

SMALL TOWN AMERICA:
A Narrative History,
1620—the Present
 by Richard Lingeman
 Putnam's, 1980
 547 pp. \$15.95

"Shaping public sentiment and giving character to American culture," the small town, wrote sociologist Thorstein Veblen in 1923, is "perhaps the greatest" of U.S. institutions. Puritans' dreams of religious utopia materialized as the familiar New England hamlets with white churches, public greens, democratic town meetings, and names like Concord and Providence. On the Midwestern frontier, New Englanders quickly became secularized, as the urgencies of food, defense, and shelter in such backwaters as Chillicothe, Ohio, and Cairo, Ill., overshadowed the yearning for a community based on lofty ideals. Americans pushed farther west, and journalist Lingeman follows the birth (and, often, quick death) of boom towns, mining camps, and cow towns. Lingeman seeks out the similarities among all kinds of small settlements, analyzing in detail dozens of fictional and factual accounts—Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd's *Middletown*, Michael Lesy's *Wisconsin Death Trip*. He finds small towns at once protective and judgmental—kindly, tranquil hotbeds of gossip. Lingeman concludes that small-town folk lead lives of continual tension—ever striving for the "diversity necessary to individualism" and the homogeneity essential to community.

HENRY ADAMS
 by R. P. Blackmur
 Harcourt, 1980
 354 pp. \$19.95

Henry Adams (1838–1918), grandson of John Quincy Adams, great-grandson of John Adams, thought of himself as a rebellious child of the 17th and 18th centuries caught unprepared in the 20th. In these posthumous essays, noted literary critic Blackmur depicts Adams as an aesthete seeking to understand himself and his times, searching for unity and continuity in the symbols provided by art and history. Reacting against his Puritan heritage, Adams became fascinated with the medieval world. In the Middle Ages, he believed, a shared religious faith provided man with ideological unity, symbolized by the icons of the epoch's cathedrals. In contrast, Adams saw his own era swept up in the anar-