

Fantastic Island is the name of the settlement where model producers demonstrate the law of rent in the latest offering from Harry Pollard's successful *Interstudent* program, produced by the Los Angeles HGS. Designed for senior high school students, *Interstudent* is a series of interactive lessons in political economy.

Interstudent's Law of Rent lesson, "The Story of Fantastic Island," is impressive in its ability to make the tried-and-true "rent chart" model address a great many of the related issues and questions surrounding the laws of distribution: overpopulation, capital, housing, tax policy, and, of course, land speculation.

The model does the additional pedagogical duty of commenting on itself as a model, a tactic which slyly accomplishes dual objectives for the presenters: teaching students the concept of economic modeling, and enhancing the authors' theoretical credibility to outside evaluators. "Models, such as Fantastic Island, are not real," notes Pollard. "They are put together to demonstrate how causes and consequences are related. By defining standard conditions, it can make changes to a cause and its consequences [will be] clearly evident." To illustrate the usefulness of a model in economic diagnosis, Pollard uses this analogy:

"An automobile with one thing wrong can be easily diagnosed. It is either getting gas, or it is not....But, if its ignition is intermittently shorting, its fuel lines are partially blocked, its compression is at times leaky..., it may take a while to pin down." All true enough. What Pollard does not say here, however (but his model clearly shows) is that it is pointless to tinker with any of these lesser problems unless there is gas in the tank. Land speculation is siphoning out the fuel tank of the economy.

One innovation in the rent chart of Fantastic Island (perhaps inspired by the territorial reality of southern California) is that the model's seven grades of land include four that are quite fertile and three that are nearly useless. It is only the introduction of capital that makes this model's marginal land habitable.

Production >>>	8	7	6	5	0.5	0.4	0.3
Fantastic Island							
Rent >>>	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
SUBSISTENCE = 5							

The poor quality of the land in the last three blocks enables this model to illustrate "How Welfare Fails to Help the Poor". Subsistence in this model is established at 5 - but competition for jobs has forced workers to accept jobs for wages of only 4. "These are now the working poor - people who work fulltime, but cannot survive without outside help."



When land speculation is introduced, the formerly nice & neat chart turns abominably sloppy and chaotic. This is, after all, what land speculation does to the economy; it is a most effective low-budget visual.

Production >>>	80	70	60	50	5	4	3
Fantastic Island							
Rent >>>	75	65	55	45	10	0	0

Of course, with this bad a land-speculation problem, it is quite easy to see that Fantastic Island is neither overpopulated nor unable to provide employment!

Finally, in his "Notes," Pollard makes some rather persuasive observations about why the HGS materials seem at odds with conventional economic wisdom. Modern economics, he argues, is seldom concerned with fundamental problems, but with symptoms, whose treatment is "usually political, which means that every whim of political advocacy must be discussed....Statistical measurements, such as the Gross National Product, the Consumer Price Index or the Merchandise Trade Deficit, are not economic measurements. They are political, useful only to governments. They are of [only] passing interest to the producer...."

Kudos to HGS-LA for supplying California high school students with uncompromising Georgist study materials that, nevertheless, stand a chance of passing theoretical muster!

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