

Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies

Volume 4 Article 3

1-1-1986

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Recommended Citation

Feller, Eric D. (1986) "The Brookings Institution and Public Policy," *Sigma: Journal of Political and International Studies*: Vol. 4, Article 3.

Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/sigma/vol4/iss1/3

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THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION AND PUBLIC POLICY

Eric D. Feller*

Brookings in the Policy Network

At a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Brookings Institution in 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson said, "You are a national institution, so important to, at least, the executive branch--and I think the Congress and the country--that if you did not exist we would have to ask someone to create you." However, presidential praise of Brookings has not always been the case. For instance, during President Hoover's administration, some of Brookings' findings were attacked as radical. Yet regardless of its value in the eyes of presidents and others in Washington, Brookings remains a major influence in public policy formation.

Brookings describes itself as "a nonprofit organization devoted to research, education, and publication in economics, government, foreign policy, and the social sciences generally." Thus, it operates independently of government and all political, economic, and interest groups while maintaining the role of observer, analyst and critic.

The institution has been described as

a university without students, where learned men do research; a well-heeled

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publishing house because it produces about twenty-five books a year under its own imprint; a graduate school for federal officials because it conducts conferences and seminars on public problems for interested officials; a government in limbo because of the number of ex-high-echelon appointees in its ranks and its role in supplying and lending its people to government—and as the single most important outside economic consultant to federal fiscal policy makers.

spite of this impressive list In characteristics, Brookings is only one small subset of the larger network in which national policy is made. This policy network can be divided into three sections: government, business, and a "third force." This third force is a conglomeration of all the think universities, foundations, and other institutions that contribute to public policy. Since Brookings is only one of these think tanks, the question is raised regarding the actual extent of its influence.

This is the subject of President Kermit Gordon's review in Brookings' 1968-69 Biennial Specifically, he brings up two questions: "How do you know you are really contributing to better decision making in public affairs?" and "What specific decisions by the President, or the Congress, can you trace to the work of Brookings?" He claims that these questions are difficult to answer because the forces that converge to shape policy extremely diverse. Thus, finding a causal nexus between study and decision is possible in only a minority of cases. According to Gordon, some of the policy shaping forces are:

legislators and their staffs; policy makers and policy advisors at all levels of government; reporters, editors, columnists, and editorial writers in print and electronic communications; scholars in and out of universities; and opinion leaders in business and the professions.

Brookings feeds impulses into this network. Weak impulses—ideas judged by decision makers and voters to be deficient in validity, timeliness, clarity or practicality—will expire quickly and quietly. Strong ideas, however, will fan out through the policy network where they will "stimulate new crosscurrents of comment and criticism; . . . provoke new analytical efforts; and . . . join with related ideas [to be] recast in a different mold." So even if the original idea was important in inspiring an important policy decision, the causal chain may be untraceable.

Nevertheless, Gordon concludes that Brookings studies have influenced the course of debate, that persons at strategic points in the policy network heed the findings of Brookings' research, and that occasionally the impact of its work is substantial. The purpose of this paper is to document this conclusion.

To facilitate this, Brookings' three research divisions--Economic Studies, Governmental Studies, and Foreign Policy Studies--will be analyzed in order to examine emerging ideas and their impact, if any, on policy and legislation. Brookings' Advanced Study program, Board of Trustees, and personnel trends will also be described in terms of their roles in policy contribution. Before looking at these areas, however, the background and overall organization of Brookings needs examination.

Background, Organization and Operation

The Brookings Institution was incorporated in 1927 as the merging of three parent organizations: the Institute for Government Research (founded in 1916), the Institute of Economics (founded in 1922), and the Robert S. Brookings School of Economics and Government (founded in 1924). These three institutions were largely the fruits of one man, Robert S. Brookings.

Born in rural Maryland in 1850, Brookings went to St. Louis at age sixteen where his brother was working for the lumber firm Cupples and Marston. Starting out as a traveling salesman for that firm, he became a partner at age twenty-one. Ten years later, he took charge of the firm and it prospered. 12 Brookings had made the fortune he had sought.

In 1896, at the age of forty-six, Brookings retired from business and devoted the rest of his life to education. He became president of the board of trustees of Washington University in St. Louis, helping to make it a major institution. This led to a career of national service and philanthropic enterprise. He became one of the original trustees of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Furthermore, at President Taft's request, he became a consultant to the Commission on Economy and Efficiency; and in this capacity, Brookings developed a concern for governmental budgeting procedures.

Brookings was asked to join the Institute for Government Research (IGR) by men he met during the time he served on President Taft's commission. The IGR was initially organized in 1916 and is regarded as the first private, national think tank. It was organized to help make government more efficient and immediately concerned itself with the national budget. Two of

the institution's original trustees (Raymond B. Fosdick and Jerome P. Greene) had ties with John D. Rockefeller; hence, early IGR studies were financed by the Rockefeller Foundation.

During World War I, the activities of the IGR were put on a shelf, and Brookings was asked by President Wilson to become chairman of the Price Fixing Committee of the War Industries Board. After the war, Brookings returned to the IGR and became its vice-chairman. He single-handedly solicited corporations and institutions for the funds necessary to put the institute back on its feet.

Satisfied, but not completely content with the early accomplishments of the Institute for Government Research, Brookings organized the Institute of Economics in June of 1922. With the aid of \$1,650,000 from the Carnegie Corporation, the Institute of Economics would do for free enterprise and American business what the Institute for Government Research was 1 doing for government efficiency and organization. Harold Moulton, professor of economics the at University of Chicago, was chosen as the institute's first president and later became president of the Brookings Institution.

At age seventy-four, Brookings launched yet a third endeavor. Still president of the board of trustees of Washington University, he wanted, as he said in his own words, "to develop in the national service, and in our economic, social, and political activities, the trained intelligence essential to the ultimate success of our government." Thus, procuring funds from George Eastman (of Kodak fame) and the Laura Spelman Rockefeller fund, he was able to establish the Robert S. Brookings School of Economics and Government in 1924. The school turned out to be a disappointment to Brookings, as many of its

graduates pursued work in education rather than government.

Early on Brookings wanted to merge the three institutions, and two considerations became clear:

The new institution must seek to supplement rather than duplicate the facilities offered by the universities of the country; and it must confine its training activity to advanced students, since the resources which the capital [city] offered were of unique importance only to those who had completed their formal education.

Thus the Brookings Institution was born. On December 8, 1927, after a year spent unifying the three separate elements under the leadership of Harold Moulton, the institution was incorporated. The school was abolished and the two research organizations were made departments of the new institution. Thus, "the training function was transferred to the institution as a whole and lifted to the super-graduate level." At the time of Mr. Brookings' death in 1932, the infant organization was healthy and growing.

Over a period of sixty years, the institution has evolved into a veritable bureaucracy run by a president and a board of trustees (whose roles will be discussed later), and with a staff of over two hundred people. Furthermore, the institution has an annual budget exceeding twelve million dollars. Accordingly, the Office of External establish 24 Affairs was created in 1981 to resource development program for Brookings. This was an addition to the existing offices of Economic, Governmental, and Foreign Policy Studies, the Advanced Study program, the Social Science Computation center, and the Publications Office. These structural elements comprise the major subdivisions that make up the present day Brookings Institution.

In its 1970 annual report, Brookings claimed that its funds come from its own endowment, the support of philanthropic foundations, corporations, private individuals, and occasional government contracts on request. The late President Kermit Gordon had a policy of keeping the income from these federal contracts below an arbitrary ceiling of 15 percent of Brookings' income. In 1978, this rule was abolished by the trustees committee and contract income began to exceed 20 percent.

Brookings' role with respect to government contracts is very limited for several reasons. It will not undertake classified research and insists that, like the government, it be given the right to terminate a study. In addition, it maintains the right to publish its findings and select its staff for all projects.

In 1977 Brookings found itself in financial trouble. Bruce MacLaury, former chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, was chosen as the new president and is credited with putting the institution on a sound footing. He did this by creating the Office of External Affairs. appointing a fellow conservative Republican, Roger Semerad, as its director. The office has been a valuable asset in attracting corporate In 1978 for example, only \$95,000 was donated bv thirty-eight corporations corporate foundations. In 1984 however, some \$1.6 million was donated by roughly two hundred corporate donors. Speaking of its reputation as a liberal think tank, Mr. Semerad has said, "Corporations are realizing that Brookings defies easy categorization. We're no longer tied to decades of theology."2

Increasing financial support is not the only mission of the Office of External Affairs. Its second function is to "bring the findings and analyses of Brookings scholars to the attention of decision-makers and the public at Because of the relative growth of other think tanks (like the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation), Brookings competes not only for funds, but for influence on opinion as This need to promote the institution's research has brought about a new magazine entitled The Brookings Review. This publication is mailed to "37,000 decision makers, opinion leaders, and institutions." Other promotional activities include press releases for publications, press conferences, arranging television and radio interviews for scholars, and opinion/editorial pieces to major newspapers. addition, Brookings has compiled a Directory of Scholars and sends it to over 2000 journalists to encourage them to contact Brookings experts for comment, and information in emerging The institution even holds weekly and regular briefing sessions journalists as part of what President MacLaury calls the "psychic income" of Brookings. These and other actions show that, in an effort to influence decision makers and the public. Brookings is increasingly turning to the media.

Having examined the history, organization, and operations of the Brookings Institution, a look at its Board of Trustees is now in order. This is necessary because before we can attempt to show how Brookings affects policy externally, we need to have some knowledge of its internal policies.

The Board of Trustees

According to Brookings, its trustees are "responsible for general supervision of the

institution, [approving] fields of investigation, and safeguarding independence." Under the Institution's Under President MacLaury's leadership, the Board of Trustees has become more involved in running Brookings. It has even gone far as to veto proposed research causing controversy within projects, institution. Mr. MacLaury has responded to staff complaints by saying that "There is always the question about the role of the trustees. particularly with regard to academic freedom. But we are a think tank. We are not a universitv."3

Political scientist Thomas Dye, in his address to the Southern Political Science Association, called Brookings' directors "as impressive a group of top elites as any assembled anywhere." For example, Robert V. Roosa, the board's president chairman, is a senior partner in Brown Brothers, Harriman & Co. Moreover, he is a director of American Express Co., Anaconda Copper, Owens Corning Fiberglass Co., and Texaco. Not surprisingly, three of these four corporations appear on the list of Brookings' corporate donors. Roosa's other duties include serving as a trustee for the Rockefeller Foundation and working as a director of the Council of Foreign Relations.

Other Brookings trustees hold prestigious positions, such as chairman of IBM (Frank Cary), chairman and chief executive officer (Samuel Armacost), BankAmerica Corp. president of the University of Chicago (Hanna Gray), to name a few. Yet it is doubtful that influential individuals manipulate these activities of Brookings to their own will. seems that it would be difficult for all thirty-four trustees to come to a consensus on exactly how to influence government. Also, if the trustees failed to create an atmosphere of academic autonomy, using their veto power only infrequently, they would probably have encountered more difficulty in attracting scholars than has been the case.

One particularly noteworthy item is the strong correlation between the companies represented by the members of the board of trustees and the companies that Brookings thanks for financial support. For example, of the twenty-four members of the board with corporate ties, fourteen represent companies that contribute financially to Brookings. One could conclude, therefore, that to promote funding, Brookings will sometimes increase the number of members serving on its board of trustees.

Yet, as stated before, there is no conclusive evidence that these corporate leaders channel influence through Brookings to government. A more direct relationship can be found in the spheres of Brookings' research influence-especially regarding economic issues.

Influence in Economic Policy

Perhaps in no other area of research and publication has Brookings' influence been as widespread as in economic policy. The late President Kermit Gordon, himself an economist. encouraged and fostered economic research. Moreover, Gordon's successor, Bruce MacLaury, was president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. the days of Since an active Brookings, who took interest economic affairs, the institution has provided a powerful example of economic policy influence.

The Institute of Economics began making its mark even before its absorption into the structure of Brookings. After World War I, the institute published a treatise on Germany's war debt called Germany's Capacity to Pay. It was set before the Reparations Commission and laid the foundation

for the transfer of payments mechanism in the Dawes Plan. The Dawes plan was instituted to restore and stabilize the German economy and allow Germany's gradual payment of reparations to her former enemies.

Later examples of Brookings' power to influence policy were early studies by its economists which helped convince the Hoover administration that the plan to create a Statewrence waterway project was too expensive. Brookings also contributed to policies that established more unified transportation regulation in the 1930s. Throughout the Roosevelt era, the institution remained an opponent of the New Deal, and the NRA (National Recovery Act) died at the hands of the Supreme Court only five weeks after a Brookings report condemned it. It has been claimed that the Supreme Court studied that report.

More recently, the negative income tax has emerged as a brainchild of the Economic Studies Program. Though never adopted, the importance of this proposal is demonstrated by the fact that it was considered by Presidents Johnson, Nixon, and Carter. Also, reforms in the congressional budgeting process were foreshadowed by Brookings, scholars Alice M. Rivlin and Charles Schultze. These predictions led to the Congressional Budgeting and Impoundment Act of 1974, which created the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), as well as the House and Senate Budget Committees. This probably contributed to the selection of Ms. Rivlin as the CBO's first chief, a position she filled until 1982.

Since 1971, Brookings has published an annual series of volumes entitled Setting National Priorities, critiquing the current administration's budget. These critiques usually include suggestions for reform. For example, the publication Setting National Priorities: The 1984 Budget,

contains the subheading, "How to Reduce the Structural Deficit." But despite their importance as helpful policy suggestions, many ideas that originate in Brookings are kicked around a long time before being adopted. For example, senior fellow Joseph Pechman's recommendation for federal government revenue sharing was rejected by Lyndon Johnson, but was later implemented during the Nixon Administration. Furthermore, Pechman has long been an advocate of tax reform and simplification, an issue currently being pushed by the Reagan Administration.

In a recent Brookings publication entitled Economic Choices 1984, edited by Alice M. Rivlin, this tax reform issue is heavily treated Supply-side economists have praised the book; others, however, have condemned it-especially its sections advocating a "cash flow tax." Nevertheless, the book has been said to have "joined liberal democrats such as Rep. Richard Gepharth and Sen. Bill Bradley in coming to terms with the supply-side revolution." It is evident that Congress heeds Brookings' research.

Publications by Brookings' economic staff are respected by the academic world as well as Congress. Besides full-length books and numerous articles, the staff produces the biannual journal Brookings Papers on Economic Activity. Sometimes Brookings strategically releases reports just before events of important consequence. For example, it released a ten-page report on world economic recovery and growth a month before President Reagan was to meet with world leaders at an economic summit in Virginia in 1983. Besides being scholarly, Brookings' reports can be very timely.

Having provided examples of Brookings' influence on economic policy, we will examine the influence on public policy of Brookings' Governmental Studies office.

Influence on Government Policy

One of the first priorities of the Institute for Government Research was to help establish a national budget. President Taft's Commission on Economy and Efficiency (to which Mr. Brookings himself had been a consultant) submitted a report in 1912 recommending a model national budget; and in 1916, the IGR was organized, immediately confronting the issue with a publication by W. F. Willoughby (then IGR director) entitled The Problem of a National Budget. Besides recommending an executive budget, Willoughby recommended the creation of an executive agency to prepare, oversee, and audit the budget.

Influenced by IGR's work, Congress finally relented and passed the Budget and Accounting Act in 1921. In fact, the legislation was drawn in the IGR office. President Harding signed the bill in June of 1921 and summoned General Charles Dawes (of the Dawes plan mentioned earlier) to become his Budget Director. It was early staff members of the Institute for Government Research that helped Dawes with his first budget proposal.

More recently, Brookings has contributed to smooth presidential transitions. When President Kennedy took office, it gave him "detailed memoranda on the organizational and administrative problems which would be raised by the transfer of power to a new President and his administration."

These memoranda were successfully implemented, so an expanded version was published for President Nixon for the transition of 1968-69. This was a 614-page volume entitled Agenda for the Nation, edited by Kermit Gordon. More recently still, Brookings'

scholar Stephen Hess wrote Organizing the Presidency. Just after Jimmy Carter's election, he phoned Hess to commend him on the study, and Hess promptly responded by sending thirteen memoranda with additional details to the president-elect. In fact, at least ten of the forty-six fellows then at Brookings assisted Carter with his takeover.

Martha Derthic, presently director of the Governmental Studies Program, has written the book Policy Making for Social Security, wherein she argues that Social Security benefits should not be treated as rights that are immune from reduction. Nevertheless, Derthic and senior fellow Henry Aaron have been called "the nation's leading scholarly defenders of Social Security," giving Brookings voice in the polemics of Social Security.

In addition, senior fellow James Sundquist has claimed that the formula for community development block grants and revenue sharing were policy contributions of Brookings. But he also said

it's hard to claim a cause-and-effect relationship with many ideas because of the way policy comes together in this Revenue sharing is another town. example. It gained some attention on the Hill years ago because of programs in Britain and New York State. When it was revived it lay dormant. people started Brookings, here at taking it seriously again. I suppose, with that example, it's safer to say that we elevate ideas here more than we originate them.

This is in harmony with Kermit Gordon's statements about policy formulation cited earlier. Sundquist's statement is not only true with

regard to Brookings' role in economic and governmental policy, but in considering foreign policy influence as well.

Influence in Foreign Policy

The Brookings Institution has long been influencing foreign policy--it aided in the formulation of the Dawes Plan after World War I and the formulation of the Marshall Plan after World War II. Later, in the early 1970s, Senator Barry Goldwater (R.-Ariz.) and Senator Strom Thurmond (R.-S.D.) accused Brookings of fostering major cuts in the Pentagon budget through its defense analyses.

Brookings' foreign policy influence under the Carter Administration was vast and far reaching. The Brookings Defense Analysis Projects were begun in 1969, and results came in the form of several recommendations. In Modernizing the Strategic Bomber Force by Alton Quanbeck and Arhcie Wood, it was recommended that the B-1 bomber be dropped from the U.S. arsenal. Published in February 1976, the report was read by Carter and announced as policy in July 1977. Another book, Deterrence and Defense in Korea by Ralph Clough, recommended the withdrawal of ground troops from Korea. This book was released in 1976 and announced as policy by Carter only a year later. Both policies were adopted in spite of military opposition.

A third example of foreign policy influence under Carter revolves around the Brookings publication Toward Peace in the Middle East. Published in 1975, the study group report favored a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement rather than a step-by-step approach. It was embraced by Carter and served as the basis for his Mideast approach. This and the previous examples of Brookings influence under

Carter were due in part to the fact that he attended briefings and luncheons on economic and foreign policy at Brookings in July 1975.

Policy influence has not been limited to the executive branch. For example, district judge John J. Sirica struck down a law prohibiting women from going to sea in Navy vessels other than hospital ships and transports, frequently citing the Brookings study Women in the Military by Martin Binkin and Shirley J. Bach in his opinion. This study by the Foreign Policy Study program encouraged an increased role for women in the military.

Sometimes, Brookings studies make conclusions and reform proposals on the basis of historical analysis. For example, the study Force Without War: Armed Forces as a Political Instrument, by Barry Blechman and Stephen Kaplan, concluded that the U.S. had threatened military force 215 times and the U.S.S.R. had done likewise 115 times since 1945. This makes a total of 330 threats—an average of one per month since the end of World War II. The work concluded that discreet use of military force was effective in achieving foreign policy objectives, but that the nation should flex its military muscles only infrequently.

Thus far we have seen that policy and legislation often results from Brookings research and studies. We will now turn to the Advanced Study Program to analyze its input into the policy network.

Influence of the Advanced Study Program

Though not as far reaching as the research divisions of Brookings, the influence of the Advanced Study program can nevertheless be felt. As a center for public policy education, it

provides continuing education to America's leaders of business, government and non-profit organizations. Also, in an effort to promote wiser and more cooperative policy, the center stimulates informal discussion among these leaders.

In doing this, the program sponsors many activities, including conferences for business executives on federal government; national issues seminars; roundtables on government, the economy, and American society; conferences for senior executives and science executives; conferences on business policy and operations; and executive leadership forums on critical public policy issues. These are only a few examples of the activities of the Advanced Study program in which over 2500 executives took part in 1983.

Because the Advanced Study Program transmits ideas through the education of powerful people, its policy injections are more indirect than those of Brookings' research branches. Educating executives and government leaders, however, can exert a great influence, creating constituencies that are favorably disposed toward Brookings' ideas. More direct policy influence can be seen through examples of personnel who step in and out of government work from Brookings.

Influence of Personnel

Aside from the research and publications they produce, Brookings staff members themselves have contributed to policy as government appointees. In 1946, for example, Harry Truman named Brookings vice-president, Edwin Nourse, as the first chairman of the newly created President's Council of Economic Advisors (CEA). Before becoming president of Brookings, Kermit Gordon was Budget Director under both Kennedy and Johnson. Staffer Herb Stein was chosen as

chairman of President Nixon's CEA. ⁶⁹ President Carter appointed scholar Nancy Teeters to a post on the Federal Reserve Board and senior fellow Charles Schultze as chairman of the CEA. Besides economic personnel, foreign policy personnel have also had influence, as fellow C. Fred Bergstein served as the Assistant Treasury Secretary for International Affairs under Carter, and Barry Blechman directed his Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

The above cases only highlighted are examples of Brookings' personnel influence. In 1972 it was reported that, "half the senior staff in the governmental studies program [was] comprised of former federal officials." This was probably the result of an outflow of Democratic appointees after Nixon's election, as major influxes and outflows governmental personnel are generally more common after the arrival of a new administration. Judging from recent annual reports, it seems that more Brookings personnel are now moving to universities and private institutions rather than government.

governmental appointments, Besides Brookings staff members influence policy in less formal ways. Being located in Washington, D.C., the scholars are only a phone call away from national decision makers. The late Senator Hubert Humphrey, for example, often received advice from staff member Joseph Pechman. Furthermore, Brookings scholars are called upon to testify before congressional committees. 1982, for example, Charles Schultze testified before the Senate on the damaging effects of the deficit. 4 Thus, besides providing government with new ideas and personnel, Brookings often influences the course of debate in less formal ways.

Brookings' Adaptation to a Changing Network

This paper has attempted to show examples of contributions by the Brookings Institution to public policy formulation over the years. This influence has been formal as well as informal, direct as well as indirect. In discussing Brookings' role in the policy network, senior fellow Gil Steiner commented that Brookings undertakes to "raise the kind of questions that it is politically inexpedient or 75 undesirable for members of Congress to raise." In being able to raise these questions from outside government, Brookings has been increasingly successful in exerting influence and initiating reform.

Besides changing policy, however, the institution itself has changed. In a 1938 New York Times article, S. T. Williamson wrote:

[Brookings] publications cause something of a stir in the world. Newspapers print summaries of them on their front pages. Economists, editorial writers and some politicians cite them much as Fundamentalist preachers draw upon Holy Writ. Although the emotional appeal of these books is nil, their statements have caused many highly placed or otherwise prominent persons to yell bloody murder.

The days when Brookings was the only "think tank" in Washington are long past. A 1983 New York Times article said, "... Brookings now finds itself competing for funds, prestige, publicity, and the ability to make a mark on this capital city."

Nevertheless, Brookings is rising to the occasion. It has intensified efforts to increase corporate donations and to maintain support from foundations and others. Furthermore, Brookings

remains a respected source of scholarship and research; in fact, its senior staff members are quoted an average of twenty-five times per year by other social scientists. With regard to publicity, Brookings is working to form closer ties with the media. Finally, in the policy arena, Brookings still has the attention, and sometimes the alumni, of many national policy agencies. Its reputation and continued efforts have reserved a prominent place for Brookings in the policy network.

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 - ⁶⁸Brookings, <u>83 Report</u>, p. 37.
 - ⁶⁹"Carter's Brain Trusts," p. 19.
- 70 "Two Think Tanks with Growing Impact," p. 47.
 - ⁷¹Lanouette, "Shadow Cabinets," p. 298.
 - 72 Glass, Think Tanks, p. 253.
 - ⁷³Ibid., p. 257.
 - 74Brookings, 1982 Report, p. 8.

- ⁷⁵Glass, "Washington Pressures," p. 263.
- ⁷⁶Williamson, "Elusive Facts," p. 4.
- 77 Tolchin, "Brookings Thinks about Future," p. A30.
- 78 Irvine Alpert and Ann Markusen, "Think Tanks and Capitalist Policy," in Power Structure Research, ed. G. William Domhoff (New York: Sage Publications, 1980), p. 192.

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