

# Henry George News

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THE EARTH IS THE BIRTHRIGHT OF ALL.

## In This Issue

Alumni Nights.....p. 2

Our New Director  
of Education.....p. 2

Torah Based Economics.....p. 3

Incentives & Economics.....p. 4

tax Cuts Anyone?.....p. 5

CGO Conference.....p. 7

Adopt a Book.....p. 8

## End of Semester Open House

This year, beginning with the Winter term, the School inaugurated a new tradition: the end of term Open House. More than just another party, this last semester's gathering was a chance for students to get acquainted, or in some cases reacquainted, with the various functions of the School and the services it provides.

Students got a chance to speak with instructors one-to-one, to view a video on the practical applications of Henry George's ideas (produced by School

Trustee Steve Cord) and were introduced to the archives and study resources that comprise our extensive library holdings.

Students also got a chance to meet amongst themselves and discuss and debate contemporary social issues.

A number of students brought refreshments, including many

homemade dishes, which were shared and enjoyed by all. And it was generally agreed that this was one new tradition that should by all means be continued.



HGS Instructor Bruce Oatman and School Trustee Si Winters discuss matters of import at the Winter term Open House.

## The Georgist Review of Books

*Owning the Future: Inside the Battles to Control the New Assets – Genes, Software, Databases, and Technological Know-how – That Make Up the Lifeblood of the New Economy* by Seth Shulman

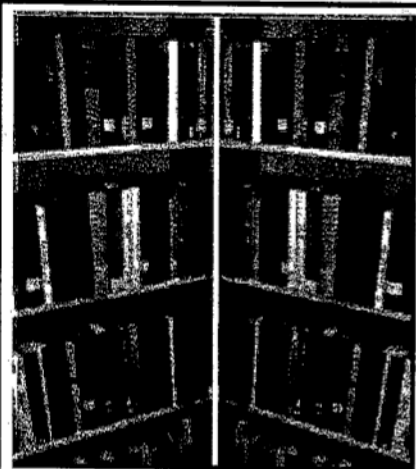
*Reviewed by Rick Hill, HGS Instructor*

If one of Henry George's main ideas was to distinguish between natural resources and the wealth derived from them as capital and to further distinguish between wages and interest from capital versus rent collected for the use of natural resources, then this book is a great update, a glimpse at the new privatization goldrush and an exploration of the ways land, wealth and capital keep getting redefined in the so-called new economy.

And if there were Georgist awards for bringing these issues into the public forum, Seth Shulman, award-winning veteran science journalist, and former Knight Science Fellow at MIT, should get one for his remarkable book, *Owning the Future*.

You can wade through a mountain of books, articles and web sites on these topics and not find a more comprehensive, sensitive and passionate treatment. This would be an ideal text for a Georgist course in the problem of ownership - it even has with some variations on George's land use "remedy" implicit throughout.

*Continued on p. 7*



### ADOPT A BOOK

in the Henry George School Library - p. 8

# Next CGO Conference

The 2001 North American Conference of the Council of Georgist Organizations will be held in Pittsburgh, PA, and will run from Wednesday, August 29 (evening) through Labor Day, September 3.

This year's conference theme will be *Land and Labor: America's Lost Legacy*. The events will focus on the relationship between land monopoly and:

- ◆ Local tax Policy
- ◆ The Erosion of Wages
- ◆ Distortions in Trade
- ◆ The Birth of the American Labor Movement



The "golden triangle,"  
Pittsburgh's business district

The conference will be held at the Pittsburgh Airport Holiday Inn. This year's local conference host will be Dan Sullivan.

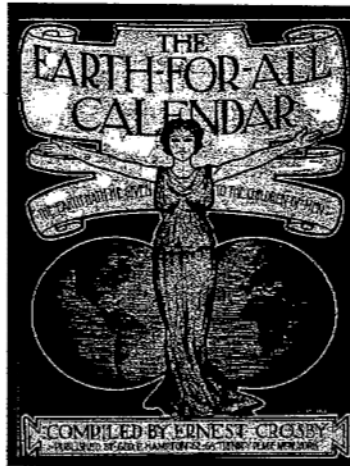
A full conference schedule is being prepared and will soon be made available.

For more information contact Sue Walton at [swalton@interaccess.com](mailto:swalton@interaccess.com). Sue advises that a number of discounted, limited time airfares are available through various airlines.

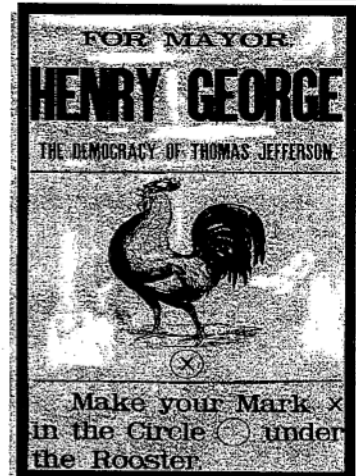
The annual conference is attended by Georgists from around the world and each conference focuses on a major theme. Last year's annual conference was held in Des Moines, Iowa, and focused on sustainable urban renewal.



## From the Archives



Advertisement from the National  
Single Taxer, 1900



Henry George Campaign Poster  
1886

Continued from p. 1

Harvard Professor Richard Lewontin has gone so far as to say of this book: "Shulman does a superb job of showing how knowledge is turned into property and how the drive to maintain property rights over knowledge has invaded and indeed taken over in both agriculture and health to the public detriment. [The public should] understand the way in which the drive to control property for private profit works against the general welfare."

And Tufts Professor of Urban and Environmental Policy Sheldon Krinsky calls it an "elegantly argued and well-researched book that shows how the appropriation and privatization of scientific knowledge and medical procedures has taken market mania to its absurd limits. The patent system has turned the limits of publicly funded science into great wealth for a few. *Owning the Future* is a sober expose of a U.S. patent system run amok."

Early in Chapter 1, *Gold Rush in the Idea Economy*, he asks: "Is owning rights to a concept really akin to owning a piece of real estate, as the phrase 'intellectual property' implies? Are there some types of know-how that

shouldn't be bought and sold?" He goes on to refer to "the fundamental fallacy of a system that lavishly rewards the incremental innovations of individuals but ignores our collective stake in society's accumulated wealth of know-how." In another chapter entitled *The Most Precious Asset*, Shulman asks, "What can be done to preserve some categories of knowledge — raw data, essential techniques, and cultural treasures — so that they can be shared by all of us rather than by a few for private gain?" He goes on to emphasize sanctuaries, zoning and antitrust solutions as curbs to the growing infrastructure monopolies.

Any Georgist knows that stolen goods bought at a high price are still stolen. Throughout this book, Shulman chronicles the new stolen goods of human genes, natural processes, and public information and how their commodification has led to a rich and legal "black market" in these stolen items. The analogy to the real estate market is hard to miss. All the corporation lawyers and entrepreneurs must surely realize their complicity in this theft unless they really believe the unqualified value of buzz words like

Continued on p. 8

## OWNING THE FUTURE

Inside the Battles to  
Control the New Assets —  
Genes, Software, Databases,  
and Technological Know-how —  
That Make Up the Lifeblood  
of the New Economy

Continued from p. 7

"private property" and "fair share of taxes".

For Shulman the key to this whole discussion lies in Franklin, Massachusetts, home of the first U.S. public library, thanks to the generosity of a Philadelphia printer named Ben Franklin who, grateful for the town's recognition, bestowed 116 books on four shelves in 1738 in lieu of their requested gratuity of a steeple bell counseling the locals that "sense is preferable to sound".

The library knocked around town in the homes of the intelligentsia for a while until the access issue was settled, after ten town meetings, when it was decided the little library would be accessible to all, unlike other existing libraries of the time. Thus were born the seeds of the nation's public library system and the related free and mandatory public education system.

The knowledge wars, says Shulman, threaten precisely this kind of public treasure and heritage.

My favorite quote is from shareware champion and McArthur Fellow programmer Richard Stallman, "The Supreme Court as ruled that no one can patent an algorithm or other law of nature, but skilled patent lawyers have been tricking the Patent Office into regularly doing precisely this in the software field." Then he refers to a patent won on Kirchoff's Law, an 1845 theory that electric current flowing into a junction equals the current flowing out, suggesting the Patent Office understands neither electricity nor software.

Yet nowhere in his book does Shulman mention Henry George. To see how George's ideas pertain to these controversies, he would need look no further than Book VIII, Chapter 3 of *Progress and Poverty* where George says: "Discovery can give no right of ownership, for whatever is discovered must have been already here to be discovered." The discovery of a law of nature, or a combination of genetic information, should give no one exclusive right to the use of that information. While some claim that a patent in such cases is warranted as an incentive to innovation and invention, George says in that same chapter: "Such a prohibition, though given for the purpose of discovery and invention, really in the long run operates as a check upon them."

# ADOPT A BOOK



Yes, I want to help  
the Henry George School Library  
buy more books for its collection.

Here is my contribution.

ADOPT ONE BOOK.....	\$5
TWO BOOKS.....	\$10
THREE BOOKS.....	\$15
SHELF OF BOOKS.....	\$30
STACK OF BOOKS.....	\$60

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