Although the consequences of the tax cuts of 1981 and the tax reforms of 1986 remain murky, some essentials seem clear. The 1986 legislation reduced the marginal tax rate for high-income taxpayers from 50 percent to 28 percent. To the surprise of all but supply-side economists, the reported pretax income of these wealthy folk rose rapidly. The top one-half percent of U.S. taxpayers, who received 7.7 percent of all adjusted gross income in 1985, got 9.2 percent in 1986, and 12.1 percent two years later.

Just what sort of change in behavior this reflected remains unclear. Are people working harder because they get to keep more of their pay, as ardent supply-siders would have it? Feldstein, a Harvard economist, says that, as yet at least, there is not much evidence for this proposition—except in the special case of married women. But Feldstein notes that people did clearly respond to the higher capital gains taxes in the 1986 legislation: reported capital gains fell by nearly 40 percent in real terms between 1988 and '92.

The reduced marginal tax rates do appear to have lessened avoidance of the personal income tax. Top earners took less of their pay in fringe benefits and other nontaxable forms, and more in cash. But Slemrod, of the University of Michigan, says that tax return data for 1984 and 1990 show that the biggest part of the increase in the real income of the affluent was the result merely of shifting income from forms subject to higher corporate income taxes to forms (e.g., Subchapter-S corporations) subject to personal income taxes.

The complexity of the economy may well preclude an unequivocal verdict on supply-side arguments, but one thing at least is clear: taxation has little-understood effects on the economy.

SOCIETY

The Small World of Academic History

"Who Killed History? An Academic Autopsy" by William Craig Rice, in *The Virginia Quarterly Review* (Autumn 1995), One West Range, Charlottesville, Va. 22903.

If America is becoming "a nation of historical illiterates," as independent historian David McCullough and others fear, then academic historians deserve much of the blame. So argues Rice, who teaches expository writing at Harvard University.

"Academic historians have followed the trajectory of professionalization so far," he maintains, "that, like poets in creative writing workshops, they now produce more writers than readers, a veritable literature without an audience." Very few of the roughly 2,000 books annually "noted" by the *American Historical Review*, the journal of the 18,000-member American Historical Association, are aimed at the general reader, Rice points out. The tomes tend to be "extraordinarily arcane," "politically trendy," or both (e.g., *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver during World War II*).

The books also tend to be poorly written, Rice observes. Academic writing's "flattened verbs, incessant abstractions, disregard for rhythm and sentence balance, expert-oriented asides, and occasional political tendentiousness all serve to drive away a general audience just as surely as they identify the author as one of the elect." Worst of all, he says, most academic historians have abandoned the narrative tradition that runs from Herodotus to Shelby Foote.

In the hundreds of college and university history departments across the land, Rice points out, "a talent for writing for a broad audience is considered secondary at best, a mark of intellectual deficiency at worst." Many academic historians sneer at writers such as David McCullough, William Manchester, and Barbara Tuchman as "nonprofessionals" and mere "popularizers."

The decline of history, Rice contends, is a result of "an unfree intellectual economy within academia, an economy which binds the feet of talented scholars even as it confers advanced degrees, lifelong employment, and subsidized publication." On politically sensitive subjects, the young academics "may be shackled by New Left notions of acceptable lines of inquiry." And in the "closed shop" of academic history, they "are cut off from 'nonprofessionals,' 'amateurs,'

and 'journalist-historians.' " It is time, Rice believes, to open up that shop, and to encourage academic historians "to write for the educated public, to become freely functioning intellectual citizens, [and] to be teachers in [an] expansive sense."

'Pro-Choicers' and the Fact of Life

"Our Bodies, Our Souls" by Naomi Wolf, in *The New Republic* (Oct. 16, 1995), 1220 19th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

In a recent *Atlantic Monthly* essay, George McKenna, a political scientist at City College of New York, urged that foes of abortion take "an unequivocally pro-life" position that is also "effectively pro-choice": namely, recognize the legal status of abortion and "grudgingly tolerate" it but at the same time seek to restrict and discourage it (see "The Periodical Observer," *WQ*, Autumn '95, pp. 115–16). Now, from the other side of the barricades, Wolf, a noted feminist writer, argues that abortion rights advocates should abandon their euphemistic rhetoric and admit, to themselves and others, that "the death of a fetus is a real death," and that "this country's high rate of abortion—which ends more than a quarter of all pregnancies—can only be rightly understood as what Dr. Henry Foster was brave enough to call it: 'a failure.' "

By clinging to the pretense that there is no life and no death involved in abortion, Wolf contends, the pro-choice movement forfeits the backing of "the millions of Americans who want to support abortion as a legal right but still need to condemn it as a moral iniquity." More important, she says, "choice" proponents "entangle our beliefs in a series of self-delusions, fibs, and evasions. And we risk becoming precisely what our critics charge us with being: callous, selfish, and casually destructive men and women who share a cheapened view of human life."

Making an analogy to war, Wolf writes that abortion should remain legal and is sometimes necessary. "Only if we uphold abortion rights within a matrix of individual conscience, atonement, and responsibility," she says, "can we both correct the logical and ethical absurdity in our position—and consolidate the support of the center."

Gotham's Anticrime Wave

"How to Run a Police Department" by George L. Kelling, in *City Journal* (Autumn 1995), Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017; "Giuliani: Start Spreading the News" by David Brooks, in *The Weekly Standard* (Nov. 13, 1995), 1150 17th St. N.W., Ste. 505, Washington, D.C. 20036-4617.

New York City's crime rate plummeted in 1994, with murder down an astonishing 32 percent and robbery down 22 percent. In the first nine months of 1995, the murder rate fell an additional 30 percent. "New York is now the safest city in America with a population over one million," declares Brooks, a senior editor at the *Weekly Standard*. The chief reason for this, he and Kelling, a criminologist at Northeastern University, contend, is the militant anticrime strategy adopted by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Police Commissioner William Bratton since they took office in early 1994.

Their approach draws on the "Broken Windows" thesis that Kelling and political scientist James Q. Wilson advanced more than a decade ago: that disorder and petty crimes, if ignored, make decent citizens fearful and put a neighborhood on the skids, and eventually lead to an upsurge in serious crime. Hence, writes Kelling, "the best way to prevent major crimes and urban decay is to target minor crimes—panhandling, youths taking over parks, prostitution, public drinking, and public urination."

This runs counter to the traditional view that serious crime is the only proper business of the police. But the Giuliani-Bratton strategy seems to be working (even if the two men have feuded over who deserves the credit). "The streets and parks are cleaner," Brooks notes. "Aggressive panhandling has been curtailed. The homeless now tend to spend their days sitting on park benches, whereas before they were likely to be found sleeping on the sidewalk. . . . New York [is