Chapter Twelve: Regulating Social Change

Overview

Chapter Twelve explores the process and patterns of social change in Amish society by:

- Identifying the areas of social change in recent decades;
- Describing who manages the process of change and by what criteria;
- Identifying the cultural regulators that control the speed and impact of change;
- Clarifying the political context and factors that regulate cultural change;
- Providing an interactive model for understanding change;
- Identifying some post-modern challenges to traditional regulations;
- Summarize concessions made by the Amish and to the Amish in recent decades; and
- Suggesting possible solutions to the riddle of Amish survival and growth.

Key Points

- The Amish have experienced enormous change in recent decades. The stereotype that they are frozen in time is simply false!

- Consider the various domains of Amish life (farm, home, shop, school, church) and note which ones have experienced the most change, or the least. Which areas are most resistant to change, or least resistant?

- Compare the Amish response to television and cell phones. Television is under a firm taboo. Cell phones are strongly discouraged, but they are a temptation to many people. Explore how these two technological items reflect different realms of influence. Why have the Amish responded differently to them?
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• Explore the process of social change. How are new things adopted, or rejected. How deliberate and calculating is the Amish response to social change. Note the symbolic meaning of some items and how the label of “Worldly” is used to control the speed of change.

• The 15 cultural regulators (pages 303-305) suggest that social change is a dynamic process whose outcome is always uncertain. Identify the most influential regulators, and the least important ones.

• Social change can threaten to pull the settlement apart into smaller factions. Note the points of tension. Explore how the Amish have been able to keep their settlement (and fellowship) together despite rapid social change.

• Review the outcomes of the extended bargaining process between the Amish and the larger society. Note the four types of outcomes. Who has fared best? Worse?

• The culmination of the chapter identifies ten reasons that may help to solve the riddle of Amish survival and growth. Which of these are most influential, or least important? Which additional factors may help to solve the riddle?

Questions

1. A typical stereotype suggests that the Amish do not change. With the use of specific examples, demolish this stereotype.

2. Compare the process of social change in Amish society to the process of change in the larger society. Show how they are similar and different?

3. A bishop once said, “That it’s not a sin to have a car. It’s just a matter of where it might lead.” What did he mean and what does his statement say about Amish understandings of social change?

4. Describe how cell phones violate older cultural boundaries and understandings.
5. Identify and discuss the major issues that the Amish have conceded in recent decades.

6. Identify and discuss the major issues that the government has conceded to the Amish in recent years.

7. Describe what the Amish have not conceded and why?

8. Identify and discuss the five most important reasons for the growth and success of Amish society.

Statement

1. Support or Refute this statement: “Women are second-class citizens in Amish society because they do not have a formal role in making decisions about new technology.”

2. Support or Refute this statement: “Social change in Amish society is driven by economic factors, not by religious values.”

3. Support or Refute this statement: “The label “Worldly” is just used as an excuse to control social change.”

4. Support or Refute this statement: “The many compromises that the Amish have made with technology and other social practices are silly distinctions that show the irrational character of Amish life”.

5. Support or Refute this statement: “The Amish are more involved in civic engagement than other Americans.”

6. Support or Refute this statement: “Amish society is a cultural relic of the 19th century that rarely changes.”
Activities

1. Call one of the information centers listed in the resources in Part III. Ask to speak with a staff member about the Amish community in the area. What are the three biggest changes they have observed in the Amish community in recent years.

2. Consider how the Amish have changed in the 20th century. Identify the five biggest changes the Amish have experienced during the 20th century. Draft an essay that addresses the question, “Why the Amish change?”