

The Review as Art and Communication

The Review as Art and Communication

By

Joey Skidmore

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

The Review as Art and Communication,
by Joey Skidmore

This book first published 2013

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2013 by Joey Skidmore

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-4444-6, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-4444-4

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One.....	1
Introduction	
Chapter Two.....	37
The Book Review as a Special Form of Communication	
Chapter Three	40
Communication: A Classic Example	
Chapter Four.....	53
The Review as a Work of Art	
Chapter Five	57
The Reviews (and Review Essays)	
Chapter Six	
Conclusion.....	178

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This book has two purposes. First, it examines the phenomenon of book reviewing, a topic that has received relatively little attention, despite the abundance of reviews and their obvious importance to publishers, authors, and scholars. Second, it compiles the work of one scholar, Max J. Skidmore, Sr., and uses the unified themes of my father's work to demonstrate the potential of book reviewing—and all forms of reviewing—into its own special form of communication and art.

A given review may receive enormous attention and generate considerable heat—and sometimes even light—but reviewing as an act seems generally to cross the borders of consciousness at will, evading the otherwise watchful scholarly sentinels who might be expected to generate theories at the first hint of an intrusion. This, of course, is in contrast to criticism, a related activity about which there is a large body of theory, discussion, and controversy.

Significant works dealing with the art and craft of book reviewing exist, but they are scarce. Mayra Calvani and Anne K. Edwards devote their *Slippery Art of Book Reviewing*, essentially to instructing budding reviewers. To them, it would be quite useful. To us, its practical approach makes it less so, although still worthwhile for background information.¹ Much more directly in line with *The Review as Art and Communication* is *Academic Evaluation: Review Genres in University Settings*,² a collection edited by Ken Hyland and Giuliana Diani, well-known linguistic scholars. As with all collections, the selections are somewhat uneven, but even so they are well-chosen. The editors prepared and include an excellent introduction making it clear that the act of evaluation is “central to a constellation of related activities,” that they describe as “*review genres*.” They include such articles so diverse as to deal with “book reviews, book

¹ Mayra Calvani and Anne K. Edwards, *The Slippery Art of Book Reviewing*, Kingsport, Tennessee: Twilight Times Books, 2008.

² Ken Hyland and Giuliana Diani, eds., *Review Genres in University Settings*, Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

review articles, review articles, book blurbs, and literature reviews.”³ However beyond our purview dissertation literature reviews and commercial “book blurbs” may be, at some level it may be refreshing to see scholars taking seriously even material that might seem to be too routine or too commercial (vulgar?) to warrant notice.

Three Examples within a “Constellation of Review Activities that may fit within Hyland and Diani’s “Review Genres”

Example Number One

As a matter of fact, following Hyland and Diani, the art and craft of reviewing may be applied to any number of activities as well as to specific works. This first example relates to a series of “Town Hall” meetings that took place simultaneously across the United States in 2010. The theme was, “Our Budget, Our Economy.” The sessions sought to elicit opinions regarding the U.S budget deficit and ways to deal with it. The unquestioned assumption was that the deficit supersedes all other concerns, and Skidmore, Sr., concluded that the bias of the activity should have been plain to any observer who was reasonably objective, and who was not a “deficit hawk.” If news coverage was any indication, though, the media seemed unaware of any agenda except attempts to achieve “good government” and “fiscal integrity.” To remedy journalism’s lack of analysis, my father applied to be a participant. He was accepted, and gained first-hand knowledge that enabled him to act as a “reviewer” of the entire enterprise from its fundamental assumptions onward.

He published the resulting study in *Poverty and Public Policy*, vol. 2, issue 3 (June 2010); I reprint it here, with permission of the Policy Studies Organization:

The People, the Economy, and the Issues: A Participant Reports on National “Town Hall” Meetings on the Deficit

[Author Notes: The following article was written within a few days of the AmericaSpeaks town meeting and reflected information supplied at the time by the preliminary summary of results. As is evident below, I considered the reported support for increasing the age for full retirement to

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

be inconsistent with the other results regarding responses to questions on Social Security. AmericaSpeaks now has released its Interim Report to Congress, "Finding a Common Ground on Our Fiscal Future," dated July 27, 2010. The report now corrects the information regarding support for increasing Social Security's age for full retirement. According to the report, only 39 % of the respondents favor such an increase.

The accompanying statement by AmericaSpeaks indicated that a programming flaw had led to a few errors, including a false report that a majority of the participants supported increasing the retirement age. They accompanied this information with the following statement: "The converted data does not reflect a significant shift in relative priorities in each section." Perhaps not; however technically correct the statement may be, though, it would seem highly significant that the correct figure is only a minority when it had been reported and publicized as a majority.

On Saturday, June 26, 2010, an organization called "AmericaSpeaks" held simultaneous meetings—"21st Century Town Meetings," a title that the group has registered as its own—in 19 cities around the United States, on the topic "Our Budget, Our Economy." The organization describes itself as nonpartisan and nonprofit, and has been in existence since 1995. It has held similar meetings on a variety of topics: Social Security, 1998–1999; redevelopment plans for ground zero at the site of the former World Trade Center, 2002; economic recovery for New Orleans after Katrina, 2005–2006; etc. The June 26 meetings were funded by the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The Peterson Foundation's sponsorship caused suspicions among Social Security supporters that the agenda might be designed to use deficit reduction as a vehicle to attack "entitlements" in general, and Social Security in particular. Peterson, a former secretary of commerce for President Nixon, is well known for his zealous opposition to Social Security over several decades. For example, he began by producing books and other writings, followed by founding the anti-Social Security Concord Coalition, and sponsoring the propaganda film IOUSA. Most recently, he has begun a newspaper, the *Fiscal Times*, which is ostensibly objective, and has devoted \$1 billion of his fortune to creating the Peterson Foundation, which has the openly stated goal of undermining "entitlements." His approach is always "nonpartisan," or "bipartisan," but is hardly nonideological. He has, however, been skillful in convincing other non-ideological figures and organizations that it is appropriate to cooperate with his efforts. The AmericaSpeaks materials for the June meetings heightened suspicions by including Social Security as a prime

subject of concern for reducing the deficit, when Social Security has never contributed to the deficit, and cannot do so under the current law. Benefits cannot be paid unless trust fund balances are sufficient to cover them.

The meetings on June 26 were linked by video, and led by those in charge of the session in Philadelphia. The announced purpose was to gather a sizeable group of representative Americans to consider the national budget deficit and to generate ideas about how to achieve the group's goal of \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction by 2025. The group then will present the results to President Obama's National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, headed by Erskine Bowles and Alan Simpson. An obvious complementary purpose was to increase existing concerns about the deficit among participants, and to convince any who may have been more concerned about other issues that the deficit represents the most serious threat to the United States and greatly overshadows all others.

When I heard of the AmericaSpeaks project, I applied to be a participant. I soon received an acceptance, saying "Thank you for RSVPing to the national conversation on our federal budget. Space is limited but we've saved you a seat at the table!" My session in Overland Park, Kansas, was one of 19 held simultaneously throughout the country. In addition to Overland Park and Philadelphia, the other cities involved were Albuquerque, New Mexico; Augusta, Maine; Casper, Wyoming; Chicago; Columbia, South Carolina; Dallas; Des Moines; Detroit; Grand Forks, North Dakota; Jackson, Mississippi; Pasadena, California; Louisville, Kentucky; Missoula, Montana; Portland, Oregon; Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Richmond, Virginia; and Silicon Valley, California. There were audio links to some 40 other locations and an additional location based on Internet communication.

Overland Park is in Johnson County—an affluent, heavily Republican, suburban section of the Kansas City, Missouri, metropolitan area. In physical size, Kansas City and its surrounding communities in both Missouri and Kansas form one of the country's largest urban regions. The Kansas–Missouri state line divides the metropolitan area roughly in half from north to south, with Missouri on the east side of the line, and Kansas on the west. Western Johnson County, the site of the session, is not centrally located. There is no light rail and little public transportation of any kind in the entire metro area. Bus systems are inadequate, and the region's few taxis concentrate on conveying passengers to and from the airport, which is some 30 miles or more from much of the population. No one familiar with Kansas City or its surrounding communities would think of stepping to the curb and attempting to hail a cab, as is customary in so

many cities. Private automobiles are a necessity. Kansas City itself is strongly Democratic, as is the other, smaller, Kansas City in Wyandotte County, Kansas.

It should be understood that the mechanism of deliberative polling, such as found in "town hall meetings," has inherent shortcomings. Under certain circumstances, forums of this type may be a healthy exercise in democratic discussion, but in no way are they reliable as reflections of true public opinion. Frequently their design and the implementation of that design more than hints at efforts to mold opinion rather than to assess it, or rather to mold opinion and then to assess it in order to achieve a predetermined result. Asserting over and over that the most serious situation facing the country is the deficit is an example. Tailoring the options available for participants to suggest that workers should continue to pay into the Social Security system yet receive reduced or no benefits is another.

Benjamin Page of Northwestern University and Lawrence Jacobs of the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota make this clear in their penetrating study, "Understanding Public Opinion on Deficits and Social Security," a paper that is forthcoming from the Roosevelt Institute. Page and Jacobs discuss the nature of public opinion research, and effectively dispute the advantages that its advocates claim for deliberative polling. The techniques used in town hall meetings to assess opinion after participants are "informed" regarding the topics under consideration using materials devoted to that subject, the approach adopted by AmericaSpeaks in "Our Budget, Our Economy." Page and Jacobs analyze that recent effort, and point out that it could not achieve the kind of scientific result that careful and professional polling can achieve. They do concede, however, that deliberative forums at times can be of assistance to those making policy. Considering the results of the AmericaSpeaks forums, that may be the case here, although not in the way its sponsors were accused of having anticipated. The results are a clear warning that the views of the deficit hawks are not widely shared by the American people. Regardless of the framing of the issues and the prodding of the participants, the majority of those participating in the forums reflected the same concerns that polls indicate are predominant among the general public. They consider the deficit to be important, but considerably less so than other issues, such as unemployment.

The Overland Park session was very skillfully organized, and reports from elsewhere indicated that all sessions pursued the same format. Participants were assigned in advance to one of a large number of round tables, each with eight or ten seats including one assigned to a facilitator.

There were no breaks, not even for lunch. People came and went as they wished to restrooms, etc., but there was no chance for significant discussion away from the immediate table or among the various tables, nor was there any plenary activity involved in assessing group opinion. The explanation for not having breaks was the difficulty in getting people to reassemble. The effect, whether deliberate or not, was to eliminate any possibility of a runaway group responding to a charismatic participant. No “Cross of Gold” stampeded convention was possible. Each participant had a keypad polling device that transmitted a signal to the central computer, presumably in Philadelphia. Despite this, for many of the issues the official vote was assessed solely by table, with a “unit rule” in effect; that is, each table would express only one opinion, and that required agreement by a majority of those at the table.

Much of the initial period consisted of “feel-good” activities. There were introductions of leaders and local moderators, pep talks both locally and from Philadelphia praising participants for exercising their civic duty, a lengthy round robin of greetings to each city—waving and yelling, “Hello Albuquerque,” with a response; waving and yelling, “Hello Jackson,” with a response; and so on. Most participants seemed to enjoy these exercises, but several busy people began to feel restive. Former Comptroller General David Walker, now director of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, spoke by video of the dire future facing the country if there are not substantial financial reforms, and said, oddly, “we can’t cut and tax our way out” of the troubles. No one appeared to question what other remedies were available, since he already had indicated that it would be impossible to grow our way to prosperity—and since the only options presented to participants in “Our Budget, Our Economy” were spending cuts and tax increases. Other brief talks followed. The first exercise for participants was to identify themselves and to indicate to the table their greatest hope for their children and grandchildren. These hopes for the future were duly recorded and sent to Philadelphia by the facilitators. After more logistical discussion, there were video presentations discussing the documents handed to each participant. Nearly two hours passed before matters of substance began.

When they did so, there were immediate questions. First, we were told that we must reduce the deficit by \$1.2 trillion by 2015 in order to put the country on track toward a sustainable future. The figures provided, though, were designed to present the worst possible scenario. Regarding military expenditures, for example, the “Options Workbook” indicated that President Obama “proposed to maintain defense spending for the next five years at current levels. Some experts, however,” it said, “believe that the

nation must spend at least 2% more a year in inflation-adjusted dollars to maintain our current approach and ensure that our military personnel are skilled and trained.” The article continued, “other experts, however, believe that it is possible to cut billions of dollars from military spending unrelated to our current wars without compromising national security.” Nevertheless, the explanatory material for “options” gave participants the choice of reducing expenditures by 5%, 10%, or 15% annually, or making no changes. Then came a dire warning: “By making no reduction,” it explained, you would be adopting the President’s defense spending path, which, as explained above, may fall short of what’s needed to maintain the nation’s defense posture around the world.” There was no discussion of revisions to military policy; the options were simply to cut or not to cut, with the warning that even not cutting might “fall short of what’s needed.”

Similarly, regarding revenues, the workbook conceded that the large individual income tax cuts enacted in 2001 and 2003 are set to expire at the end of 2010. Disregarding its own seemingly forthright admission, it blithely proceeded to say that “their continuation is considered the ‘current policy’ of the federal government. The projections in this guide on deficits and debt in coming decades are based on that current policy.”

Thus, even though current law provides for substantial tax increases to begin soon, AmericaSpeaks provided figures showing that the existing law will continue unchanged. By greatly understating projected revenue, they are openly overstating projected deficits, making them appear to be worse than they really are. Despite this discrepancy, most participants seemed to work diligently to come up with the targeted amount for deficit reduction, and did not question why it was necessary to achieve the \$1.2 trillion figure.

Many of the issues were framed poorly, and some participants thought them designed to mislead. The first item asked individual participants to give their preferences on a sliding scale between “taking care of current generation” and “taking care of future generations.” These options, of course, are not mutually exclusive, and appear to be designed to nudge participants toward cuts in Social Security, inasmuch as critics such as the Peterson Foundation allege that current benefit levels will lead to shortchanging our children and grandchildren.

With regard to healthcare, the workbook indicated that “Most developed nations spend much less of their national income on health care than the United States and achieve better outcomes.” Actually, all spend far less than the United States, and most do achieve better outcomes. The next sentence, though, is puzzling, if not astonishing: “Whether we can allocate fewer resources on health care and achieve better outcomes,

however, is an open question.” If nearly every other wealthy country spends less than we do and yet at the same time achieves better outcomes, what could possibly make it impossible for us to do so as well? Certainly the citizens of the United States are no less capable than those of other lands, but AmericaSpeaks seems to be questioning the ability of Americans to perform up to the standards existing elsewhere.

The only healthcare options presented to the participants were to do nothing or to “reduce federal spending” by 5%, 10%, or 15%. There was no provision for cost reductions through greater efficiency, through negotiating drug prices in the Medicare program, or for a single-payer system. Therefore, the participants were led to choose either to make gross and unspecified reductions in spending—surely authorizing cuts with an ax rather than a scalpel—or to choose the option saying that there should be no reductions at all. Many groups around the country reportedly rebelled and submitted a preference for single-payer, regardless.

The option booklet presents arguments for and against reducing benefits under Social Security. Nowhere, however, does the material concede that Social Security does not, and under existing law cannot, contribute to the deficit. No benefits can be paid that exceed balances in the trust funds, and workers have paid for all their benefits. Suggesting cuts presupposes that only benefits will be reduced, not taxes. Workers would continue to pay into the system as they do now, but they would qualify either for lower benefits or for none at all. The options given were various increases in Social Security (FICA) taxes, increasing the age for receiving full benefits to 69 years, reducing benefits in various other ways, creating “personal accounts” within the system (admitting that at least in the short run this would be counterproductive), and raising the amount of wages subject to FICA taxes.

There were other subjects presented, such as raising taxes in general, making unspecified cuts across the board in defense and non-defense spending, or creating new taxes. In a surprising development, despite the slanted framing of the issues, the national results reflected a number of progressive principles.

With regard to Social Security, except for majority support for raising the age for full retirement benefits to 69—a sharp benefit cut that may not have been understood as such by the participants—there was opposition to means testing, benefit reductions, or private accounts and majority support for raising the FICA rates. An overwhelming majority called for raising the amount of wages subject to Social Security taxes (currently \$106,800), and apparently there also was rather strong support both locally and around

the country for removing the cap entirely, although that was not presented as an option.

Additionally, there was strong support for raising tax rates on corporate income, and for adding an additional tax on those earning more than \$1 million per year. There was strong support for reducing defense spending by 10%–15%, and also a strong majority for creating a carbon tax. Although the amount it would bring in as revenue was understated, participants strongly favored creating a tax on securities transactions.

None of these outcomes fits into the Peterson agenda or is consistent with the issues as framed. The participants did vote to urge reductions in healthcare and non-defense spending by at least 5%, but there were mitigating factors. Of those who supported reductions, a majority chose 5% rather than the 10% or 15% options. The 38% who voted for no reduction was greater than the percentage voting for any other individual category. As indicated, the issue was very poorly framed. Enough participants (with apologies to Sarah Palin) went rogue and demanded a single-payer system that the organizers made note of them.

In a piece responding to the criticisms of these recent AmericaSpeaks meetings, Harvard professor Archon Fung posted an essay he titled “Public Deliberation: The Left Should Learn to Trust Americans.”⁴ Fung is not entirely disinterested; he serves on the advisory board of AmericaSpeaks, and will be working with the group to evaluate the responses. He describes himself as a progressive, and expresses dismay that those on the left tended to view the activity as part of a “vast right-wing conspiracy.” Fung remarked that “if Saturday’s event was part of some conservative scheme, it was more incompetent than Michael Brown’s efforts in post-Katrina New Orleans.” Perhaps so. “By the end of their deliberations,” he continued, “it was clear that most participants wanted to reduce the deficit primarily by raising taxes and cutting defense, not by slashing Social Security, Medicaid, or Medicare.” The reason for this, he asserted, was simply that the project was as its organizers described it: a good-faith effort to “bring a representative cross-section of Americans together to discuss America’s fiscal problems in an even-handed and reasonable way and then to transmit the results of their discussions to policy makers.”⁵

One hopes that he is right, but the framing of the issues is certainly problematic, as are what Fung calls his “inconvenient facts.” “While it is

⁴ Archon Fung, “Public Deliberation: The Left Should Learn to Trust Americans,” AmericaSpeaks, June 28, 2010, <http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/public-deliberation-the-left-should-learn-to-trust-americans/>>.

⁵ *Ibid*

true,” he said, “that the conservative Peter G. Peterson Foundation provided substantial support for ‘Our Budget, Our Economy,’ the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur and W.K. Kellogg Foundations—certainly not right-wing bankrolls—also supplied major funding. Second, the event’s National Advisory Committee—which vetted the agenda and briefing materials—included not just people from conservative organizations such as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute, but also left think tanks such as the Economic Policy Institute, Center for American Progress, Urban Institute, and Brookings. The view that ‘Our Budget, Our Economy’ was a right-wing machination is simply not based in reality.”⁶

At a superficial level, Fung is correct, but he ignores Peterson’s brilliance: that is, his skill in presenting himself as nonpartisan and interested only in good government. That has been the genius of his Concord Coalition, which has been quite successful in convincing the media of its objectivity. Peterson has a knack for securing support from across the political spectrum for his activities, but that does not ensure their impartiality. Indeed, much of the criticism of “Our Budget, Our Economy” comes from some of the progressive organizations that participated. Fung is probably correct that the explanation for the outcome is that “democratic deliberations” may be risky. In fact, deliberations that take on some of the form of democracy even without its substance may become more democratic than intended.

In the 1990s, Peterson’s Concord Coalition encouraged newspapers and groups all around the country to play its “Debt Busters” game. The intent was to find ways to balance the budget (before the Clinton administration did so). The result was that many media outlets reported Concord’s press releases as though they were legitimate news. The enterprise inspired an excellent study by David Ekerdt, who directs the Gerontology Center of the University of Kansas. The title of Ekerdt’s article, “Entitlements, Generational Equity, and Public-Opinion Manipulation in Kansas City,”⁷ is an apt description of the campaign and its outcome. Typically, participants—who came from all walks of life—emerged from the sessions with scorn for policymakers. “How can they not balance the budget?” was the common refrain. “We did so easily in an hour.”

That theme was echoed in “Our Budget, Our Economy” by *AmericaSpeaks*. At least it was echoed there if Carolyn Lukensmeyer, the

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ David Ekerdt, “Entitlements, Generational Equity, and Public-Opinion Manipulation in Kansas City,” *Gerontologist* 38 (5) (1998): 525-536.

organizations' president and founder, was accurate in the summary report that she quickly prepared and submitted to the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility.⁸ "Among the most common sentiments from table groups" that she reported were the generalities that one would expect:

"Abandon the failed politics of partisanship!" Who could disagree with that? Of course, much depends upon definitions.

"Please find the political will to use this input as if it were coming from a powerful lobbying group—because we are!" was another. {As a matter of fact I seem to remember having seen this in writing before the sessions began.)

Of course there were the expected, and innocuous, demands to "Listen to the people and not special interests!" and the assertion that "We need to deal with these issues now!"

More ominous was the echo from Peterson's public-opinion manipulation in the 1990s. I didn't hear this, but Lukensmeyer reported that one of the common table sentiments, presumably from around the country, was, "Can you be elected officials first and politicians second? Our table balanced the budget in less than an hour!"

Of course they did. It is simple to play a game that has no consequences. Real policymakers know that what they do affects the lives of real people. Cut here, add there, do this, do that. We can certainly do it "in an hour" if what we do has no effect on poverty, education, security, health, safety—or anything else. That is another problem with the town hall mechanism: the assumption that citizens, with minimal or distorted information, can achieve wisdom "in only an hour"—that is, without really hard work.

In this case, fortunately, as Professor Fung pointed out, the people did indeed exercise some collective wisdom. The result is likely attributable to the fact that a good many of them, regardless of the extent to which they were well informed, had been warned in advance, and came with an awareness of fundamental justice and a wariness of manipulation.

Example Number Two

This second unusual example of a reviewing activity is the "review," or analysis, of a persistent allegation. In this case, the allegation that Social

⁸ Carolyn Lukensmeyer, "Written Testimony for the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform," Wednesday, June 30, 2010, <http://usabudgetdiscussion.org/written-testimony-for-the-national-commission-on-fiscalresponsibility-and-reform/>.

Security is a “Ponzi Scheme.” Skidmore, Sr., also directed his reviewing toward that common theme:

From: *Poverty and Public Policy*, vol. 2, issue 4 (December 2010);
reprinted by permission of the Policy Studies Organization

The U. S. System of Social Security: Emphatically Not a Ponzi Scheme

A “Ponzi scheme” takes its name from a pyramid plan in 1920 that its originator, an Italian immigrant to the United States, Carlo (or “Charles”) Ponzi, promised would pay huge returns to investors. They could double their money, he told them, in 90 days. Profits to the early investors came from amounts paid in by subsequent investors, but the promised returns were so great that paying each wave of investors required a geometric increase in the number of investors in the next wave. If every investor remained in the scheme, the successive requirements for new investors to keep the system going would fairly quickly exceed the population of the earth. Obviously, this is unsustainable. Ponzi schemes inevitably collapse. As the Securities and Exchange Commission of the United States explains on its website:

In the classic “pyramid” scheme, participants attempt to make money solely by recruiting new participants into the program. The hallmark of these schemes is the promise of sky-high returns in a short period of time for doing nothing other than handing over your money and getting others to do the same.⁹

When the promoter of the scheme can no longer find the enormous number of new investors required to keep it going, the scheme collapses. The collapse is not only inevitable, but comes rapidly. Social insurance bears no relation to pyramid, or Ponzi, schemes. “The first modern social insurance program began in Germany in 1889 and has been in continuous operation for more than 100 years. The American Social Security system has been in continuous successful operation since 1935. Charles Ponzi’s scheme lasted barely 200 days.”¹⁰

⁹ Securities and Exchange Commission, “Pyramid Schemes,”
<http://www.sec.gov/answers/pyramid.htm> (accessed October 12, 2010).

¹⁰ Larry DeWitt, “Ponzi Schemes vs. Social Security,” Research Notes and Special Studies by the Historian’s Office, Social Security Administration, Research Note #25, <<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/history/ponzi.htm>> (accessed October 12, 2010).

As I make clear in *Securing America's Future*, "Social Security is not a Ponzi, or pyramid, scheme; it bears no resemblance to one."¹¹ Social Security does not promise great riches, and in fact is not an investment scheme at all. All participants benefit. Even the unusual person with no dependents who dies before retirement without ever having become disabled has received a measure of protection from disability insurance, and may also have benefited indirectly by not having to support elderly relatives who are independent because of Social Security. The situation of this person is similar to that of the homeowner who has fire insurance but never has a house fire; that homeowner has benefited from the insurance coverage, and is hardly likely to consider it unfortunate that his house didn't burn. Social Security does not encourage risk, and certainly does not benefit a manipulator. In fact, it "turns the notion of a Ponzi scheme upside down; instead of impoverishing all but a few, for nearly three-quarters of a century it has provided extensive benefits to virtually the entire population."¹² No Ponzi scheme can survive for an extended period, and none can pay benefits to all who participate—or even to more than a very few of them. All participants in a Ponzi scheme lose their investments, except for the initial handful of investors (and, of course, the promoter).

Why, then, have there been so many allegations in recent years to the contrary? People may be misled by failure to understand pyramid schemes. It is true that they promise to pay returns to early investors from the amounts paid in by other investors, and Social Security also pays benefits from amounts paid in by other contributors. Ponzi schemes, though, promise huge returns on investments and thus require a geometric increase of new investors, which is impossible. Social Security, in contrast, is essentially a transfer program from one group to another, and requires no increases in the number of new participants, let alone an unsustainable geometric increase. In fact, every society throughout humanity's existence has had some arrangement for supporting those who are too young or too old to work, and that support has come from workers. Modern societies have arranged to do it with great efficiency through the social insurance mechanism.

There is more involved here, however, than simple misunderstanding, or ignorance. There have been deliberate attempts to mislead the public, in order to undermine confidence in Social Security. Take comments by the

¹¹ Max J. Skidmore, *Securing America's Future: A Bold Plan to Preserve and Expand Social Security*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2008, Appendix C. Social Security (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), Appendix C: "Social Security and Ponzi Schemes."

¹² *Ibid.*, p.186.

late economist, Milton Friedman, for example. He frequently hinted, and sometimes actually said, that Social Security is a Ponzi scheme.¹³ One can be reasonably certain that he knew better, since he was a Nobel laureate in economics and undoubtedly understood what a Ponzi scheme actually is. Similarly, Social Security's opponents have pointed to comments by another Nobel laureate in economics, Paul Samuelson, who remarked in 1967 that Social Security was a Ponzi scheme, but one that worked. What the critics miss is that Samuelson, who was known for witty remarks, and who knew full well that Ponzi schemes cannot work, was joking. He also once quipped that economists had predicted nine of the past five recessions.¹⁴

But this does not explain why there is opposition to social insurance. To begin to understand, we must look at what Social Security is and does, and at the political ideologies that it reflects—and offends.

The American Social Security program, based on legislation enacted in 1935 as part of the “New Deal” of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, has operated efficiently and economically since its first regular benefits were issued in 1940. During these 70 years Social Security has become an integral part of the fabric of American life, and is probably the most popular government program in the country's history. Without fail, the system provides retirement benefits to workers who have worked within the system, with additional benefits for their spouses and minor dependents. Benefits also include payments to surviving dependents of deceased wage earners and beneficiaries. Moreover, for more than half a century the system has provided disability benefits as well.

Another fact that is too easy to overlook is that Social Security not only enables enormous numbers of retirees and others to live independently, but as it does so it ensures that inflation will not erode its benefits, as is likely to happen with income from private investments. In other words, benefits from Social Security retain their purchasing power, regardless of what happens in the economy. Another source of security from the program is that one cannot outlive Social Security's retirement benefits. They can never be exhausted regardless of how long a retiree lives.

Those who are not actually receiving checks from Social Security may yet benefit indirectly from the system. The independence that Social Security confers upon its beneficiaries also frees most of the population

¹³ See, e.g., Milton Friedman, “Social Security Chimeras,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1999, op. ed.

¹⁴ See Skidmore, *Securing America's Future*, 186-187.

who are still working from having to provide direct support to their elderly or disabled parents or grandparents.

Despite all this, there has always been a small group of opponents. Most of these, such as quasi anarchists from the libertarian Cato Institute, are motivated by ideology. Their opposition reflects philosophical objection to government programs, and they form the intellectual core of the opposition. The force behind the opposition, though, comes from economic interests— multi-billionaires such as the (also ideologically libertarian) Koch brothers, Charles and David of Koch Industries in Wichita, Kansas, and from investment banker Peter G. Peterson, who held the position of secretary of commerce under President Richard Nixon. Charles Koch was a founder of Cato, and he and David continue to fund the Institute and other related efforts. For example, they provided funds to begin the anti-government “tea party” movement in the United States. Peterson for years wrote diatribes against “entitlements,” including Social Security, and then became more sophisticated in his attacks. He was instrumental in forming the Concord Coalition, and subsequently created the Fiscal Times and the Peter G. Peterson Foundation; he endowed the latter with one billion dollars to work against Social Security, and was a major instigator of the recent “town hall” meetings across the country that attempted to create fears that the deficit, not unemployment, is America’s greatest current economic danger.

Peterson has been especially skillful in working with mainstream groups to obscure any perception of extremism. The Concord Coalition has been notably successful in this regard. The intellectual foundation of the effort to undermine Social Security, however, dates to an article by Stuart Butler and Peter Germanis that Cato published in 1983, “Achieving a ‘Leninist’ Strategy.” Butler and Germanis openly set forth plans for a long-term project to destroy public confidence in the system, reassure the elderly that their interests would be protected in order to dispel their opposition to “reform,” and establish a coalition with those “who will reap benefits” from a private system, including “the banks, insurance companies, and other institutions that will gain from providing such plans to the public.”¹⁵ By “reassuring” the elderly, Butler and Germanis propose to buy their support, or at least to ensure that they do not protest when the security of their children and grandchildren is put at risk. Their strategy of incremental attacks has been effective, but they were proven too cynical in

¹⁵ Stuart Butler and Peter Germanis, “Achieving a ‘Leninist’ Strategy,” *Cato Journal* 3 (Fall) (1983): 2.

their hope that the elderly—who continue fiercely to protect Social Security—would react with complete selfishness.

The overall result has been decades of well-funded propaganda suggesting that Social Security is unsustainable. That view came to have tacit support from official quarters when Ronald Reagan became president. Reagan had campaigned against Social Security for years prior to entering politics officially, and then attempted to cut the program severely when he took office. His efforts brought such political backlash that he promised in so many words that under his administration there would be no more assaults on America's cherished program. He remained true to his word, and even appointed a commission of Republicans and Democrats to deal with the system's cash-flow troubles in 1982. That commission's recommendations led to the 1983 revisions to the Social Security Act that were designed to secure the program's financing.

Official opposition became overt during the administration of George W. Bush, especially in his second term. By the time of Bush's presidency, his Republican Party had become far more ideological than has been the norm for American political parties, and had come to devote itself to privatization and de-regulation whenever possible. Its foremost answer to all economic questions came to be lowering taxes. Even going to war brought no tax increases. Astonishingly, as it took the country to war, the Bush administration actually lowered taxes—a circumstance that probably was unique in the history not only of the United States but also of the world. Thus, it could hardly be surprising that hostility to Social Security had become imbedded in the official positions of Bush and his party.

For example, the Bush administration not only attempted to divert Social Security funds into private accounts, but also promulgated a "tactical plan" to portray the program as unsound. The administration's actions at the time led some Social Security employees to complain that the Bush officials were advancing their political agenda by using money from the trust funds. Part of this effort involved "cleansing" the website of the Social Security Administration (SSA). The SSA website had always been a model of objective public information, but Bush's appointees filled it with propagandistic warnings that the system was unsustainable unless considerably revised. The website until Bush's second term had included an excellent discussion of the Ponzi scheme allegation. That discussion had been available as late as December 3, 2005, barely more than a month before his second term was about to begin. After that, however, it seemed to have vanished.

Happily, Ponzi information now has returned to SSA's website. Immediately upon Bush's departure, the site began again to deal expertly

with the question. This time it took the form of an excellent essay by the official historian of the Social Security Administration, Larry DeWitt. Significantly, DeWitt's essay, "Ponzi Schemes vs. Social Security," which is highly detailed both in its description of the nature of pyramid schemes (complete with graphs) and in its explanation of Social Security, is dated January 2009—the month that Barack Obama took office as President of the United States.

There now should be no more confusion, no allegation that Social Security is a Ponzi scheme. Undoubtedly, though, considering the huge economic force backing the attacks against the system, and considering the compliant role of the media, the attempts to confuse and mislead the public will continue. Under the circumstances, only one possible way exists for the public ever to have even a chance at being well informed. That way will be if those who recognize that the stakes are high, who understand the situation, and who are concerned for the future of Social Security work at every opportunity to counter the propaganda with accurate information.

Example Number Three

This third, and final, of our examples of "review genres" certainly involves reviewing and is part of "a constellation of related activities" that would seem to be covered by Hyland and Diani's broad definition. As with the previous example, it relates to correction of misconceptions widely disseminated about the American Social Security system. As with the first example, above, it seeks to subject broad disseminations of propaganda to review and analysis.

This example differs from the preceding ones in that it involves books, a dozen of them, but it is not specifically a review of the books involved. It is closer to a bibliographic essay, but differs from such an essay in that its purpose is to draw attention to a considerable body of substantial literature. That literature takes issue with the conventional wisdom. The elder Skidmore identifies the sources of common misperceptions, and lays out the objections to "what everyone knows." As his essay demonstrates, he is far from alone.

From *Poverty and Public Policy*, vol. 3, Issue 4; reprinted with permission from the Policy Studies Organization.

Scholarly Support for Social Security: A Political History of Prevailing Beliefs, and of the Growing Number of Works Demonstrating that the “Conventional” Often is not “Wisdom”

- Eric R. Kingson and James H. Shulz, eds., *Social Security in the 21st Century*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997
- Robert Eisner (1998) *Social Security: MORE Not Less*, New York: The Century Foundation Press, A Century Foundation/20th Century Fund Report, 1998.
- Max J. Skidmore (1999) *Social Security and Its Enemies: The Case for America’s Most Efficient Insurance Program*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999.
- Dean Baker and Mark Weisbrot (1999) *Social Security: The Phony Crisis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Arthur Benavie, *Social Security Under the Gun*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Joseph White (2003), *False Alarm: Why the Greatest Threat to Social Security and Medicare is the Campaign to “Save” Them*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press/Century Foundation, 2003.
- Daniel Béland (2005), *Social Security: History and Politics from the New Deal to the Privatization Debate*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005.
- Michael Hiltzik (2005) *The Plot Against Social Security*, New York: Harper Collins, 2005.
- Nancy J. Altman (2005), *The Battle for Social Security: From FDR’s Vision to Bush’s Gamble*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2005.
- Max J. Skidmore, *Securing America’s Future: A Bold Plan to Preserve and Expand Social Security*, (Foreword by Sen. George McGovern), Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.
- Teresa Ghilarducci, *When I’m Sixty-Four: The Plot Against Pensions and the Plan to Save Them*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Larry W. DeWitt, Daniel Béland, and Edward D. Berkowitz, *Social Security: A Documentary History*, Washington: CQ Press, 2008.

In a Shanghai hotel room, before dawn one morning in 1993, it was a pleasant surprise, considering the relatively primitive communication capabilities of the time, to discover the fledgling CNN International on television. It also was a surprise, although not a pleasant one, to find that CNN considered it worthwhile to beam around the world a rant from a young American directing a diatribe at the U.S. system of Social Security.

He said that members of his generation were tired of supporting greedy geezers. Young Americans would rise up to end the system that drained

money from them to enrich the elderly. No one challenged him, or pointed out that Social Security and Medicare, by providing the elderly with independence, make it unlikely that America's youth have to support their parents and grandparents. Nor did anyone mention that, in any case, nearly one-third of Social Security's checks go not to the elderly, but rather to children and to others younger than retirement age. This report on CNN was an early salvo directed openly against Social Security in an enormous campaign that only recently had become public.

Many years previously, back in the 1950s, Ronald Reagan had begun a stealth attack upon Social Security. After a moderately successful career as a film actor, the highly personable Reagan had become a spokesman for the General Electric Corporation, and was the featured speaker at the company's banquets all over the United States. In hundreds of appearances he polished his delivery and perfected elements of what he called, simply, "The Speech." A major element of The Speech was condemnation of Social Security, and of what was to become Medicare. He adapted The Speech in 1961 to create a phonograph recording for the American Medical Association, "Ronald Reagan Speaks Out Against Socialized Medicine." The recording was packaged professionally, was of professional quality, and was the major element of "Operation Coffeecup," a stealth component of the very open—and very loud—AMA effort to prevent passage of Medicare legislation.¹⁶ Its purpose was to inspire individually worded, handwritten, letters to members of Congress, both representatives and senators, from members of "Women's Auxiliaries to County Medical Societies," organizations of physicians' wives. A flood of letters that appeared to be personal, but really flowed from Operation Coffeecup parties, inundated Congress.

In 1964 Reagan again adapted The Speech. That time he appeared on nationwide television to give a fervent talk on behalf of the doomed presidential campaign of Republican conservative Senator Barry Goldwater. Goldwater lost, but Reagan went on to become Governor of California. By the time he took office as President of the United States in January 1981, his decades of rhetoric had conditioned the public to accept some skepticism regarding Social Security.

Acting upon his visceral dislike of the program, Reagan overreached, and early in his presidency sought to slash it dramatically. The public

¹⁶ For the complete text of "Ronald Reagan Speaks Out Against Socialized Medicine," including Reagan's full talk plus the comments of the unnamed announcer, see Max J. Skidmore, *Securing America's Future*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008, Appendix A.

reaction forced the new president to back down, and he promised not to attack Social Security again.

Although he failed to achieve his primary goal, he did succeed to some extent. For instance, he eliminated the minimum benefit (a floor below which a benefit could not fall, regardless of how little a qualified beneficiary had earned) and the college benefit (which had paid benefits until the age of 21 to a college student child of a deceased worker). Initially, the administration had stripped the minimum benefit even from those extremely needy people who had already been receiving it, but the public outcry forced Reagan to retreat, and to restore it—but only to those to whom it already had been awarded.

In 1982, acting in good faith upon his promise, President Reagan appointed the Greenspan Commission to recommend revisions to the system to correct anticipated cash flow troubles. Congress accepted the Commission's recommendations and on its own added a gradual increase from 65 to 67 in the age for full benefits. President Reagan signed the resulting 1983 Amendments with lavish praise for the role of Social Security in American society. This praise has led many subsequent observers who are unfamiliar with Reagan's views and history to consider him a friend of Social Security. In the election of 1964, despite Reagan's stirring plea on behalf of Goldwater, Lyndon B. Johnson, the sitting Democratic President, easily won reelection; in fact, he received the greatest popular vote percentage of any president in American history. The following year, LBJ succeeded in securing Medicare's passage. By 1968, however, the Vietnam War had made LBJ's administration so controversial that he chose not to run for re-election in that year's presidential contest. The narrow winner was the Republican Richard M. Nixon.

Although Nixon did support Social Security—every president, regardless of party, since Franklin Roosevelt had done so—a Nixon appointee, Peter G. Peterson, went on to become one of the system's most bitter and effective enemies. Peterson served Nixon in several capacities, including even a cabinet post, secretary of commerce, which he held for nearly a year.

After leaving Nixon's administration, he made his great fortune as an investment banker. Throughout the 1980s, Peterson wrote books and articles alleging that Social Security would lead to national bankruptcy. In 1992, he was instrumental in the founding of the Concord Coalition, a nonpartisan group that purports to be dedicated solely to fiscal integrity and budgetary soundness. In reality, Concord devotes its considerable energy to a conservative agenda, primarily "reform" of "entitlements." Its

“reforms” would lead to means, or “affluence,” testing and to a gradual shift away from public programs to private investment accounts.

In short, they would lead to privatization, which to a large extent would return the United States to the pre-New Deal arrangement in which everything was private, and public programs hardly existed. The Concord Coalition demonstrates Peterson’s genius in convincing mainstream elements to work with him as though he were mainstream, and not an extremist. He presents a benign face, accepts gradual change, and indicates a willingness to accept tax increases in his pursuit of balanced budgets. Thus, he is far more subtle than Grover Norquist, the anti-tax purist who demands of Republican candidates that they sign a pledge not to raise taxes under any circumstances. Peterson’s primary goal, however, is hardly less extreme: to rid the country of “entitlements,” such as Medicare and Social Security. He would achieve this by raising the ages for eligibility, and ultimately by restricting their benefits to the “needy,” thereby converting them completely into “welfare” programs.

Peterson uses his considerable fortune in a variety of ways. Examples are funding a program for teachers at Columbia University’s Teachers College, underwriting in 2010 a well-publicized series of “Town Hall Meetings” (“America Speaks: Our Budget, Our Economy”) across the country designed to direct attention to the deficit and to elicit concern for “entitlements,”¹⁷ and creating a newspaper: The Fiscal Times. Most ambitious was his creation in 2008 of the Peter G. Peterson Foundation to which he devoted approximately one billion dollars. He recruited David Walker, Comptroller General of the United States, to be the Foundation’s first president and CEO. The Foundation’s overt purpose is to awaken citizens to the “unsustainability” of entitlements. For more than two decades, much of the rhetoric flowing from politicians and media figures expressing the need for “reform” can be traced directly to Peterson sources.

Unfortunately, Peterson is not alone as an effective attacker of Social Security. Oil billionaire Charles Koch in 1977 was the co-founder in San Francisco of the Cato Institute, a libertarian (read “quasi anarchist”) think tank now in Washington, D.C. One of Cato’s major efforts began in 1995 as its Project on Social Security Privatization, but, in response to unfavorable responses to the term “privatization,” underwent a name change in 2002, during the administration of the younger Bush, to “Project

¹⁷ Reprinted above; in this instance, Peterson’s efforts backfired. The participants at the “Town Meetings” were better informed and less subject to manipulation than might have been anticipated. They strongly supported “entitlements,” rejected severe budget cuts, and supported tax increases.

for Social Security Choice.” Even earlier, however, Cato actively sought to undermine the system.

In 1983, cooperating with the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank, Cato published an anti-Social Security manifesto, with the revealing title “Achieving a ‘Leninist’ Strategy.”¹⁸ The authors were Stuart Butler and Peter Germanis, both from Heritage. Cato has published many articles along similar lines (including the following piece in the same issue of *Cato Journal*, in which Marilyn Flowers says that “Many of us today regret the way in which the Social Security program was allowed to develop”¹⁹, but Butler and Germanis established the framework for an approach that has obviously been influential in the media and, through them, upon the public.

For instance, they write, it is essential to “recognize that there is a firm coalition behind the present Social Security system,” and that “we must begin to divide this coalition.” Evidence that their suggestions are the foundation of current discussions on Social Security is too obvious to ignore. Fortunately, though, the effort to “buy off” the elderly by reassuring them that their benefits will be secure has not caused parents and grandparents to sacrifice their descendants. They have refused to turn their collective backs on their children and grandchildren and acquiesce to a dismantling of Social Security.

After noting the importance of disarming the coalition supporting Social Security, Butler and Germanis proceed to say that it will be necessary to construct a new coalition of those who could “reap benefits” from an “IRA-based private system,” including “banks, insurance companies, and other institutions that will gain from providing such plans to the public.” They call for agitation to “press for modest changes in the laws and regulations designed to make private pension options more attractive.” The result would be to prepare for “the next crisis in Social Security” by being “ready with a strong coalition for change,” along with “a weakened coalition supporting the current system.”

An important part of their strategy would be “Calming Existing Beneficiaries,” because “the elderly represent a very powerful and vocal interest group.” As for the rest of the population, they must be constantly bombarded with “a comprehensive program of economic education” that would convince them that Social Security is in “serious trouble,” and

¹⁸ Stuart A. Butler and Peter Germanis, “Achieving a ‘Leninist’ Strategy,” *Cato Journal* 3 (2) (Fall 1983): 547-556.

¹⁹ Marilyn Flowers, “The Political Feasibility of Privatizing Social Security,” *Cato Journal* 3 (2) (Fall 1983): 557-561; quotation on p. 557.

direct their attention to alternatives. All these things have, indeed, become integral to nearly all commentary on Social Security.

Reflecting their confidence in privatization but their ignorance of the future, Butler and Germanis suggest informing the public about the success of the Thatcher revisions to Britain's social insurance. In their defense, they could not have anticipated the troubles that the UK would experience from those changes before the next decade was over. Finally, and above all, they concede that the road to privatization will be long, but that it will be necessary to treat "the issue primarily as a political problem."

Indeed it is. Most of the current mainstream commentary on Social Security reflects the Butler and Germanis strategy. Convince current beneficiaries and those near retirement age that their benefits are secure. Undermine confidence among the rest of the population by constant bombardment of overheated rhetoric calling for "reform," using any rationale available. At first, "reform" was required to make the system "sustainable." Now, the conventional wisdom has shifted to the need for "reform" to reduce the deficit. Establish 401k and other mechanisms to substitute private investment for a public system. Emphasize only "retirement," and allege that Social Security is inferior to private investments all the while directing attention away from Social Security's advantages that include disability and dependents' benefits, inflation protection, and lifelong benefits that cannot be outlived.

Cato has moved aggressively to pursue the Butler/Germanis framework. Among their efforts was the employment of José Piñera, to speak around the United States praising the Chilean system, and saying that it makes every worker a capitalist. Piñera was head of Chile's privatized social security program that former dictator Augusto Pinochet imposed upon the Chileans (except for the military). He has been less in evidence since troubles in the Chilean system have caused Chile to move back in the direction of a public program.

The result of these, and other, attacks upon Social Security has been the development of a "conventional wisdom" that incorporates misrepresentations of the system. It exaggerates the possibility of financial troubles, and assumes, falsely, that Social Security affects the deficit—which, it further assumes, is the country's greatest economic threat rather than unemployment.

When conventional wisdom forms, it is difficult to counter. Those who attempt to do so are represented as not "serious people," especially by

figures in media and politics engaged in “inside the beltway” groupthink.²⁰ A case in point may be found in the interesting collection of essays, *Framing the Social Security Debate*, that Douglas Arnold, Michael J. Graetz, and Alicia Munnell edited for the National Academy of Social Insurance in 1998.²¹ Among the interesting essays is a commentary by the respected journalist Susan Dentzer. She wrote, perceptively, that “few policymakers will admit this publicly, so it is up to journalists to help fill this void. After all, as the National Academy of Social Insurance’s own Robert Myers, formerly deputy commissioner of Social Security, has pointed out in congressional testimony, under the low-cost estimate of Social Security prepared by the system’s actuaries, the program is projected to experience no long-range financing problem whatsoever. Yet when was the last time you read in the popular press that under some plausible—if not especially likely—circumstances, Social Security might never be in trouble at all? I confess,” she wrote, “that not even I have raised this possibility in any of my written work to date on Social Security.”²² In this, she certainly was correct. The trouble with this admission of irresponsibility on her part, and her plea for journalists to present balance in their writings, though, is that it seems to have stopped there. Her subsequent writings and comments give no indication that the presumed depletion dates for the trust funds are anything other than certainties.

Academic sensibilities may also play a role. A personal anecdote may be appropriate here. As a result of observing the CNN broadcast in China, when I returned home, I delved back into studies of Social Security, a subject that my dissertation had involved some 30 years previously, but one that I had neglected other than to publish an article on Ronald Reagan and the AMA’s “Operation Coffeecup.”²³ My studies indicated that any threat to Social Security came largely from those who argued for “reform,” and that many of its supporters had unwittingly accepted the ideas of its opponents, and thus contributed to the threat.

²⁰ For a discussion of this phenomenon that emphasizes Social Security, see Max J. Skidmore, “Censorship: Who Needs It? How the Conventional Wisdom Restricts Information’s Free Flow,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 33 (Winter 2001): 3.

²¹ Douglas Arnold, Michael J. Graetz, and Alicia H. Munnell, eds., *Framing the Social Security Debate: Values, Politics, and Economics* (Washington: National Academy of Social Insurance, 1998).

²² *Ibid.*, 421.

²³ Max J. Skidmore, “Ronald Reagan and ‘Operation Coffeecup,’ A Hidden Episode in American Political History,” *Journal of American Culture* 12: (Fall 1989): 3.