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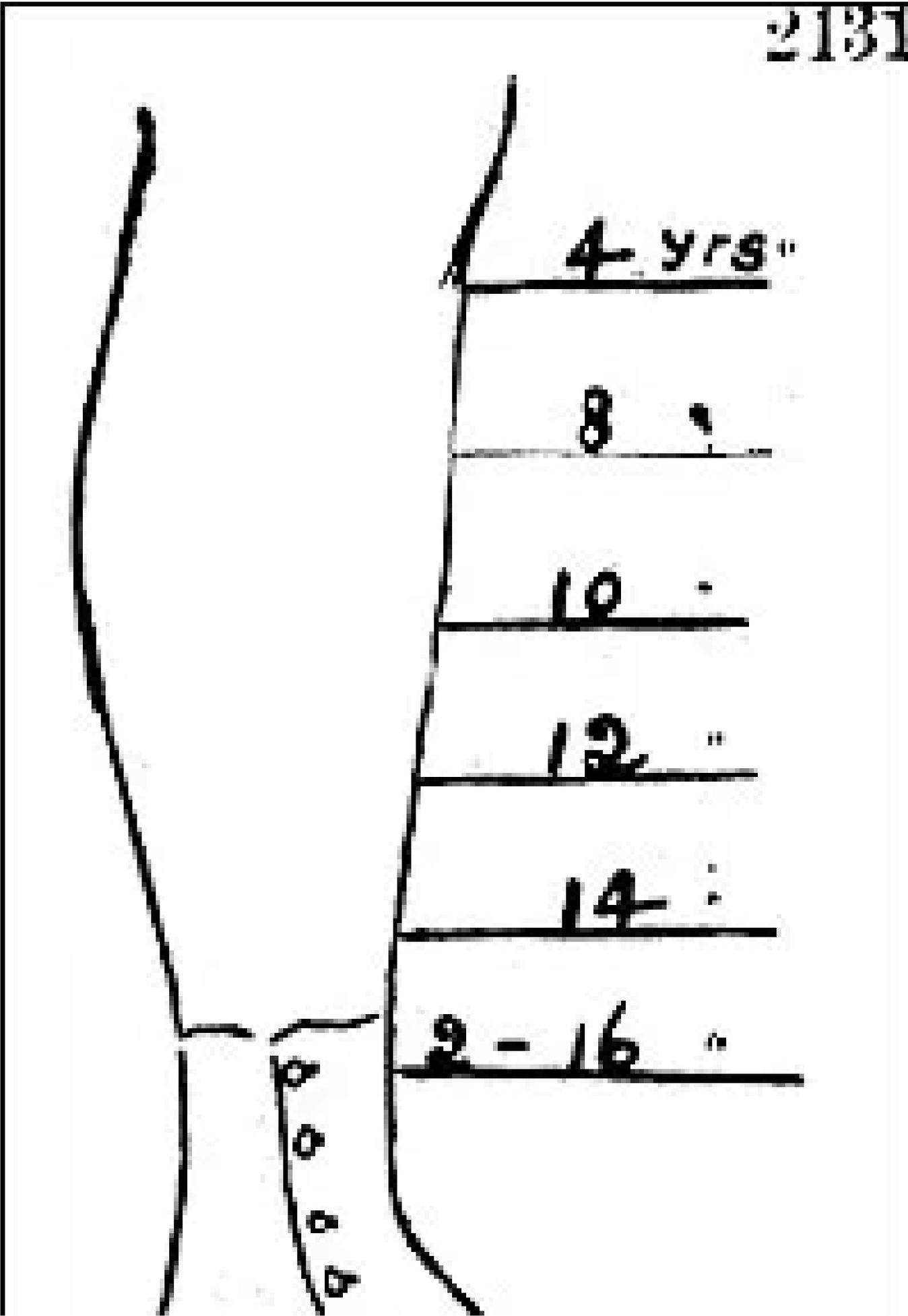
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The Hemline Index

OCTOBER 23, 2008 · 1:58 PM ET

By David Gura

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The proper length for little girls' skirts at various ages.

A diagram from *Harper's Bazar*, circa 1868.

Source: *digfndtns*

For decades, social scientists have referred to "the hemline index" when the economy has faltered. (The old theory correlates economic performance with the length of women's skirts. Bad economy? Long skirts.)

For a recent article reporter Tamar Lewin, of *The New York Times*, asked several experts if the hemline index has a modern-day equivalent.

"Data points litter the landscape as economists, sociologists, psychologists and marketers examine the societal changes, big and small, trivial and traumatic, that accompany a bad economy," Lewin discovered. But "it's one thing to measure changes in society, however, and another to ascribe causes."

According to Professor Terry F. Pettijohn II, whom Lewin interviewed, "In uncertain times, people tend to prefer songs that are longer, slower, with more meaningful themes." (It's time to break out the Simon & Garfunkel, folks.)

Other indicators abound. Lewin notes that, historically, "*Playboy* magazine's Playmate of the Year in bad times tended to have a more mature appearance -- that is, to be older, heavier, taller and less curvy -- than those selected when times were good." She points to a Nielsen report, which "listed tobacco, carbonated drinks and eggs as especially vulnerable to recession, and candy, beer and pasta sauce as recession-proof."

So, what is *your* hemline index? In other words, what in American popular culture tells you that the economy isn't doing so hot?

the new york times tamar levin



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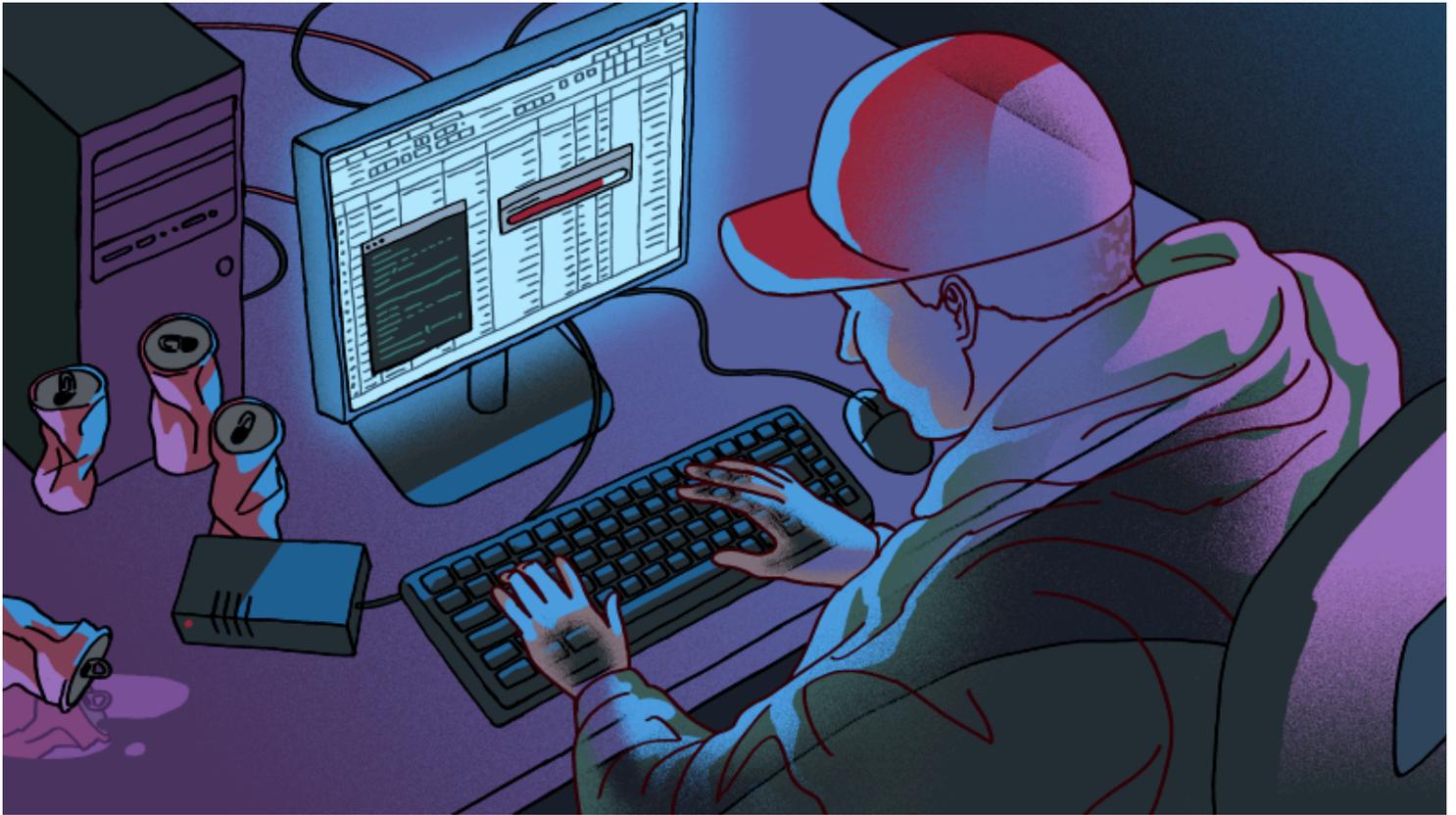
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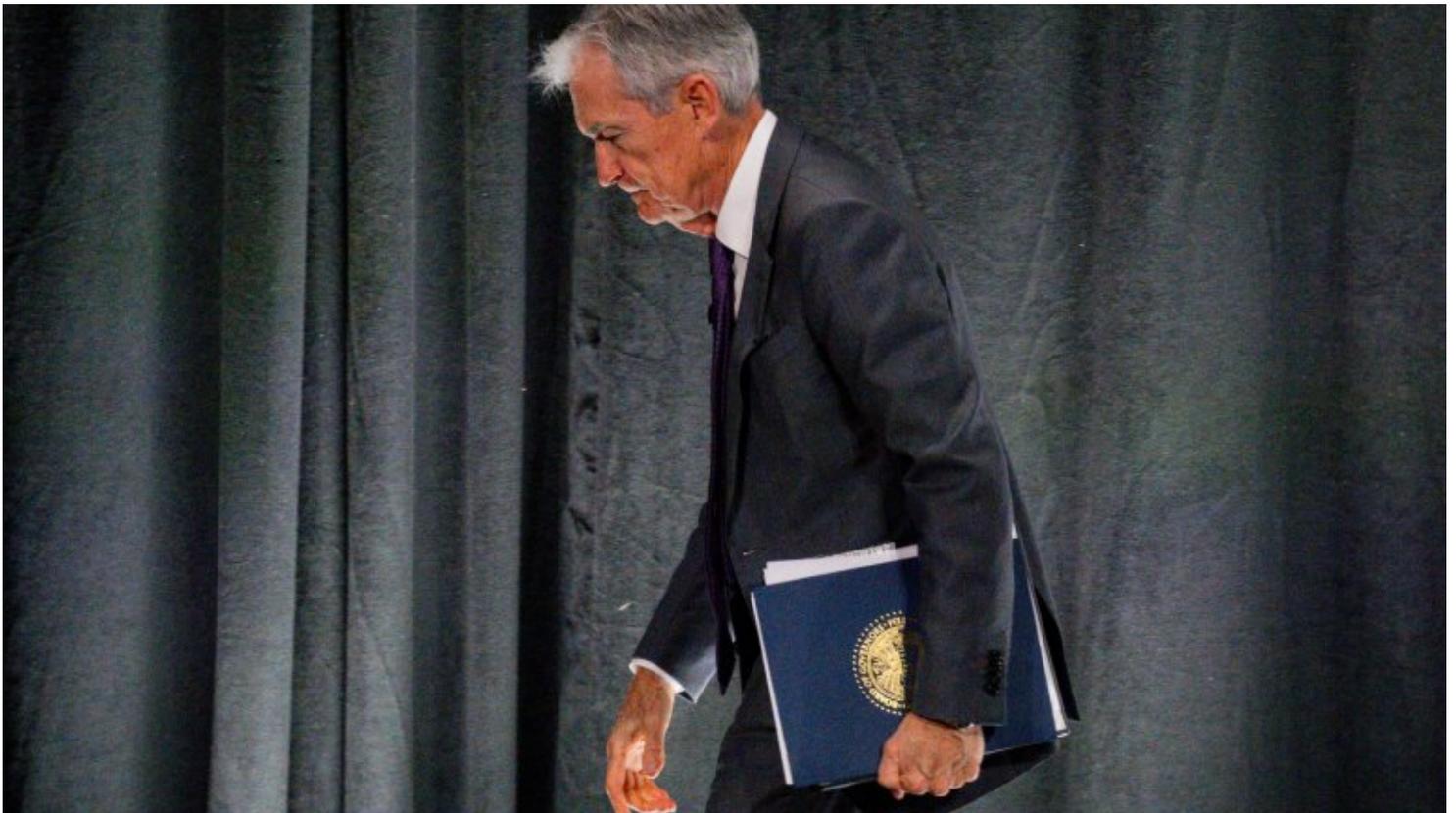


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