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ISSN 0036-8075 15 JULY 1988 VOLUME 241 NUMBER 4863

	271	This Week in Science
Editorial	273	Economic Arteriosclerosis and Competitiveness
Letters	275	Psychoanalysis: E. L. WHITE Adrenal Medulla Grafts in Animals: W. J. FREED Federal Budget: T. B. LYNCH Crisis in Systematics: R. J. O'HARA, D. R. MADDISON, P. F. STEVENS Mesoamerica, Not the New World: K. V. FLANNERY
News & Comment	283	Politics of the Heart
	284	Japan Prodded on the Environment Biotechnology Investment Lags
	285	Perestroika and Détente Boost IIASA's Prospects
	286	Panel Completes Interviews in "Baltimore Case"
1	287	A Bleak Portrait of Soviet Science
		Becker to Retain NIH Research Post
	288	Debate Warming Up on Legal Migration Policy Effect of 1986 Law Still Unproven
Research News	291	A Lopsided Look at Evolution
	293	Eye Cancer Gene Linked to New Malignancies
	295	Molecular Photography with an X-ray Flash
	296	Soar: A Unified Theory of Cognition?
Articles	299	Economic Competitiveness U.S. Competitiveness: Beyond the Trade Deficit: G. N. HATSOPOULOS, P. R. KRUGMAN, L. H. SUMMERS
	308	Components of Competitiveness: L. R. KLEIN
	313	Technology and Competitiveness: A Key to the Economic Future of the United States: J. A. YOUNG
Research Articles	317	The RAD9 Gene Controls the Cell Cycle Response to DNA Damage in Saccharomyces cerevisiae: T. A. WEINERT AND L. H. HARTWELL
	323	Helical Repeat and Linking Number of Surface-Wrapped DNA: J. H. WHITE, N. R. COZZARELLI, W. R. BAUER
Reports	328	Estimate of Electromagnetic Quantities in Space from Ground Magnetic Records: Y. KAMIDE
	330	Diffusion of Small Solutes in Polymer-Containing Solutions: K. L. YAM, D. K. Anderson, R. E. Buxbaum
		SCIENCE is published weekly on Friday, except the last week in December, and with an extra issue in February by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005. Sec- ond-class postage (publication No. 484460) paid at Washington, DC, and at an additional entry. Now combined with The Scientific Monthly® Copyright © 1988 by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The title SCI- ENCE is a registered trademark of the AAAS. Domestic individual membership and subscription (51 issues): \$70. Do- mestic institutional subscription (51 issues): \$110. Foreign postage extra: Canada \$32, other (surface mail) \$32, air-sur- face via Amsterdam \$85. First class, airmail, school-year, and student rates on request. Single copies \$3.00 (\$3.50 by mail); back issues \$4.50 (\$5.00 by mail): Biotechnology issue; \$5.50 (\$6 by mail): classroom rates on request: Guide to Bio-

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COVER Does it matter whether the United States is competitive in the global marketplace? Several articles in this issue of Science focus on that question and how economic competitiveness affects not only individuals and government but also our industries, particularly high-technology industry. See page 299. [Cover design by John L. Heinly, Burke, VA 22015]

	332	Design of a Monomeric Arsinogallane and Chemical Conversion to Gallium Arsenide: E. K. Byrne, L. Parkanyi, K. H. THEOPOLD
	334	Congenital Poisoning by Polychlorinated Biphenyls and Their Contaminants in Taiwan: W. J. ROGAN, B. C. GLADEN, KL. HUNG, SL. KOONG, LY. SHIH, J. S. TAYLOR, YC. WU, D. YANG, N. B. RAGAN, CC. HSU
	336	Molecular Cloning of Odorant-Binding Protein: Member of a Ligand Carrier Family: J. PEVSNER, R. R. REED, P. G. FEINSTEIN, S. H. SNYDER
	339	GABA _A -Receptor Function in Hippocampal Cells Is Maintained by Phosphorylation Factors: A. STELZER, A. R. KAY, R. K. S. WONG
	342	Vasopressin mRNA in the Suprachiasmatic Nuclei: Daily Regulation of Polyadenylate Tail Length: B. G. ROBINSON, D. M. FRIM, W. J. SCHWARTZ, J. A. MAJZOUB
	344	Long Lives for Homozygous Trembler Mutant Mice Despite Virtual Absence of Peripheral Nerve Myelin: E. W. HENRY AND R. L. SIDMAN
	346	Naturally Occurring Auxin Transport Regulators: M. JACOBS AND P. H. RUBERY
	350	Negative Regulation by Glucocorticoids Through Interference with a cAMP Responsive Enhancer: I. E. AKERBLOM, E. P. SLATER, M. BEATO, J. D. BAXTER, P. L. MELLON
	353	Abnormalities in Structure and Expression of the Human Retinoblastoma Gene in SCLC: J. W. HARBOUR, SL. LAI, J. WHANG-PENG, A. F. GAZDAR, J. D. MINNA, F. J. KAYE
	357	Type-Restricted Neutralization of Molecular Clones of Human Immunodeficiency Virus: D. J. LOONEY, A. G. FISHER, S. D. PUTNEY, J. R. RUSCHE, R. R. REDFIELD, D. S. BURKE, R. C. GALLO, F. WONG-STAAL
	359	Acoustical Detection of High-Density Krill Demersal Layers in the Submarine Canyons off Georges Bank: C. H. GREENE, P. H. WIEBE, J. BURCZYNSKI, M. J. YOUNGBLUTH
Book Reviews	363	The International Atomic Energy Agency and World Nuclear Order, reviewed by B. SANDERS Charles Darwin's Notebooks, 1836–1844, W. MONTGOMERY The Heritage of Experimental Embryology, J. A. WITKOWSKI Mantle Xenoliths, J. W. SHERVAIS Books Received
Products & Materials	368	Flask Rinser Image Analysis System Nucleic Acid Isolation Densitometry Software Video Caliper Automated Peptide Synthesizer Literature

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TABLE OF CONTENTS 269

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Semiconductor synthesis

HE next generation of integrated circuits will include faster components made from advanced materials such as gallium arsenide. The standard procedure for preparing thin films of gallium arsenide has been cumbersome and depends on a highly toxic starting material, arsine. An alternative technique is now described by Byrne et al. by which a precursor arsinogallane is synthesized and then converted to gallium arsenide (page 332). A monomeric structure for the arsinogallane was established both in solution and in the solid state. Monomers apparently then combined into dimers and eventually formed macroscopic gallium arsenide particles, growing in size as a function of time. Studies of the chemistry of these reactions should assist in the design of useful precursors for improved semiconducting materials.

Legacy of oil disease

OME children in Taiwan have suffered lasting effects from exposure, in utero, to polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and dibenzofurans (PCDFs) (page 334). In 1979, their mothers had "oil disease"; they were poisoned by cooking oil contaminated with PCBs and the more toxic breakdown products PCDFs. Both are fat soluble and persist for years in tissues; they can cross the placenta and enter fetal tissues where they may also persist. Rogan et al. describe the physical and behavioral anomalies of the affected children who, along with their mothers and a control group, were evaluated in 1985. Even though the affected children did not directly ingest the toxins and even though many were conceived years after their mothers had been poisoned, they had a high incidence of problems. Many of the pathologic findings involved ectodermal tissue. The children weighed less and were shorter than unexposed children, and they achieved various developmental milestones later than expected. This is not the first report of PCB and PCDF poisoning, but it is the first documentation of the effects of these toxins on the offspring of exposed women.

Flavonoids and auxins

▼wo mysteries of plant biology may be closer to being solved: what regulates transport of the plant growth substance auxin and what do flavonoids, the ubiquitous phenolic compounds of plants, do? Auxins are not synthesized where they regulate growth and differentiation but have to be transported to target tissues. Jacobs and Rubery found that in zucchini, corn, and pea plants certain of the flavonoids-quercetin, apigenin, and kaempferol-could regulate auxin transport (page 346). The flavonoids, like some synthetic substances, bind to a receptor in the cell membrane called the NPA receptor; when this receptor is occupied, either by NPA or by a flavonoid, auxin efflux from cells is inhibited, causing auxins to accumulate within cells. A number of structural features that distinguish inhibitory flavonoids from those that do not inhibit auxin transport have been identified. The association of flavonoids with the inhibition of auxin transport may explain earlier observations in wounded or light-exposed plants: increased flavonoid synthesis and binding to local receptors could restrict auxin transport, perhaps concentrating auxins where they could be used for the repair of damaged portions of the plant.

Gene inactivation in lung cancer

MALL cell lung cancer (SCLC) is a malignancy that can develop in smokers. It appears that associated with the pathogenesis of SCLC is the inactivation of the retinoblastoma gene Rb, a gene that may normally be active in most cells (page 353). In cell lines and tumor cells of SCLC and "atypical" pulmonary carcinoid tumors, dysfunctions and structural changes have been found in Rb genes; in cells from other types of lung cancers and in normal lung tissues, Rb genes do not have

similar alterations. The Rb gene had previously been localized to chromosome region 13q14; 13q is one of three chromosomal regions known to be altered in SCLC, and this study confirms that the changes in the gene affect region 13q14. Retinoblastoma (a hereditary disease) and SCLC (not a hereditary disease) have never been associated clinically, although in both neuroendocrine differentiation occurs and the expression of N-myc may be deregulated. Harbour et al. speculate that cigarette-associated carcinogens in the lungs may induce mutations in Rb gene that result in its inactivation and SCLC.

Ocean krill

TEORGES Bank, located off the T northeastern North American coast, is one of the world's most productive fisheries. Its productivity may reflect the availability of a ready supply of krill (small crustaceans) in surrounding deep waters (page 359). The density of krill (measured in the water column with acoustic equipment aboard a research submersible) varied throughout the daily 24-hour cycle: during the day, there was a thick layer of krill in the bottom 50 meters of the water column; at night, a portion of the population migrated as much as 400 meters upward. The canyons along Georges Bank may effect the concentration of krill by funneling them during their downward migrations. Greene et al. propose that the abundant squid and bottom fish (cod, flounder, redfish, and others) on Georges Bank may feed not only on zooplankton and bottomdwelling organisms but also on the krill in adjacent deep waters. Local plankton and the productivity at the sea floor cannot account for the abundance of these marine animals, but the krill could make up the difference.

The bottom lines

The United States' eroding economic position is the subject of three articles on competitiveness (pages 299, 308, and 313; see also page 273).



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Economic Arteriosclerosis and Competitiveness

Why should I scrimp so that must plan more innovatively. Both say politicians must devise tax laws for the future, not just for the short run. Congress says voters want quick fixes, not Spartan self-discipline. Voters say, "Why should I scrimp so that my children can live off the land?"

The three articles on U.S. economic competitiveness in this issue provide signposts that might help the U.S. economy back onto a more stable pathway. The good news is that the patient is not in a terminal decline, and the malady has been identified.

Hatsopoulos, Krugman, and Summers clearly lay out the dimensions of the problem. The authors point out that over the long haul productivity growth is the main determinant of trends in living standards, and no amount of fiscal legerdemain can obscure a basic weakness. Real wages in this country have steadily decreased, and they will have to diminish further unless productivity and capital investment trends reverse. Capital spending is closely related to the cost of capital. Because the cost of capital is so high here, a U.S. firm that undertakes a project that lowers earnings by \$1 a day requires a payoff of 1.2 constant dollars a day in less than 3 years, whereas a Japanese firm could be willing to make the same sacrifice for the same increment 12 years in the future. It is thus inevitable that the Japanese firm can afford to take a longer view. The cost of capital is in turn related to the savings pattern in a country, and U.S. fiscal policy does not encourage savings, either in the private sector or in the government. A large part of savings in the private sector is tied up in residential real estate, which does nothing to reduce the trade deficit.

That there is no quick fix is illustrated by Klein, who points out that the devaluation of the dollar makes U.S. goods more competitive abroad, but that increases the difficulty of paying off the debt. The good news, as pointed out by Young, is that steps are being taken to improve productivity by improved interactions of manufacturers with the research community and by improved efficiency at the manufacturing level. Cooperation between scientists, engineers, and managers is a key step.

The pinch of the global economy has indeed resulted in the need for discipline at both labor and management levels. The question is whether such discipline can be applied at the political level. Hatsopoulos *et al.* point out that U.S. saving is as low as 2% of national income, in dramatic contrast to the average 13% saving rate of the other advanced countries. If our nation is to become genuinely competitive instead of depending on fiscal gimmicks and mutual recriminations, it will have to take the hard steps necessary to reduce the debt, readjust taxes, and opt for deferred gratification. Fortunately, there are devices that can set the economy on a better course, but they require significant changes in the tax incentives, with emphasis on long-term investments rather than short-term profits. There are tough political choices ahead, and the United States is currently in the middle of a presidential election campaign. That election could present a welcome opportunity if the candidates are asked to speak these economic issues realistically.

"Eat dessert first, life is uncertain." That T-shirt slogan expresses the fiscal policy of the United States at the moment. It is a prescription that can make the system fat, happy, and dangerously clogged with cholesterol. Economics has been called a dismal science, possibly because, like the second law of thermodynamics, it eventually confronts us with the fact that none of our easy ways out are viable. Nations faced with dilemmas like this have responded well, once a true crisis has developed. The intriguing question in this case is whether the arteries can be unclogged before or after the first major heart attack.

–Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.



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reason. Systematics is not simply the identification of specimens, it is the reconstruction of evolutionary history; and it should be supported not just because it has practical applications (which it does) but because it is a fundamental scientific discipline.

Systematics is important because all living things are the product of history, and we can understand little about the diversity of organisms without knowledge of their history the phylogenetic knowledge provided by systematics (1). One might just as well try to understand the current political conflicts in Central America or the Middle East without understanding the history of the people of those areas.

Oliver correctly deplores the placement of major systematics collections in "maintenance storage," and we further deplore the disposal of other collections (2) and the retreat of university biology departments into nonevolutionary disciplines. Many of the biological "laws" that such disciplines discover may be bounded by clade and place, and only systematic research—research on evolutionary history—can discover those bounds.

Other recent calls for the support of systematics (3) have also emphasized its practi-

cal and cataloging aspects. We agree strongly that systematics is insufficiently supported, but we fear that these arguments based exclusively on "usefulness" will backfire in the long run. Systematics will not attract the brightest students—the true innovators of theory and practice—if it is portrayed as an identification service. Systematics must command attention because of the intellectual challenge it represents, in and of itself, as the study of evolutionary history.

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- 4. We thank G. C. Mayer and E. E. Williams for their comments.

Mesoamerica, Not the New World

I was enjoying Roger Lewin's essay on agricultural origins (Research News, 20 May, p. 984) until I found myself misquoted. Lewin quotes me as seeing no evidence "anywhere in the New World" to suggest that population pressure was responsible for the beginnings of agriculture. What I said was that I saw no such evidence anywhere in *Mesoamerica* (a culture area stretching roughly from central Mexico to Honduras).

I would never have extended my comments to the whole New World, because I know that some areas, such as the Pacific Coast of Peru, had much higher population densities than Mexico. It is still too early to rule out population pressure in Peru.

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**Patent Pending.

1. Tabor, S. and Richardson, C.C., Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci., USA 84, No. 14, 4767-4771 (1987).





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SCIENCE, VOL. 241

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