

## Abstract

### **Regional warfare: The Office of Strategic Services, the Cold War, and the changing conception of the region in American geographical thought**

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Kirk Stone, an Ensign at the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) (1942-45), and later a prominent geographer at the University of Wisconsin, said, "World War II was the best thing that has happened to geography since the birth of Strabo." While a characteristically hyperbolic statement, the Second World War, and the Cold War that followed on its heels, were formative, contributing in particular to changing disciplinary conceptions of the region within American geographical thought. In this sense, real regional wars on the outside came to shape academic wars about the region on the inside as the very idea of the region, a cornerstone concept of geography from its academic inception, was rethought. In particular, the hitherto dominant idiographic conception of the region as descriptive, typological, and encyclopaedic (the region as a repository of dead knowledge) by 1955 was increasingly nudged aside by a nomothetic one that was explanatory, theoretical, and instrumental (the region as a tool to achieve immediate practical ends). Such a change did not come as a bolt of lightning out of the blue, nor was it born of an internal rationalist re-reckoning, but was intimately connected, as this paper argues, to warfare and associated large-scale geopolitical conflicts found first in the Second World War and later the Cold War.