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**FAMILIAR TERRITORY:**

**Observations on  
American Life**  
by Joseph Epstein  
Oxford, 1979  
204 pp. \$11.95

Like the 19th-century French traveler Tocqueville, Epstein is intrigued by what kind of people Americans are. Writing informal essays in the tradition of Addison and Steele and Montaigne, Epstein, who is editor of the *American Scholar*, is more inclined to be inquisitive about educational fads, television, and publishing than about foreign affairs or the economy. He rebels at Americans' fascination with psychology: "We have become connoisseurs of grievance—one nation problematical with anxiety and aggravation for all." He warily notes the popularity of the King Tut exhibit, the success of book clubs, and the celebrity status indiscriminately granted to almost anyone who writes, paints, or performs. Americans' "appetite for culture is palpably there," he remarks; "at issue is the quality of the diet it is being fed." Readers of this slim volume need not fret about the quality of the fare.

**ACCOUNTING FOR  
SLOWER ECONOMIC  
GROWTH: The United  
States in the 1970s**

by Edward F. Denison  
Brookings, 1979  
212 pp. \$16.95 cloth,  
\$7.95 paper

Since 1973, the U.S. economy has been plagued by "stagflation"—slow growth, chronic inflation, and a sharp decrease in productivity. (Ten of the nation's 11 leading industries have experienced sluggish growth, communications being the sole exception.) In this sober, densely written study, Denison, a Commerce Department economist, echoes neither those critics who blame lethargy within business nor those who blame burdensome demands on business by government and labor. Increased federal outlays (and higher taxes), he writes, have not had a noticeable adverse effect on growth and productivity. Federal and industry research-and-development expenditures have held constant, even taking inflation into account, since the mid-1960s. Total employment has risen; it is output per worker that is down. Government safety and health regulations, the high costs of needed environmental protection, and rising crime rates (with more money and manpower now funneled into security) contributed to the down-turn in productivity. Inflation and high energy prices have also had an impact. But inflation's ef-