OPINION

Live Free and Prosper

INSIDE *By Andy Kessler*

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I., Vt.) wants to confiscate, er, "tax" 50% of the stock of artificial-intelligence companies—the big-data ideas since Karl Marx picked up a pen. Meanwhile, his mind-meld mini-me, Millennial Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D., N.Y.), said in 2019 that an entire generation "came of age and never saw American prosperity," and then whined, "I have never seen that, or experienced it, really, in my adult life." Because silly? She must be distracted with only five years to go on her climate-measuring clock. "It is gonna end" prediction.

Meanwhile, in the real world, the free market is a prosperity dynamo. Ilia Mo, Ocasio-Cortes' tweeted Verve-102? Last month's trial results of Lilly's new obesity gene-editing therapy showed it can lower LDL, "bad cholesterol," by almost two-thirds. Could this be a heart-attack vaccine? It's certainly a sign of a prosperous society.

Speaking of sick-making, Columbia University researchers successfully demonstrated how to treat "cancer in human embryos" to replace specific genetic letters. Oh, there's the loveboat of moral implications on how this is used. But who wants genetic breeding of 7-foot-4 humans. But the ability to identify and eliminate debilitating diseases—for example, hereditary blindness—is nothing short of amazing.

Meanwhile, the march of the GLP-1 agonist wonder drugs continues. Ozempic and Wegovy are now in pill form for diabetes and weight loss. There's also Zepbound, for food, and Compbell's said that its snacks business in the July quarter was down 4% from last year. It would have been 6% if they hadn't raised prices.

Meanwhile, GLP-1s may also help stroke, kidney and fatty liver diseases as well as sleep apnea, and research is under way to treat substance abuse, psychiatric and even neurodegenerative disorders. Starting this month, a Penn Medicine analysis reported that women 45 to 80 "who took GLP-1 medications were about 30 percent less likely to develop breast cancer." Should we all be medicated? Probably. Now add last week's notes that a shingles vaccine may reduce dementia risk. Prosperity power.

As someone who used to work in tech, I'm astounded by the ability simply to talk to Alexa and Siri and Google, which then spits out pretty decent software. Palantir CEO Alex Karp said AI to lower early death rates from sepsis at Tampa General Hospital by over two-thirds. Every hospital should adopt this immediately, but wouldn't you know it, protests broke out in the U.K. during a deal between the National Health Service and Palantir over the company's ties to Israel. Even dumber was the introduction in March of the Algorithmic Fair Act, Silicon-Corter's AI Data Center Moratorium Act. Do they want you dead?

More prosperity: Active noise cancellation has gotten good enough to muffle airplane noise and it's almost there for human voices in offices. Maybe we have active sonic pension dumping, which the *Journal*'s Dan Neil has reviewed. Cameras read the

Socialists claim they haven't experienced American prosperity. But look around.

bumpy road and actively smooth the ride. As the old ads go, we can finally cut a diamond or circumcise a baby in the back seat of more than a Mercury Marquis.

Generation Z may be the first generation to own cars, thanks to Uber and self-driving vehicles, and will turn their garages into man caves or influence studios. Car unit sales in 2025 were still below pre-pandemic levels. Most city bus services none tell you when the next one will show up. Just travel, while still awful, may become more enjoyable for Alaska and Southeast roll out Starlink Wi-Fi.

We may be on the verge of no more online data breaches, hacking a dead behavior left furiously run (not widely enough) to by Russian hackers and harden important software already deployed, in a race with enemy AI.

AI bots, like them or not, are being perfected as personal AI coaches, encouragers, even therapists to counter their voice in your head, especially about climate calamities. Can we cure anxiety? Or does the idea of this make you even more anxious?

Cuba Libre! Freedom may soon arrive to the island nearly 70 years after that famous scene in "The Godfather Part II" and the Cuban New Year's Eve in Havana at the start of Fidel Castro's communism. Cuba finally beach vacations may return. We are exporting our prosperity. Comrades don't like it.

Progressives have a relative prosperity problem: envy. Yes, housing is expensive (see progressive policies). Billionaires and now a trillionaire are tanking stock targets even if they bring us the prosperity Ms. Ocasio-Cortez and Mr. Sanders are reluctant to see—or more likely politically benefit from. Remember, the future arrives via diffusion, it a different pace for each person. But it happens. Worrywarts miss it.

To enjoy prosperity, you have to participate in prosperity. Sadly, the progressive agenda runs from thought to teachers' unions. Students are indoctrinated to prosperity for college and life. Realtor.com noted recently that [redacted] adults under 35 lived with their parents last year—a higher rate than during the pandemic. Maybe the free market should run more of the rest of public schools. That's a prosperity-popping idea I can get behind.

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Little has changed since a leftist writer described the disaster on the island in 1970.

Chronicle of Cuba's Ruin Foretold

AMERICAS *By Mary Anastasia O'Grady*

In her memoir, "Dancing With Cuba," the Mexican-born writer Alma Guillermoprieto describes her intense privation on the Caribbean island a decade

after the 1959 revolution. The basic creature comforts she had taken for granted in New York, where she lived before reporting to teach dance in Havana in 1970, were hard to come by after years of Soviet subsidies. Comrades were in charge. Meme the U.S.

Fifty-six years later most foreign aid to Cuba has dried up and cure packages from Floridians with Cuban roots are the last best hope for the island population. The dictatorship's excuse for the widespread misery it's the same as it's ever was: Washington's Cuba policy.

The facts tell a different story. True, the U.S. intervention in Venezuela, which cut off Cuba's access to oil welfare earlier this year, has been a gut punch. But Cuban blackouts and brownouts date back decades. Even when fuel was readily available, a decrepit electrical grid created frequent power outages and daily life was consumed by the search for necessities.

Havana's treasury is empty, in part because of the elite's corrupt military conglomerate Gaesa undercutting hard currency that comes into the country. That includes remittances and payments for medical services. Shortages, long lines and human trafficking are rife. Medical personnel, from the government isn't allowed to audit those accounts. Last month Cuba's public auditor told its problem is financial and that government reforms designed to attract foreign capital.

Reader Cuba watchers cheered as if this hadn't been tried before. Fidel Castro's regime has been chasing investors since his 1959 triumph, always with a caveat. As the Communist Party rushed to note, the revolution in 1959 was fundamentate a deviation from the socialist project. Translation: We aren't leaving power and the government's promise is going to break our rice bowl.

The stunt Ms. Guillermoprieto encountered when she arrived in Cuba was predictable 15 years earlier. Fidel Castro had seized private property, instituted price controls, ended judicial review and imprisoned, executed or exiled those who opposed the communist capital.

The nullification of farms, hacienda and ranches triggered an immediate contraction of the food supply. By 1960 there was a meat shortage. Sugar production—Large Sugar-Carrillo and Andino Nordeste-León, authors of "Cuba: The Economic Legacy of Fidel Castro"—fell by 1963 to the lowest level in more than a decade. Per capita consumption of the cattle industry created such disruption that not even a meager ration of 0.75 pounds per week (about 2 pounds per year) could be met. Cuba produced 50 staple food products such as milk, butter, and cheese." The authors cite a lack of organization and inefficient production" on agricultural cooperatives called "People's Farms." The government couldn't "depend on collectivized production."

Ms. Guillermoprieto witnessed Castro's absurd efforts to reverse the decline in sugar production with a goal of a 10 million ton" harvest. Voluntary campaigns were launched among those forced into compulsory service. The plan failed and the harvest came in significantly short.

The harvest was supposed to be a symbol of revolutionary solidarity. But Cubans grumbled. "This is a country," a friend told Ms. Guillermoprieto, "where you spit a *fruta bomba* and you get a fine. You can say *dise millones* there's a plant 9 foot high in its pleasure for months and the cane you can't get your hands on— *pero fruta bomba* is not even an orange or a mango—not even papaya, coño!"

There was also corruption. One painful realization for Ms. Guillermoprieto was that in Castro's utopia some got a lot more equal than others. For example, the ruling regime enjoyed a privileged diet of fruits, vegetables and cheeses not available to the general public and her students met with tears, grease and gastritis.

By the mid-2000s the lack of investment in infrastructure was compounding the high cost of central planning. "In June 2005 the national electricity system (SEN) was working at half capacity and blackouts lasted from 7 to 12 hours daily," the prominent economist Carmelo Mesa-Lago explained in a 2006 paper for the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy. "Instead of building new Cubans jerking off in the periods when electricity was available as 'light-ins.'"

Most of the thermoelectric plants were 25 to 35 years old. Mesa-Lago wrote, and sourcing parts was "extremely difficult." The plants used heavy oil with high sulfur content that requires frequent maintenance," and "many electric poles are rotten." Despite "1.9 million refrigerators" must be replaced, and electricity was estimated to waste 17-18% of electricity generated."

Twenty years later the system has collapsed and the country has been plunged into darkness. It's not that the regime hierarchy doesn't know what to do. It has gotten rich off this way of life, and it wants more of the same for its people.

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BOOKSHELF | By Adrian Woolfson

A Disease's Lifetime Enemy

Albert Sabin

By Karen Toepfoke
Yale, 416 pages, $38

In the summer of 1916, a major polio epidemic in the U.S. left almost 6,000 people dead and 20,000 permanently paralyzed. The outbreak began in New York City, and its severity prompted unprecedented moves by authorities to control transmission of the disease. On July 4, a New York Times headline proclaimed, "Ban All Children From Movies in Paralysis War."

Polio is a highly infectious viral disease. While many who contract it experience mild symptoms, for some it results in serious damage to the nerve cells that control muscles. Children are particularly vulnerable. Before the development of preventive vaccines, polio epidemics left many young patients unable to walk. Others required the use of crutches, wheelchairs and, in the most extreme cases, artificial breathing machines known as iron lungs.

Ignorant of what caused the disease and how it was spread, during the 1916 crisis New York City administrators killed thousands of stray dogs and cats and blasted sidewalks with water. Children leaving the city had to carry medical

certificates stating that they were symptom-free. Violent attacks were carried out by Italian New Yorkers against Italian immigrants, who were wrongly accused of being responsible for infection. Polio outbreaks continued throughout the 1920s—President Franklin D. Roosevelt contracted the disease in 1921 and suffered partial paralysis for the rest of his life. Parents became fearful of letting their children play outside.

The lasting remedy came with the development of two vaccines in the 1950s. In "Albert Sabin," Karen

Toepfoke, an epidemiologist and historian of science, offers a detailed history of Sabin's oral vaccine, which he developed at the Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center around the same time that Jonas Salk was developing an injectable vaccine at the University of Pittsburgh. Their research projects would lead to the elimination of polio from the U.S. by the early 1990s. In 2023 there were 12 documented cases of wild polio worldwide, and the disease is now on the verge of global eradication.

Today, Salk (1914-95) is the figure most remembered for the successful conquering of a polio scourge. In her compelling biography of the lesser-known Sabin (1906-93), Ms. Toepfoke draws on a range of sources to correct the balance. She introduces readers to a passionate, driven and irascible scientist through the story of his life's work.

He was born Abram Saperstein in Białystok—now in Poland, then part of Russia. When he was 12, he and his family fled antisemitic pogroms in their hometown and set out to join relatives in America—a risky journey that took nearly two years in total. Ms. Toepfoke recounts how, upon their arrival at Ellis Island in 1921, immigrants were examined for signs of disease. Following devastating polio breakouts and the influenza pandemic of 1918-20, anxiety over immigration had grown, and public-health officials had become increasingly cautious.

The family took the name Sabin and settled in Paterson, N.J., where Abram, now called Albert, became an accomplished high-school student. After reading "Microbe Hunters," Paul de Kruif's popular 1926 account of pioneers in microbiology, Sabin found his calling. He enrolled at the New York University school of medicine. Working evenings at the Harlem Hospital, he invented a method for channeling microbial organisms in patients with pneumonia, publishing his first paper at the age of 21.

Albert Sabin concluded that the global elimination of polio required an oral vaccine comprising weakened, live viruses.

As a young doctor, Sabin became familiar with the suffering of those afflicted by polio and the following years were resolved to focus his research on the disease. Working first at the Rockefeller Institute and, after 1939, in Cincinnati, he developed a new and unprecedented method. His polio research was interrupted by World War II, during which he worked on a vaccine for Japanese encephalitis. Remarkably, his polio project after the war, he concluded by the early 1950s that eradication would only be achieved if transmission could be prevented through halting viral replication in the patient's intestinal tract.

Meanwhile, Salk's injectable vaccine, which used formalin to inactivate the virus, was approved in 1955. Sabin believed that global eradication of polio required a more effective, long-spreading weakened, live polio viruses. His lab produced these "attenuated" strains, which he tested in monkeys and, subsequently, on himself and his children. He went on to test candidate polio vaccine in countries including Poland, Yugoslavia, Switzerland and the Belgian Congo.

But Salk's approach initially had the upper hand. In 1954 Life magazine described Salk as the man who had conquered polio. Unfortunately, his vaccine had advanced into the clinic prematurely. Some batches did not fully inactivate the virus, and in 1955 the mistake resulted in 51 deaths and 200 vaccine-related cases of polio paralysis.

Salk's new vaccine's popularity and undertook an unprecedented act of cooperation with Cold War-era Russia. In 1956 he began working with Mikhail Chumakov, a prominent Soviet virologist. The result was that more than 77 million Soviet citizens were vaccinated with the Sabin vaccine. As Sabin remarked in a 1959 interview with Pravda, "the live vaccine was born in the U.S., but baptized in the U.S.S.R."

Sabin's vaccine had several advantages over Salk's. It was cheaper and faster to manufacture, could be administered without medical training and—most important—prevented transmission. Sabin's vaccine was finally approved for use in the U.S. in 1961. But despite its effectiveness in eliminating polio, the live virus vaccine was found to cause polio in the ganglionic form, resulting in rare cases of vaccine-related polio—something that Sabin refused to acknowledge. While statistically insignificant at the population level, such cases were devastating for affected individuals.

The remarkable story of success and tragedy narrated by Ms. Toepfoke provides valuable insight into the power and complexity of modern medicine. As the rational foundations of clinical research continue to be challenged and undermined, her book reminds us of science's singular ability to address problems of civilizational importance.

Mr. Woolfson is the author of "On the Future of Species: Authoring Life by Means of Artificial Biological Intelligence."

AI Is a Boon to Ambitious Recent Grads

By Andrea Javor

College graduates recently booed commencement speakers—former Google CEO Eric Schmidt and Disney executive Gloria Caulfield and music mogul Scott Borchetta—who promoted artificial intelligence as a positive force.

Young people have big feelings about their new reality, and they are understanding. AI is disrupting the traditional way of doing things, but it is also creating opportunities for junior employees.

At 46, I'm at the beginning of my executive marketing career. I want, and am required, to use AI at work—yet I fear that my hard-won institutional knowledge is replicable by any entry-level employee who builds an agent to do the things it took me years to learn.

Early in my working years, I earned access to resources, relationships and insights gradually, so the people handing them over could vet me along the way. Major productivity aids were tied to seniority. The right to manage a budget, senior employees had institutional knowledge. My access to these boons was limited by how high I was positioned on the organizational chart. The gatekeeping was practical and cultural: I won the trust of my employers by proving myself.

The opportunities for entry-level employees are new and different.

That architecture is falling apart. Anyone can use AI to do the basics: summarize meetings, draft briefings and manage calendars. It is like having an assistant directly reporting to you on day one, not in decade two.

The opportunity to slingshot yourself onto the radar of upper management will be limited only by curiosity. My colleague's 23-year-old assistant fed a multimillion-dollar media plan into an agent she created on industry ad-spend benchmarks, seasonal trends, auctions, and past performance audits. It flagged a significant overspend that she caught a few months on the job, she never would have discovered, and saved the company more than her annual salary.

On another team, a 30-something junior employee built an AI agent that scans restaurant options in destination cities, cross-references them against a client's preferred wine varietals, and flags the best spots for a right travel budget. If he hasn't built this tool, I might not have known about him. Now he's on my radar—proof the balance of organizational power has shifted.

Despite these new opportunities, recent graduates are concerned that AI will jeopardize their career prospects. A recent poll found that nearly 9 in 10 members of the Class of 2026 worry AI will eliminate entry-level jobs. They underestimate AI's ability to elevate motivated workers at every level. Organizational success still relies on trust, hard work and human connection. AI won't change that, even if it's widening the access points.

Recent graduates can meet this moment by recognizing what AI is: direct access to every sort of resources that Google in 2002, email in 1985 and fire in 1902 all did. Early success with AI tools may favor the inexperienced and untrained. It requires minimal training, allowing newcomers to move at the speed of business.

Today, ambitious rookies aren't constrained by bureaucratic red tape or the strictures of office hierarchy. That is something I would have cheered for when I moved into my first cubicle at 22.

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