

"booming over grade crossings"; the hoboos "staring from empty boxcars"; the small-town depots that attracted small boys and their grandfathers. The train, mused one *Atlantic Monthly* writer, was "the poetry of the machine age." Not all was perfect, however. Despite guardrails, signs, whistles, and flashing lights, grade crossings meant death for thousands of pedestrians and passengers in horse-drawn buggies. Residents along the "metropolitan corridor" wandered the tracks dangerously confident of the trains' ability to meet their scheduled comings and goings. One child, explaining the accidental death of his friend, charged that the express was "running on the wrong track." For well over a half-century, writes Stilgoe, the train was the "herald of the future," as modern America outgrew its rural, small-town origins. But once unleashed, progress vanquished even the empire of the rails. Taking the form of the automobile, "the future" left the railroad behind.

Contemporary Affairs

DANGEROUS CURRENTS:
The State of Economics
 by Lester C. Thurow
 Random, 1983
 247 pp. \$16.95

Nearly everybody now concedes that our leading economic theories, from Keynesianism to monetarism, are unreliable. Economists and others concur that these "macroeconomic" systems (dealing with the relations between the big variables—inflation, unemployment, and growth) are flawed chiefly because they do not mesh with the bedrock "microeconomic" knowledge about how particular markets work. But long-held notions about the workings of the microeconomic world are just as faulty, insists Thurow, an MIT economist. The shibboleth of the supply-demand mechanism simply does not account for such intangibles as the effect of workers' motivation upon productivity. Yet econometricians proceed to construct abstruse mathematical models that exclude the human factor. Most economists also continue to base their theories on the outmoded behavioral assumption that people are "rational individual utility (income) maximizers." This

despite ample proof that people often seek some jobs that pay less well than others. In a long and devastating march through contemporary economics, Thurow repeatedly shows where his colleagues have gone astray. Needed, he insists, is a more sophisticated set of assumptions about how people respond to economic incentives and disincentives and how other factors affect human behavior in the marketplace. Thurow's book is free of jargon and mathematical formulae. Even so, nonspecialists will encounter some rough going in these *Dangerous Currents*.

**THE HEARTS OF MEN:
American Dreams and
the Flight from
Commitment**

by Barbara Ehrenreich
Doubleday, 1983
206 pp. \$13.95

What made so many middle-class American women of the 1960s quit the traditional "housewife" role that seemed so much a part of the 1950s scheme of things? Was it boredom, anger, or feminist arguments? Ehrenreich, a former New York Institute Fellow, argues that it was, ironically, men's growing discontent with the breadwinner role that induced women to kick over the traces. Among the many sources of male unrest was Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* philosophy (appearing first in 1953), which proclaimed that a man could be a real (and happier) man outside of marriage. Mainstream publications such as *Life*, *Look*, and *Reader's Digest* worried about the gray flannel rat race. Men were in danger of becoming robots, or at least victims of stress and heart disease. Though the mass media routinely censured the rebels—the beatniks and, later, the hippies—all the attention was itself a sign of fascination. Ehrenreich describes the growing chorus of doctors, sociologists, and psychologists who diagnosed the problem and offered a variety of remedies—alternative lifestyles and various pop-psychologies that put "looking after Number One" above all else. Middle-class women, abandoned (often without alimony or child support) by self-seeking husbands, began to heed the feminist message. Ehrenreich, deploring the hedonistic selfishness of the 1980s, calls for a return to strong, two-parent families and responsible fathers, but not to the rigid sex roles of the '50s.