

Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

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SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION: Subscription prices for Volume 44 (1997) are \$286 list; \$229 institutional member; \$172 individual member. (The subscription price for members is included in the annual dues.) A late charge of 10% of the subscription price will be imposed upon orders received from nonmembers after January 1 of the subscription year. Add for postage: Surface delivery outside the United States and India—\$15; in India—\$36; expedited delivery to destinations in North America—\$35; elsewhere—\$70. Subscriptions and orders for AMS publications should be addressed to the American Mathematical Society, P.O. Box 5904, Boston, MA 02206-5904. All orders must be prepaid.

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[*Notices of the American Mathematical Society* is published monthly by the American Mathematical Society at 201 Charles Street, Providence, RI 02904-2213. Periodicals postage paid at Providence, RI and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address change notices to *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*, P.O. Box 6248, Providence, RI 02940-6248.] Publication here of the Society's street address, and the other information in brackets above, is a technical requirement of the U.S. Postal Service. All correspondence should be mailed to the Post Office box, not the street address. Tel: 401-455-4000. e-mail: ams@math.ams.org.

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ABOUT THE COVER

It is possible to maintain threefold symmetry for the projections of the graph of the complex squaring function into a family of planes, starting at the unit disc (at the lower left) and ending at the conjugate of its square. Lifting those mappings into three-space gives a very symmetric sequence of projections of the Riemann surface of the squaring function. This image sequence was produced at the Geometry Center by Thomas Banchoff from Brown University and Davide Cervone from Union College. For more information on this deformation, see the prototype of "Communications in Visual Mathematics" at the location <http://www.geom.umn.edu/locate/journal/>.

Boycott Cut-Rate Mathematics Instruction!

In one of those strange ways that ethical concerns occasionally leap to center stage in American popular culture, in the spring of 1996 the working conditions under which their garments were manufactured became a concern among purchasers of mass market clothing. Suddenly consumers were paying attention to whether the workers sewing the garments were third world child laborers or workers trapped in domestic sweatshops, along with their usual consumer concerns about whether the clothes fit, lasted, were stylish, and had a celebrity label. Indeed, it seems as though the celebrity label may have been the key factor, and it was the supermarket tabloid media which first exposed the problem to the public. Be that as it may, a perfectly good shirt produced by exploited workers came to be seen as not so good after all.

We have been struggling with the problem of exploiting workers in the mathematical world also. The AMS took a strong stand on one-year appointments. But this is hardly the only threat. Mathematicians have quipped that only technology has kept their administrations from having calculus taught by South American teenagers at subminimum wages. Hyperbole of course, but, nonetheless, a disturbing trend to "outsource" the teaching of entry-level core mathematics to adjuncts or underutilized faculty outside of mathematics, which was a notorious part of the now-modified Rochester Renaissance Plan, has been proposed and sometimes implemented in a number of institutions.

Mathematicians know that mathematics, including entry-level college mathematics, is best taught by mathematicians, where we define the latter as having experience in and ongoing commitment to mathematical scholarship. (And if the empirical studies demonstrating this do not exist, then we should conduct them immediately.) Regardless of background, adjuncts or faculty whose primary orientation is to another discipline will not have this experience and commitment to mathematics scholarship, and institutions that entrust their mathematics teaching to them are cheating their students.

Supermarket tabloids are unlikely to take up this story, and anyway the analogy is not complete: unlike the clothing issue, the mathematics courses taught by substitute faculty are defective products as well as being produced under improper working conditions. Nor should we realistically expect a consumer boycott, from either the cheated students or their subsequent employers.

Can we do anything except deplore these developments? For example, could graduate programs refuse to accept students who had not been taught mathematics by bona fide mathematicians? As unworkable as such a suggestion might be, perhaps it is time for the American Mathematical Society to consider some sort of collective action on accreditation or certification aimed at keeping inferior (outsourced) mathematics instruction off the market by embarrassing those institutions that try it. While we may never capture the public attention that Kathie Lee Gifford's Honduran sweatshops did, by exposing perpetrators, we may stop the trend. And mathematics will be the better for it.

—Andy Magid