Regional Traditions and Social Patterns

The thesis of this book, **The Challenge of Diversity** (Harper and Row, New York, 1964. 352 pp., $6.50), by Richard E. Engler, Jr., is that the cultural values and social institutions of American society have evolved differently in particular local communities, and that the diversity itself contributes to freedom. Although there are unifying values, we cannot understand the United States as a whole unless we take account of the regional patterns that have emerged in response to different historical traditions, local environmental settings, and the culture and aspirations of the original and subsequent settlers. The diverse patterns indicate that the social process of Americanization is an ongoing and a continuing aspect of our democratic society.

The major chapters of the book present sociologically oriented historical sketches of eight American cities: New Bedford (40 pages), Charleston (42 pages), Sante Fe (27 pages), Houston (34 pages), Iowa City (18 pages), Boise (18 pages), Racine (30 pages), and Seattle (32 pages). Each chapter begins with the origin of the urban center and surrounding hinterland and traces its development to the contemporary period, with emphasis on intergroup and interpersonal relationships. The author concludes that heterogeneous population elements have achieved a sense of community as a consequence of adjustment to others in a continually advancing frontier, and that the variability in local styles has been a constant challenge and source of vitality in American life.

It is not that similar forms of democracy have been forged as a consequence of the confrontation of man and nature in frontier settings, in which cooperation was achieved by the necessity of directing human energies to the taming of the physical environment. It is rather that diverse migrant groups, with varying cultural traditions, have adjusted to one another in different social environments at different periods of history, and, in the process of social accommodation in an essentially urban frontier, these groups have established localized and regional variants of the national pattern.

On balance, the point is well taken, particularly when contrasted with alternate approaches to American culture. Our society has been viewed as a monolithic entity; as a stratification system segmented into two, three, six, or any number of social layers; as a field of conflict and accommodation between different ethnic and caste groups; as a hierarchy of occupational and professional groupings; as an amalgam of different ways of life pursued in urban, suburban, and rural settings; or more recently as a conglomeration of hypothetical mass men, alienated of course, and constantly searching for "identity."

These alternate approaches, taken together, illuminate one or another dimension of American life, but Engler's eight sketches serve to remind us that men reside in localities, and that new migrants to a region not only bring their own traditions but must also take account of the established pattern and ideology. If American communities were all more or less alike, and if the melting-pot hypothesis operated as thoroughly and as uniformly as was thought to be the case two or three decades ago, then we would not have to consider entities circumscribed by geographical boundaries. But locality does provide one context for communication and one stage for the enactment of human interaction.

Engler has written a good book that advances our understanding because of its emphasis on patterned regionalism and the comparison of eight different cities considered through time. The major weakness, however, is that the summary treatment of the city as a whole leads to a lack of sociological depth. Possibly I am asking too much, but I would have appreciated a more sensitive treatment of the various segments, strata, and neighborhoods within a city and a more complete description of how different subsegments of urban society experience their community and participate in its institutions. Engler gives us one picture of what each city is like, but he does not fully consider the multiple perceptions and images of the community held by those occupying differential positions in the urban social structure. In his account of contemporary Sante Fe, for example, Engler reports on interviews with a bank president, a social worker, a school superintendent, a minister, and a doctor, but I wonder how the city would appear to lower-class members of the Spanish-American segment.

In my opinion, the relative importance of a locality and its history for contemporary population segments remains an open empirical question. Certainly, the traditions and social patterns that have developed in a region may provide a model of behavior and a guide to action for those subgroups within the city who are committed to and involved in community life. But others, who do not share the myths, may be less affected by their surroundings. To what extent does the behavior and beliefs of a college professor in Houston differ from his counterpart in Seattle because of residence in different urban centers? How responsive are the urban poor in Charleston or New Bedford to the localities in which they find themselves? The key question, unanswered by Engler, is this: In what sense is the city a community?

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Rhythmic Functions

Biological Rhythms. Alain Reinberg and Jean Ghata. Translated from the French edition by D. J. Cameron. Walker, New York, 1964. xiv + 138 pp. Illus. $3.50.

This book is a translation of the second edition (1964) of *Rythmes et Cycles Biologiques*, first published in France in 1957. The 1964 editions contain new explanatory and introductory materials, in keeping with the fluid state of knowledge in the study of temporal biology.

The authors begin with a discussion of elementary rhythmical activity in living matter, and deal in turn with circadian rhythms in general, rhythms with longer periods (for example, sex-