

SOCIETY

The Right to Choose

"Abortion, Parental Burdens, and the Right to Choose" by George Steven Swan, in *Case & Comment* (May-June 1977), Lawyers Cooperative Publishing Co., Aqueduct Building, Rochester, N.Y. 14603.

A July 1976 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Planned Parenthood of Central Missouri v. Danforth*), in effect, struck down the right of a husband to an "abortion veto" by ruling that, when parents disagree over an abortion decision, the mother has the final say. Should the husband (or unwed father), thus isolated from the abortion decision, have the right to choose whether to support an unwanted child—a 20-year burden costing \$125,000 in 1973 and much more today?

With its 1976 decision, writes Swan, a former assistant attorney general of Ohio, the Court has inadvertently backed itself into a corner. Combined with the right to abortion on demand (established in *Abortion Cases*, 1973) and the presumed duty of parental child support, the decision could create "excruciating logical dilemmas" by forcing child support on a helpless father.

The Court, says Swan, wishes to recognize three principles: a father's duty to support his child; abortion on demand (*Abortion Cases*); and a woman's exclusive right to choose whether to have an abortion (*Planned Parenthood*). But "the cold logic of causation" makes room only for abortion on demand coupled with a woman's exclusive right to choose, or abortion on demand coupled with a father's child-support duty. Attempts to square forced paternal support duty with a woman's exclusive right to choose, Swan argues, are "grotesque in the extreme."

Southern Blacks Are Catching Up

"Racial Stratification and Socioeconomic Change in the American North and South" by Dennis F. Hogan and David L. Featherman, in *American Journal of Sociology* (July 1977), 5801 Ellis Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

As a group, America's blacks have made significant economic and social progress. But these gains, contend Hogan and Featherman, researchers at the Universities of Chicago and Wisconsin, respectively, mask *regional* disparities that still exist among blacks.

Comparing data from 1962 and 1973 for black workers between the ages of 25 and 64, they find that "pronounced inequalities" in income exist not only between the black minority and the white majority, but also *within* the black minority itself.

Overall, the black population appears to have "moved in the

SOCIETY

direction of economic integration" with the white population. By 1973, the difference in amount of completed schooling between blacks and whites that could be attributed to "racial" causes had dropped to about half a year. "Positive" factors that traditionally correlate with "success" for white males—such as socioeconomic background, education, and father's occupation—now influence occupational patterns among growing numbers of black men. (Put another way, the process of "perverse egalitarianism"—in which opportunity for black males is based on the liabilities but not the assets of their backgrounds—is slowly being reversed.)

But behind general progress lies a regional lag. In 1962 and 1973, native Northerners typically led native Southerners in socioeconomic background, education, occupational status, and earnings. (In most "status" categories, black migrants from South to North tend to fall between Northern and Southern levels.) In 1973, the economic "return" on each additional year of schooling was twice as high in the North as in the South; Northerners also completed, on average, two more years of schooling than Southerners. In fact, Hogan and Featherman note that the range of educational inequality is now greater among blacks than among whites. Annual earnings have risen for all blacks, but Northerners still lead Southerners by \$3,000.

While the Southern lag may be attributed to the North's economic edge, the authors believe that North-South differences are steadily narrowing. (The current status of Southern blacks resembles that of Northern blacks a decade ago.) As the economies of North and South "converge," they speculate, so too will "regional variations" in social status between Northern and Southern blacks.

The Biology of Salt Taboos

"A Biocultural Approach to Salt Taboos: The Case of the Southeastern United States" by Thomas W. Neumann, in *Current Anthropology* (June 1977), University of Chicago, 1126 E. 59th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

Sodium from salt (sodium chloride) and from high-sodium foods is a basic requirement of the human diet. But sodium needs vary widely, especially during periods of exercise, emotional stress, menstruation, and pregnancy. Today, doctors can adjust a person's sodium intake to prevent dehydration or edema (swelling) during these periods. Neumann, a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota, believes that "salt taboos" performed an analogous function among Indian tribes of the Southeastern United States.

Neumann compares the biology of sodium needs with dietary customs among the Cherokee, Creek, Caddo, Chickasaw, and Choctaw tribes. During menstruation, pregnancy, and mourning, when the human body needs little sodium because of sodium and water retention, salt taboos provided the needed restriction. In Creek and