild geese, wild duck, possum, coon, turtle, muskrat, frog, rats and mice. The eating of rats is looked down upon by Whites and even by many Negroes. It seems likely that rats were probably eaten more extensively in the past but that with the introduction of new food ideas their use decreased considerably. Apparently they represent a dire poverty food, the use of which many do not like to admit. On the other hand, the owner of the largest holding in Black Bottoms told us with great pride that he liked to eat rats, "especially the big ones," because he said they have lots of good meat on them. Defensively he added that "the crib squirrels" were cleaner than chickens.

Since the resources of the total Negro community are meagre, most of the deficit has to be made up in store purchases. It is clear from the records that although Negroes derive less from their gardens than Whites do, and although Negroes have smaller cash incomes than Whites, their store purchase is proportionately higher to total food income than is to be found among Whites. This is a significant difference between the two racial groups. Of course even within the Negro community there are differences in this regard. Corresponding to the division earlier indicated, that is, between farmers and those dependent on Government aid, we find that the latter group depends more largely on store purchase for its food. Among these, store purchases are made with relative frequency, sometimes as often as every two or three days, more often once a week. For the more conservative group, purchases are made at intervals of from two weeks to a month.

#### CONCLUSIONS

*Theoretical Summary.* From the meagre outline presented above, it can be seen that a number of significant approaches to the study of food habits have emerged from the study. Viewing the materials purely from the standpoint of the culture scientist, the relevance of food and foodways as indices to the social structure, social status, culture change, and economic status is apparent. The study of techniques and attitudes surrounding the production and consumption of food in any culture can lead to important analyses of the basic attitudinal sets and social processes at work in the cultural situation. The elaborate implementation of the concept of "urbanization" in this region was derived strictly from leads acquired during the study of food and the subsistence economy. This point may be particularly true for rural and the so-called "primitive" societies, where subsistence is a rela-



tively more important pursuit than in the larger urban communities. Rationalizations and ambivalences surrounding food in simpler societies are more commonly shifted to material possessions and personal behavior in urban culture.

If the data are viewed from the standpoint of applied social science, however, the problem of change is seen to be uppermost. For these purposes the production and consumption of food are regarded in terms of (1) frequencies, time and method of introduction, and (2) of the social processes affecting the use of a given food. Thus concrete leads can be developed for the constructive modification of food habits.

Attitudes and the social processes, however, are fully as important for practical purposes as the mechanisms and techniques. No remedial program could succeed without manipulating status situations, types of cultural interconnections, and conflicting and alternative value-systems. Thus both the theoretical and applied approaches deal with essentially similar materials.

*Recommendations.* Two types of programs for constructive change in food habits can be briefly sketched. (1) An over-all socio-economic plan could be made involving both direct and indirect approaches to problems of subsistence. This plan might be constructed in the form of a resettlement program or cooperative farming project, geared to eliminate the absentee-landlord system in the Bottoms, and permit a soil-revivification program in the Hills. The plan might be organized in terms of the entire region, or merely for one area. The essential feature of this type of plan in regard to food habits is the approach to the fundamental economic and social controls affecting food preferences and preparations. In the Bottoms, for example, cooperative resettlement might help to alleviate the exhausting individualistic striving and thereby divert diet from the rigid channels of prestige.

(2) The second type of remedial plan might be a more or less short-term campaign for dietary modification utilizing all available sources of contact with the people. NYA, for example, might intensify cooking projects, which could be integrated with school lunch programs and high school home economics instruction. The Surplus Commodities Corporation could introduce a program of systematic instruction in balanced choice among its distributed foods. Local merchants might cooperate in a promotional campaign to stimulate interest and sales in whole wheat products, lean meats, and other foods. Window displays in stores might be linked with cooking and dietary projects in the schools. Merchants with regular delivery services to the rural areas could be utilized as direct contacts for promotional devices. The local Farm Bureau might be utilized for extensional services in dietary instruction, adding to its present agricultural advisory function.

Many existing attitudes could be utilized as operating bases upon which to construct new food ideas. Thus the prevalent favorable attitude toward

patent medicines in the area could be easily manipulated to include vitamin preparations. These could be sold by local drug stores or travelling merchants, who would use techniques similar to those already in use by manufacturers of patent medicines, omitting, of course, the extravagant claims for cure.

These various techniques, in addition to many others of a similar nature, could be controlled as a unified experimental project. The personnel of such an undertaking should include social scientists, administrators, and advisors for promotional and advertising methods.

The direction and organization of such a program would necessarily be guided by the specific information upon food habits secured during the field study. Frequencies of food choices and preparations, methods and times of introductions, and the direction by which further introductions can take place would comprise the basic data. Manipulation of specific foods or food habits would then be aligned in accordance with the attitudes and social processes affecting their integration within the culture.

*Notice.* Sociologists who are conducting research on food habits or attitudes, or who would be willing to organize opinion-sampling squads or student research projects dealing with nutrition, rationing, etc., might be helpful by communicating with the Committee on Food Habits, National Research Council, 2101 Constitution Ave., Washington, D. C., Margaret Mead, Executive Secretary. Also, certain reports in this field may be available for distribution.