

"By the middle teens," Longman writes, "the financial condition of many major systems . . . had become desperate." After America entered World War I, in 1917, the nation's rail system was overwhelmed, with soaring volume and plummeting net profits. The government soon took over the system.

"Though railroads reverted back to private ownership after the war," Longman writes, "the pattern of meddlesome and inefficient rate-regulation continued for

another 60 years." Air freight and trucking bit deeply into the railroads' markets; service deteriorated. Finally, in 1980, "alarmed by a series of huge railroad bankruptcies in the Northeast and Midwest," Congress stripped the ICC of its power to set freight rates. "The dramatic resurgence of the [freight] rail industry since then," Longman concludes, "underscores just how costly the ICC regulation of this industry had been."

Screening Out Sex Bias

"Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of 'Blind' Auditions on Female Musicians" by Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse, in *Working Paper* 5903 (Jan. 1997), National Bureau of Economic Research, 1050 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Discrimination against women in hiring is often alleged, but hard to prove. Goldin and Rouse, economists at Harvard and Princeton universities, respectively, examine one case that offers an unusual opportunity to gauge the extent of sex bias: symphony orchestras.

Orchestras traditionally have been largely male bastions. Many conductors looked upon female musicians as less talented than men or too temperamental. "I just don't think that women should be in an orchestra," Zubin Mehta, conductor of the Los Angeles Symphony (1964-78) and of the New York Philharmonic (1978-90), once said. Women seldom got the chance even to apply. Orchestra positions paid well and turnover was low, and when new musicians were to be hired, most who were invited to audition were "the (male) students of a select group of teachers," the authors note. The "Big Five" orchestras (in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia) were at least 95 percent male until the mid-1960s.

Since then, however, most major orchestras have opened up their hiring practices.

One change is unique: using "screens," such as a room divider placed on the stage, to hide the sex of candidates from the judges. The result: the proportion of female members of the "Big Five" orchestras has dramatically increased, to 25 percent. The New York Philharmonic is 35 percent female. (Despite Mehta's previously expressed opinion, 45 percent of the new hires during his tenure there were women.)

Hiring has increased partly because the pool of female applicants is larger. But screening out bias, Goldin and Rouse conclude from an analysis of audition records of eight major symphony orchestras, made it 50 percent more likely that a woman would be advanced from some of the preliminary rounds of an audition, and also significantly improved her chances of being selected in the final round. Overall, their study of the personnel rosters of a larger number of orchestras shows that the use of "screens" was responsible for at least one-fourth of the increase in female musicians since 1970.

SOCIETY

Honk If You Love Your Car

"Cars and Their Enemies" by James Q. Wilson, in *Commentary* (July 1997), 165 E. 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

If there is one feature of American life that inspires near-universal revulsion in social critics, it is Americans' love affair with the car. The latest blast comes from Jane Holtz Kay, the architecture critic for the *Nation*. In

Asphalt Nation (1997), she takes a sledgehammer to the hated shiny object, shouting "sprawl . . . pollution . . . congestion . . . commuting." She wants mass transit, railroads, and more biking and walking. What Kay and