

**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-

chic energies of new science and technology, typified by industry's giant engines. Adams felt his attempts, in *Mont-Saint Michel and Chartres* (1913) and in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918), to discover a continuity between the 13th and the 20th centuries—to reconcile the images of the Virgin and the dynamo—had failed. "All he could prove," Adams wrote of himself, "was change." Yet, Blackmur insists that Adams was unsuccessful only in the sense "that we cannot consciously react to more than a minor fraction" of life. Adams's education was "pushed to the point of failure as contrasted with ordinary education which stops at the formula of success."

**CIVILITIES AND CIVIL RIGHTS: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom**  
by William H. Chafe  
Oxford, 1980  
436 pp. \$13.95

In February 1960, four black students sat down at a "for whites only" Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Within two months, the sit-in movement had spread to 54 cities in nine Southern states. Within a year, some 200 cities had engaged in at least some desegregation of public facilities in response to black-led demonstrations. By focusing on events in one city in the 1950s and '60s, Duke historian Chafe conveys an unromantic sense of the realities often lacking in broadbrush accounts of the Movement; he describes the failures of white paternalism and of uneven efforts by blacks. In 1954, Greensboro was the first Southern community to agree to comply with the Supreme Court's ruling to desegregate schools. Yet, Chafe argues, Greensboro's enlightened approach was shaped by white leaders who intended to alter "only minimally" the racial status quo. After each racial outburst, the old subtle patterns of prejudice re-emerged. Worse, adds Chafe, "North Carolina's image of progressivism acted as a camouflage, obscuring [to black activists and well-intentioned whites alike] the extent to which underlying social and economic realities remained reactionary." Only after riots in 1969 brought 600 National Guardsmen to Greensboro and threatened the town's prized reputation, did influential local white busi-