

# MY CAMPAIGN TO CHANGE THE WORLD (AND ALSO SELL SOME BOOKS)

By Scott Baker, New York, NY

I've been writing articles on major economic reforms since about a year after I started taking classes at the Henry George School of Social Sciences in New York City (<http://www.hgsss.org/>) in 2007. My purpose has been the same as for all my activist work subsequently – including becoming president of the local New York City metro chapter of the Georgist advocacy group Common Ground-USA (<http://commonground-usa.net/>), the New York Coordinator of the Public Banking Institute (<http://www.publicbankinginstitute.org/>), and even graduating the school and becoming a part-time instructor there – to educate and move people to advocate for the major macroeconomic changes that will Change the World for the better.

This article is not so much about the specific reforms, though the embedded radio recordings will provide plenty of background on those, but rather to talk about the process of using a book as a vehicle for positive social change.

Publicity experts say that writing a book is half the battle, but this really understates things if, like almost everyone, you are a relative unknown. While Bill Clinton could write almost anything, or have a ghostwriter write most of it (paid for by the publisher) and it would be an instant bestseller, most of us will write books destined for the remainder pile almost before we publish. Consider, Neilson Bookscan said that only 13% of traditionally published books sold more than a thousand copies (<http://bit.ly/1N0vFuG> - slide 14). But *this was in 2004*, and the rise of the Internet and print-on-demand since then have only diluted sales further. The definition of a bestseller is murky (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestseller>), with dependence on various bestseller lists, or online sales that can be gamed, at least for a short time if you can time simultaneous purchases and reviews with lots of colleagues near the book's debut (I've done this with my novel, *Neitherworld Book 1* (<http://amzn.to/1PRkiG0>) and *Book 2* (<http://amzn.to/1MZku0N>), but it's much harder now than it was in 2007).

It's also a fact that unless you are a well-known personality, even the large publishers will not spend much money, if any, in promoting your book. The smaller publishers will probably not spend any at all, and with the micro-publishers, defined as a publisher with fewer than 50 titles (at publication time) like Tayen Lane (<http://bit.ly/1yNhh43>), who published my book, you're really on your own, even for reviews.

As implied above, however, the way to think of a book, especially a non-fiction book like mine, *America is Not Broke!* (<http://amzn.to/1QyMmjg>), is as a way to position oneself as an expert in the field. This was explained to me by a V.P. from Smith Publicity at the Spring 2015 Book Expo (<http://bit.ly/1lzimqT>). I attended this event at the Jacob Javits Center in New York City with Rob Kall, the publisher of

Opednews.com, who also wrote the Foreword for *America is Not Broke!*

By mid-summer of 2015, I realized the book was never going to sell well, nor was I going to be able to promote the vital ideas in it, if I simply relied on my own efforts, and the past efforts of the publisher. I had sent out dozens of books on my own by then to bookstores and reviewers and although I did get some responses – one bookstore asked for the book and the Midwest Book Review wrote a nice review – I realized I would need help from professional publicists. I researched several publicists and then decided on Smith Publicity (<http://www.smithpublicity.com>) which is one of the most established and largest of the publicity firms (some of the others were little more than one-person shops). I was assigned a publicist, Sarah Gilbert, along with a team approach to marketing the book, and we began a series of weekly conference calls. Smith is not the cheapest of the lot, however, and depending on options, a 3-month campaign costs in the high 4-digit range. In addition to that, I had to pay to ship 75 books (hardcover, which I had bought at my author's discount) to Smith, and provide a \$500 postage fee for them to use to send out books. As of this writing, the campaign has wrapped up, and after a grace period of a couple of weeks for any late targets to respond, I expect to receive my remaining 20 or so books back, along with the balance of my postage fee.

Smith provides a long questionnaire about your book, you, your goals, etc. In practice, I'm not sure how, or if, they ever referred to this. It only came up once or twice briefly in our earliest calls. They also put you on their mailing list so you get periodic emailings about publicity and tips to position yourself.

The first couple of weeks were slow, involving mainly reach-outs to 23 mostly mainstream financial media outlets, and 13 professional reviewers, befitting the nature of my book. Sarah also followed up on some local media contacts I had made earlier in the summer. Like me, she received no response from them.

A bit about the book is in order here: The full title of the book is "*America is Not Broke! Four Multi-Trillion Dollar Paths to a Thriving America*." In the book, I discuss 4 unrelated but possibly synergistic approaches to dealing with the \$18.5 trillion national debt and ensuring a sustainable growth path for the country:

1. Sovereign Money, aka debt-free money
  2. Land Value Taxation, aka the Georgist single Tax on Land/Location.
  3. Public Banking, based mostly on the highly successful model of the Bank of North Dakota
- (continued on page 10)

## MY CAMPAIGN (from page 5)

4. Ending Government Financial Asset Hoarding, basically uncovering and possibly reallocating the trillions of dollars invested in over 200,000 government enterprise, agency, proprietary, and fiduciary accounts (e.g. by allocating a portion of the pension funds to a public bank).

The book is an updated anthology of articles I have written for Opednews and elsewhere from about 2010-2014, plus new introductions and extensive endnotes (456 of them). The title and main ideas came from a flier I and some of the activists in my Common Ground-NYC group had handed out in Zuccotti Park in the Fall of 2011, when Occupy Wall Street occupied it. When the publisher contacted me and asked me to create an anthology, I considered it for a few weeks and then threw myself into the project for several months. The book was published in March, 2015.

One of the first successes was a separate and new article I wrote for the Cleveland Daily Banner, a Tennessee newspaper with about a 20,000 circulation. During our weekly conference calls, Sarah and I would brainstorm ways to connect the broad themes in my book with current events. In this case, I wrote an editorial rebutting Rep. Vern Buchanan (<http://fxn.ws/ljbAOE8>) (R-FL16) who wrote in a Fox News opinion column dated June 27, 2015 (<http://fxn.ws/1YkUB3H>) that America needed a balanced budget. My article was entitled "America Urgently Needs an Unbalanced Budget" and although we couldn't get Fox to publish it, and it was never published online by the Cleveland Banner, I did receive a printed copy and then republished it in Opednews, with a related cartoon (<http://bit.ly/1Ojp5i1>). **Lesson learned:** You can't expect to be able to rebut establishment figures in the same media if you are less well known than them, even if you have a book.

One of my earliest scheduled radio interviews never called me (all radio interviews were conducted remotely on my landline phone), and when we couldn't get a reliable commitment from him we dropped him from consideration. **Lesson learned:** you can't trust even professional people to do what they say.

I also turned down an opportunity to do a 57-minute solo program on Alternative Radio. Although this would have provided me with a long format open forum, I thought both my lack of professional experience and the lack of a professional radio host to guide the conversation would produce a bad result. Sarah told me Ellen Brown of the Public Banking Institute had been approached previously and had turned it down as well (Brown now co-hosts the radio show "It's Our Money" with new PBI Chair Walt McRee). Now that I have 15 radio shows to my credit, I may reconsider this.

### On with the shows

One of the earliest programs was from September 16<sup>th</sup> on WJIM 1240-AM, LANSINGS' BIG TALKER, aka the Steve Gruber Show, from Michigan (<http://bit.ly/1MsA4Fd>.)

I should say that I wasn't trying to talk over Gruber, as it sounds like in the recording, I simply couldn't hear him given

the audio quality early on, plus the editing may make it sound like I was just talking without listening. Still, there is no denying my interview with Gruber, mainly about Public Banking, was combative at times, since he is distrustful of government and I believe, perhaps naively, that properly reformed, government can work for the People as it is supposed to. Although Gruber asked me to come back, he never extended an invitation and Sarah and I wondered if that was intentional. You can listen here, running from about 11:35 minutes – 16:09 minutes.

<http://www.podbean.com/media/player/ks7x-58c21e>

One has to keep one's cool on shows like this, even if the host disagrees with you. It is still an opportunity to get your point of view out there and possibly change some minds in the audience. If I had had more time, I would have explained how Sovereign Money would allow for us to have money without the debt he was so worried about.

Two days earlier, I had had another half hour interview on a progressive station, KBOO Community Radio with Chris Andrac, but this was never archived. This was much more comfortable, but without an archive, it probably reached fewer people.

I had a chance to explain how a Georgist Land Value Tax could help pay for New York City infrastructure by taxing those who stand to gain the most, the city's landowners, on New York City's WBAI radio show, Citywatch, on Saturday, 10:00AM, September 19<sup>th</sup>, with hosts Larry Schimmel, and Mark Dunlea. We also talked about Public Banks. This show was very locally focused on the Metropolitan Transit Authority and its ability to fund improvements. I had known this would be the topic ahead of time thanks to my discussions with Sarah, so I studied up on this topical issue.

However, I made a big gaff at the 55:50 mark when talking about the Land Value Tax we had under Gov. Al Smith from 1920-1932; I got it exactly reversed and said the tax was lifted on the land instead of the buildings! Everything else was right to the best of my knowledge, but...ouch that was a pretty basic gaff. **Lesson learned:** Think before you talk.

You can listen by going to the archive <http://www.wbai.org/archive.php> for that date and time and scrolling to the 45:05 – 54:15 mark, or paste the following link: [http://nuarchive.wbai.org/mp3/wbai\\_150919\\_100003citywatch.mp3](http://nuarchive.wbai.org/mp3/wbai_150919_100003citywatch.mp3) and go to the times indicated above (You have to copy and paste it into the URL space on your browser).

I was on James Low's show (<http://bit.ly/1QyNjYV>) for 10 minutes from Kansas, KJAG RADIO, September 30<sup>th</sup>. The show was entitled Interview the Economist Who Penned a Teachable House of Cards Plot Twist (<http://bit.ly/1Gle4IV>) playing off a debt-free money debt ceiling-defeating script suggestion I had made for the Netflix show "House of Cards." It's still a good idea! We talked seriously about Sovereign Money and the distortion of economic history. This was new to James Low and he asked me to return but due to technical difficulties we haven't been able to reschedule yet. (Cont'd on p. 11)

## MY CAMPAIGN (from page 10)

I had one of the best times with Jeff Santos on his show October 2, for about 20 minutes (there's a long commercial break in the middle). We talked about sovereign money, land value taxation, and Public Banking. It was good to have enough time to thoroughly explain these concepts with a host who was open to them. You can listen starting at the 28:30 mark here:

[https://w.soundcloud.com/player/?url=https%3A//api.soundcloud.com/tracks/228564289&auto\\_play=false&hide\\_related=false&show\\_comments=true&show\\_user=true&show\\_reposts=false&visual=true](https://w.soundcloud.com/player/?url=https%3A//api.soundcloud.com/tracks/228564289&auto_play=false&hide_related=false&show_comments=true&show_user=true&show_reposts=false&visual=true)</iframe>

One of my longer and in-depth interviews on Georgism and Henry George was with Kris Welsh on October 28, 2015. The archive will be here: <http://bit.ly/1NHsrIG> when it is posted.

One of the things I tried to do in my book is to tear down the falsely constructed Right vs. Left dichotomy, at least on economic and some general government emphasis issues. I had a 15-question quiz to challenge people's assumptions over what it means to be a Liberal vs. a Conservative. Out of 300 bloggers Sarah sent the article to, only one, California Blogger, posted it as a stand-alone article here: <http://bit.ly/1lz17WE>. If you take the quiz, I think it'll challenge your assumptions!

Has the world changed yet?

I did 15 radio shows over the course of the campaign, one of which came from the Public Banking Institute once they learned I was on a publicity radio "tour." Fourteen radio shows, 1 blog post and 1 newspaper byline came by way of Smith Publicity. Was it worth it? Well, there's no doubt I got on media I would not have gotten on had I pitched my book and myself on my own. But then again, I have gotten on TV/radio and made presentations on my own (<http://newthinking.blogspot.com/>). And Smith was unable to book me on any TV interviews though I've been on local cable access TV before.

An unusually serendipitous incident happened 2 days after the campaign ended where a reviewer found a copy of my book left on a plane and wrote a nice review for the San Jose Mercury News (<http://bayareane.ws/1j9ralj>)...maybe. My weekly report shows that Sarah sent that newspaper reviewer, Steve Butler, a copy of the book in September. In any case, it was a very nice review and I sent it to about 60 Twitter followers and people whom I am following. During the campaign, my Social Influence score as measured by Klout.com jumped from 48 to 52, out of a possible 100 (Obama has a 99, Robert Reich an 85). It's hard to tell what impact the campaign had on my recognition factors. In no single week of the campaign did my book ever sell more than in the high single digits, but this was still higher than before

the campaign.

The larger and more important question is what sort of impact on society did this have? Did it move the world a bit closer to implementing the reforms discussed? It's hard to say at this point, and not just because 1 or 2 more interview opportunities may trickle in over the next few weeks, as producers clear their backlog. (Sarah will forward those to me to follow up with as they come to her. She will retain the books and press releases for the rest of November to send out even after the campaign ended on November 17<sup>th</sup> in case she is contacted as well).

I've been an activist since 2009, and have promoted the 4 solutions in my book for at least the last 4 years. I've led two small activist groups, been interviewed dozens of times, made over a dozen presentations, been active on Social Media, and written over 200 articles. Does a Publicist help beyond all that? Probably. It's not enough alone, and it's not enough even if you have good ideas and are a relatively presentable speaker. I don't know if you need scads of money. Henry George didn't have that and he moved millions with his words and persuasive force alone. The Georgist movement has never achieved such momentum since. Some of the other movements like Public Banking and Monetary Reform seem to be slowly picking up momentum. Do we need a Charismatic Leader? Better watch what you wish for, you just might get it (<http://bit.ly/119SWzr>). Many of my colleagues are discouraged by the slow pace of change, or even retreat, yet we press on because There Is No Alternative (TINA).

Meanwhile, just remember, America is Not Broke! (<http://bit.ly/1LqTeHy>)



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