

1990, oil prices declined in the early 1990s. They jumped up in 1996 but retreated in 1997 and plummeted in 1998.”

- “Lower costs for imported goods because of a strong U.S. dollar. Besides their direct effect, lower import prices also cut component costs and increase competitive pressure on domestic producers.”

- A rising stock market has cut pension costs for employers providing defined benefit pension plans.

- Inflation in health care costs has been reduced because of changes in the industry resulting from increased competition and pressures from employers and government.

“Prices reflect total labor costs, not just wages,” Brinner notes. “Therefore, any surprise reduction in the cost of fringe benefits relative to base wages would also trim price inflation.”

Usually, “unemployment is the dominant

influence on inflation,” Brinner observes. In the late 1980s, however, a surge in inflation took place that, while frequently blamed on the drop in the unemployment rate to 5.3 percent, “was actually due to a confluence of adverse inflation shocks” from other sources, including rising prices for oil and other imported goods.

“Conversely,” Brinner says, “the moderate inflation of recent years is due to a confluence of beneficial shocks from all factors other than unemployment.” Were it not for the declining prices of imported goods and energy, and the slower growth in the cost of fringe benefits, the tight labor markets in 1997 and 1998, he says, would have added perhaps a full percentage point to the wholesale price index. In short, he concludes, the good fortune of recent years “[does] not herald a new economy, forever destined to enjoy high growth and low inflation.”

SOCIETY

The New Mating Game

“How We Mate” by Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, in *City Journal* (Summer 1999), Manhattan Inst., 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Laments about the decline of marriage and the traditional family have almost become a tradition themselves in recent years, but Whitehead, author of the influential 1993 *Atlantic Monthly* article, “Dan Quayle Was Right,” holds out little hope that the decline will be reversed. “A fundamental and probably permanent change in the way we mate” has taken place, she contends.

“Though the majority of Americans will marry at least once,” Whitehead reports, “the marriage rate among unmarried adults has nevertheless declined by a third between 1960 and 1995.” Cohabitation is now the rule rather than the exception. Two-thirds of the young adults born between 1963 and 1974, according to Whitehead, “began their partnered lives through cohabitation rather than marriage,” compared with only 16 percent of men and seven percent of women born between the mid-1930s and early 1940s. Seemingly vanished are many of the rituals of romantic courtship. “By the time they leave their

teens,” says Whitehead, “many single young women have experienced at least one round of [sexual] hookup-breakup, and they carry its emotional baggage” into their twenties, as each new relationship “starts out at a lower level of trust and commitment than the one before.”

While “living together” was pioneered by privileged college students during the 1960s and ’70s, today it is more common among 25- to 39-year-olds who lack a college degree. By the 1980s, 45 percent of female high school graduates were opting for cohabitation as a first union, compared with 24 percent of female college grads.

Among African Americans, cohabitating unions often begin earlier and are much less likely to lead to marriage than such unions among whites. Those black couples who do marry—as portrayed in such popular movies as *Waiting to Exhale* (1995)—have very high rates of divorce, and, says Whitehead, “those who stick it out have strikingly high rates of marital dissatisfaction.”

In the evolving new mating ritual, in Whitehead's view, "men and women can pursue their reproductive destinies with only minimal involvement with each other." At first, both sides seem to benefit: "men get sex without the ball and chain of commitment and marriage; women get a baby without the fuss and muss of a man around the house." Women's economic independence and the pill have encouraged women to accept this new deal. Today, 53 percent of teenage girls think it is "a worthwhile life-style" to have a baby without getting married. Among teenage boys, when asked their views on dealing with an unwed girl's pregnancy, 59 percent said that rather than marriage, adoption, or abortion, the best option was for her to have the baby and the father to help with support.

Such loose arrangements give men the

freedom to walk away at any time, leaving women to raise the children. Even women who opt for single motherhood, according to survey responses, often rethink their choice by the time their children reach the age of six, particularly those with sons. It is far easier for men to find the situation that suits them, and many opt for a pattern of serial monogamy, sometimes involving marriage or remarriage, but more often not. Except for a lucky few in the upper-middle class, women are more often left embittered and alone, struggling to work and raise children on their own. In the end, the new mating pattern, says Whitehead, "which began with the promise of enlarged happiness for all, generates a superabundance of discontent, pain, and misery, something that should be a matter of concern to a society as solicitous of adult psychological well-being as ours."

The Road to Grandmother's House

"The Making of the Domestic Occasion: The History of Thanksgiving in the United States" by Elizabeth Pleck, in *The Journal of Social History* (Summer 1999) Carnegie Mellon Univ., Pittsburgh, Pa. 15213.

On Thanksgiving Day 1880, dozens of drunken youths careened through the streets of Philadelphia, wearing makeshift masks and women's clothing, just as Thanksgiving "Fantastics" had been doing for generations. They were followed by eager groups of younger boys who donned rags and knocked at the doors of the well-to-do, demanding treats. Beginning with this drunken working-class carnival, Pleck, a professor of history at the University of Illinois, traces Thanksgiving's progression toward the sedate domestic occasion it is today.

Thanksgiving didn't become a peaceful familial feast by accident, Pleck argues. While it had bona fide historical origins—starting, of course, with the Pilgrims' 1621 meal with their Wampanoag neighbors, and later, the issuance of ad hoc proclamations of a national day of thanksgiving by Presidents Washington, Adams, and Madison—Pleck contends that the holiday was "invented and reinvented" over a period of almost two centuries by a series of politicians, social reformers, and ordinary citizens. Among them was Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of *Godey's Lady's Magazine*. Beginning in the 1840s, she con-

ducted a campaign to spread Thanksgiving, hoping that a unifying holiday would help avert a civil war. Partly in response to her efforts, President Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a legal holiday in 1863. Even so, it continued to be little celebrated outside New England.

That changed during the Industrial Revolution, when Thanksgiving was readily adopted by those who wished to restore the morality and simplicity of a previous age. It became a holiday of homecoming for the newly mobile younger generation, a time of reunion and renewal. Despite this gradual familialization, however, Thanksgiving would only become an exclusively domesticated occasion in the 1910s, says Pleck. Amid the labor strikes and general unrest of the period, unruliness of any sort came to seem threatening to the middle and upper classes. Public tolerance of the Fantastics' rowdy parades declined and the ritual disappeared.

As immigrants streamed into the United States, the holiday took another turn. Progressive social workers and teachers, anxious about the immigrant tide, portrayed