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perspectives Another Sojourn Into Science: Next Generation II



BY PROF.
MCKINLEY BURT

In respect to that promised "Math-for-Youth" orientation segment, I've had to regroup and revamp my presentation.

I wanted to achieve a direct relevance to my last "Saturday Academy" science class demonstration for that quintessential instructor, Michael Grice.

The problem has been obtaining one of those very sophisticated and very expensive computer programs designed specifically for mathematical exposition - that is for a onetime application.

The reference is to a program that "speaks" the language: subscripts, superscripts, exponents, differentials, summations--all the related symbols, icons and Greek letters. I (and the cable company) are about a year away from my

sending a such a program to a remote location.

I may have a compact disk or NET address long before then, but in any case I am appending some useful citations at the end of this article.

In the interim it is essential that very early on certain basic concepts must be thoroughly understood if one is not to be found 'disposable' at every merger, layoff or belt tightening.

In the same mode as my demonstration for the mathematics class of Mr. Grace, I emphasize the study of "permutations" and "Combinations"; the basic logic of "how many ways may things (devices) be connected or arranged or distributed? - one at a time, or 'not at a time?'"

Understanding these formulas and paradigms is crucial to designing or relating to systems - people or machines (like computers).

In fact, comprehension of the several number systems and their bases (radix) require this. But only if you wish to move your expertise beyond that of sitting before a com-

puter screen getting carpal tunnel syndrome from days of repetitive data entry orchestrated by some easily learned (too easily) rules. Or by programmed reaction to certain visual 'icons' toward which you can point your mouse.

As I made these points before the youthful "Saturday Academy" class Mr. Grice would always have me reinforce the lesson - say, when I made the connection to the hamburger chain's highly-publicized substitution of 'icons' like the picture of a pop or 'Big Mac' for numbers on the cash register keys.

The point was made that there was not too much difference between that and the routine that management has implemented for tens of thousands of public sector employees, or at many banks, insurance companies and financial services.

By the carloads, the media depicts them leaving \$15 an hour jobs for \$6 ones. This is not to say, of course, that learning how computers work or that becoming facile with their use and applications is a waste of time.

To the contrary, it's time to get down to basics and to understand

what this medium really is all about and, even more importantly, where it is headed - and what demands should be placed on your child and/or his teachers.

I recall that in 1969 a Lake Oswego resident saw an Oregonian article describing my approach to teaching computer logic to small children. Very quickly I was called by the Montessori School there to come out and demonstrate.

I was engaged to design small "program boards" whereby 5 to 7 year olds could envision logic gates, decision trees, binary choices and the like: built around easily comprehensible routines like getting up in the morning, dressing, catching the school bus.

My most immediate suggestion is that even before getting one of the large, detailed books on computers or programming (or if you already have one), get the "Dictionary of Computer Words: An A to Z Guide to Today's Computers", Revised Edition, Houghton Mifflin Co., (1995 or later). This book is excellently designed, easily readable and has good illustrations.

To Be Equal Storm Warnings on Welfare Reform

BY HUGH B. PRICE
PRESIDENT
NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

The news across much of the nation's economic front has been splendid recently.

The stock market is soaring. Inflation is low. As is the overall unemployment rate. And most of the nation's cities are on solid fiscal footing, a remarkable turnaround from a decade ago.

I and other critics of the new law have always said that those receiving welfare assistance must themselves make a meaningful effort-by work-

ing for the government, a private company or nonprofit group, or taking job-training or educational courses-to get off the welfare rolls.

But should those in welfare programs have to work for less than the minimum wage or the area's prevailing wage for the work they do?

Should they not have the job-related health and safety protections other American workers enjoy? Should they not be eligible for overtime, promotion, the earned income

tax credit, unemployment insurance, Social Security?

Because welfare recipients can be paid below the minimum wage, should cities and state and private companies be allowed to use those in welfare programs to displace low-wage workers who weren't on welfare?

And just this week President Clinton, speaking at the National Governors' Association, declared that welfare recipients in state

workfare programs should be paid the equivalent of the minimum wage.

He also said that state officials should use the savings they gain from moving people off welfare for programs for the remaining welfare recipients, and not divert that money to other uses.

First, there is no indication yet that current welfare programs can quickly move a sizeable number of welfare recipients into jobs that pay a liveable wage.

That means that, with relatively few exceptions, workfare is likely to just add to the ranks of the working poor--those who work, but whose wages barely surpass the federal poverty-line standards.

That was one finding of a recent study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington-based think tank. It said that because "projected employment trends show that job growth in the near future will be concentrated in low-paying industries," most welfare families will find it more difficult to find work that can support a family.

This is not a prescription for successfully moving people off welfare. Instead, it's part of the accumulating evidence that a storm of huge dimensions is gathering force out in the country behind all the good economic news.

New Budget Deal Is Reagan Tax Rerun

George Santayana once wrote that "those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it." Unfortunately, they try to make the rest of us relive it, too.

In the early 1980s, Ronald Reagan and his "supply-side" tax cut allies conducted a major public policy experiment.

They claimed that they could lower taxes (especially on the rich), while simultaneously raising more revenues.

Rational people knew that was a ludicrous proposition, but the right had the political power at the time, so this experiment in greed went on.

It was a total flop. The rich and powerful received major tax breaks; the average American took

home a few extra dollars a month; and the poorest Americans found themselves worse off, especially after service cuts were factored in. The most irresponsible part of the whole experiment was the tripling of our public debt, a burden on our children and grandchildren which remains the real Reagan legacy.

A critical mass of GOP legislators believes they were sent to Capitol Hill to make life easier for the rich, and tougher for the poor.

So, they're back. The GOP tax cut of 1997 would once again benefit the rich, hurt the poor, and increase public deficits after 2002.

At a time of increasing wealth polarization, stagnant wages for a generation of working families,

and declining deficits stemming from the 1993 tax increase: that president Clinton and the Democrats forced on the wealthy, the conservatives are offering up relief from estate taxes, a decrease in the capital gains tax, and a child tax credit tilted away from the working poor.

What would be the effect of their new tax loopholes? According to Robert McIntyre and Michael Ettlinger of the Citizens for Tax Justice, in a recent Washington Post analysis,

"more than half the tax cuts in both the House and Senate plans are targeted toward the best-off taxpayers, the 5% of Americans who make more than \$113,000 a year."

McIntyre & Ettlinger continue:

"This shouldn't surprise anybody. After all, the congressional tax bills propose reducing the capital gains tax by as much as half (from an effective rate of 28% to as little as 14% under the House bill), lowering inheritance taxes on the largest 1.5% of estates, exempting a big chunk of investment income outright and providing a variety of new corporate tax loopholes.

"All these items disproportionately benefit the wealthy, while the bills' other provisions have been designed to give nothing at all to 40% of the taxpayers, those with the lowest incomes.

Even the highly touted \$500 child credit has been structured

so that almost half of all children, mostly in low- and moderate-income families, will be ineligible."

McIntyre & Ettlinger have constructed a table, which breaks down how the GOP tax breaks would go to different income groups in America.

The top 1% of all Americans, what Jesus might call "the most of these" - certainly the most powerful - would take home 33.8% of the tax breaks under the Senate GOP plan, and 38.0% under the House GOP plan.

The next 4% wealthiest Americans would take home 18.9% and 18.2%, respectively.

The next 15% of the rich would take home another 31.3% under the Senate GOP plan, and another 26.6% under the House GOP plan.

BY BERNICE POWELL JACKSON

Our grandmothers' old saying that when white folks get a cold, black folks get pneumonia took on new meaning with the release of a new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report on HIV/AIDS.

The report showed that we have entered a new era in the treatment and prevention of this disease, with the number of deaths dropping a dramatic 19% last year.

But while deaths among whites decreased 28%, they dropped only 10% for blacks and 16% for Hispanics. Thus, much of the progress seen in the treatment of AIDS has been experienced by white men.

Indeed, it is women, who account for 20% of the AIDS population, and who are seeing fewer benefits from the progress made against this dreaded disease.

Deaths of women decreased by just 7%, while deaths of men dropped 22%.

Most infected women are women of color and most are poor and uneducated. Once again, black women are in the category of the "least of these."

Women with HIV/AIDS, it seems, are less likely to be properly diagnosed.

The HIV Law Project in Manhattan had to bring suit in 1993 in order to get the CDC to expand its official list of AIDS-related illnesses to in-

Civil Rights Journal Sisters and AIDS

clude ailments that are particular to women and even now many doctors fail to recognize these conditions as signs of HIV infection. In addition, women have only been allowed to participate in AIDS clinical trials for four years and only account for 16% of the patients in such studies.

But even when properly diagnosed, women are less likely to be placed on the new antiviral therapy which is largely responsible for the dramatic decrease in AIDS-related deaths.

"Women, especially women of color, don't have the time or money or the energy to be surfing the Internet to know what is the new and improved latest treatment," said Dr. Janet Mitchell in a recent New York Times story, adding, "They tend overwhelmingly to be mothers. They don't have that leisure to make AIDS the only focus in their life."

The result is that AIDS is now the leading cause of death for African American women ages 25-44. Black women are almost 15 times more

likely to test positive for HIV than are white women.

Nationwide, AIDS cases are now increasing most rapidly among women, particularly women of color. With at least 40,000 new infections of HIV/AIDS occurring nationally each year, HIV/AIDS will threaten the black family's very survival in the 21st century.

Doctors are warning that as troubling as these statistics are, the gender/race gap will only increase over the next few years as the full impact

of the new drugs takes affect in the white male community. We must come to grips with the presence of HIV/AIDS in communities of color. We must demand that our communities receive medical and preventive services.

We must offer treatment and support to women of color who are living and dying with this disease. We must open our hearts and our doors to our children who are orphaned by this disease. Our sisters with HIV/AIDS cannot shoulder this burden alone. Nor should they.