
ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

total investment to 24 percent. The drop in construction of new houses and apartments would boost housing costs by 28 percent. But the reallocation of capital to better uses (e.g., new plant and equipment) would increase wages by 13 percent and the gross national product by 10 percent, while cutting interest rates from eight to seven percent. Because income from earnings is more equally distributed than income from property, according to Mills, "the move to a socially efficient capital allocation could also reduce income inequality."

While many tax breaks for housing were eliminated in the Tax Reform Act of 1986, most, including the mortgage interest deduction, remain. The fall in marginal tax rates due under tax reform, Mills concludes, will make housing deductions less attractive, thus increasing the "social return" of future housing investments.

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The Back Alley Myth

"Good News for the Fetus" by Ian Gentles, in *Policy Review* (Spring 1987), 214 Massachusetts Ave. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002.

Many Americans who favor abortion often make two related arguments: Women who become pregnant against their wishes, they say, will have an abortion whether it is legal or not; prohibiting women from having legal abortions will only drive them into the unsafe hands of back-alley butchers.

But Gentles, research director of the Human Life Research Institute in Toronto, Canada, believes that both of these assertions are untrue.

Abortions, says Gentles, became safe long before they became legal. The number of maternal deaths resulting from illegal abortions in the United States, Britain, and Canada, he argues, has never been high, and had been decreasing steadily since long before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the procedure constitutional, within limits, in 1973. In 1940, there were fewer than 350 deaths in the United States resulting from abortion; on the eve of the Court's decision, the figure stood between 20 and 25.

Why did abortion become safer? Gentles credits the discovery and increasing use of sulfonamides, penicillin, and other antibiotics that abortionists, most of whom were qualified physicians, employed. "The vast majority of [illegal] abortions," observes Gentles, "were conducted by doctors trying to make some extra money on the side. These doctors had access to the latest in medical technology and put it to use."

Since 1971, abortion has become increasingly common. Citing research conducted by Barbara Syska, Thomas Hilgers, and Dennis O'Hare, authors of a study published in 1981, Gentles maintains that the number of illegal U.S. abortions in 1967 was probably no more than 135,000. Even if that figure were doubled or tripled, it would still fall far short of the 1.5 million U.S. abortions that Planned Parenthood's research agency, the Alan Guttmacher Institute, estimates now take place every year.

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The rising number of legal abortions, says Gentles, suggests that a woman's willingness to terminate an unwanted pregnancy largely depends on how difficult it is for her to have an abortion.

"The vast majority of abortions today," says Gentles, "are sought out by unmarried teen-aged women and by married women who simply do not want an additional child . . . [and who] would prefer legal abortion to the embarrassment [or] inconvenience of having a baby. On the other hand, it is hard to believe that all, or even most, of them would go to the extent of having an illegal abortion."

The Still-Wild West

"Violent Death, Violent States, and American Youth" by Michael R. Greenberg, George W. Carey, and Frank J. Popper, in *The Public Interest* (Spring 1987), 10 East 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

Murder, robbery, and other violent crimes are common occurrences in the nation's largest population centers, such as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

But according to Greenberg, Carey, and Popper, all Rutgers University professors, young white people (counting Hispanics as whites, as the U.S. Census Bureau does) stand a greater chance of dying violent deaths on the streets of some rural towns in Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico than they do in dense urban areas.

Every year, thousands of young Americans, aged 15 to 24, die violent deaths—mostly from murder, suicide, and auto accidents.

Most of these fatalities take place where the majority of Americans live, in large towns and cities. But the authors found that six rural Western states (Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Wyoming and New Mexico) suffer from the highest number of youthful deaths per capita in the nation (excluding deaths among blacks, Orientals, native Americans, and other minorities). Death rates among young white people living in those states, the authors found, have, since 1939, stood some 20 percent above the national rate for young whites. And in the six most dangerous Western counties, the death rate among young white men even exceeds the rate for their black counterparts in Atlanta, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. Youths living in seven Eastern states (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York, Maryland, and Pennsylvania), the researchers found, are least likely to die violent deaths.

Why is the West so dangerous, at least for young people?

The authors blame various forms of social instability. Divorce rates in the six most violence-prone Western states, they point out, are two to three times higher than those in the Northeast, and the unemployment rate is one-third higher. Population migration is also more common in the West. About two-thirds of Northeasterners, but only two-fifths of Westerners, are still living in the states where they were born.

They also discovered the same relationship between instability and violence within the Western states. The rates of violent deaths in rural northwest New Mexico were 5.6 times higher than those around urban Utah County (Provo), Utah, where divorce and unemployment rates are