



**STANFORD**  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

**STANFORD** SOCIAL INNOVATION *review*

**War of Ideas**  
**Why mainstream and liberal foundations**  
**and the think tanks they support are losing**  
**in the war of ideas in American politics**

By Andrew Rich

Stanford Social Innovation Review  
Spring 2005

Copyright © 2005 by Leland Stanford Jr. University  
All Rights Reserved

**DO NOT COPY**



**STANFORD**  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Stanford Social Innovation Review  
518 Memorial Way, Stanford, CA 94305-5015  
Ph: 650-725-5399. Fax: 650-723-0516  
Email: [info@ssireview.com](mailto:info@ssireview.com), [www.ssireview.com](http://www.ssireview.com)

For a century, foundations have been sources of private wealth for public purposes; they have committed great resources to address society's ills – but they have remained wary of straying too close to the political sphere. Foundations are prohibited from engaging in partisan political activity and from lobbying elected officials about legislation. So foundations have often viewed their funding as a counterweight to public spending, supporting, for example, domestic social services or international public health initiatives.

Yet a notable portion of foundation spending – a growing portion for some foundations – is targeted almost directly at the political process. This spending is intended to win the “war of ideas” under way in American politics. It supports research and advocacy that aims to influence how elected officials and the public think about a broad range of policies. This “war of ideas” is fundamentally a battle between liberals and conservatives, progressives and libertarians, over the appropriate role for government. Some progressive writers argue that conservatives have been winning battles in the war of ideas because liberal foundations are not spending near the amount that conservative foundations are on the war and the liberal money is not deployed nearly as effectively.<sup>1</sup>

My research suggests that while it is true that conservatives have been more effective than progressive funders, this is not because they spend more money. Nonconservative foundations – what might be labeled “middle of the road,” “mainline,” or “liberal foundations” – have devoted far more resources than conservatives to influencing thinking about public policy. This spending simply has not been as deliberate or effective.<sup>2</sup> Conservative think tanks have quite successfully provided political leaders, journalists, and the public with concrete ideas about shrinking the role of the federal government, deregulation, and privatization.

They are succeeding by aggressively promoting their ideas. By contrast, liberal and mainstream foundations back policy research that is of interest to liberals. But these funders remain reluctant to make explicit financial commitment to the war of ideas, and they do relatively little to support the marketing of liberal ideas.

### It's Not About Money

The 15 largest foundations are spending more than \$100 million a year on public policy institutes, and these are not conservative foundations supporting conservative think tanks. These are large, mainline foundations often led and staffed by progressively minded people that do not share the agenda of reducing the role of government. In the 1990s, their endowments grew, and their interest in supporting groups in Washington grew as well. As Table 1 (p. 21) illustrates, in 2002 these foundations spent \$136 million supporting public policy institutes that are mostly in Washington producing policy-relevant work.

These foundations do not generally make policy research one of their top funding priorities, but it remains an important part of their annual giving.

An evaluation of how these foundations apportion their funding to policy institutes relative to scores of other categories of spending reveals that funding for public policy institutes ranges from the third-highest category to the 26th, with the exception of one foundation

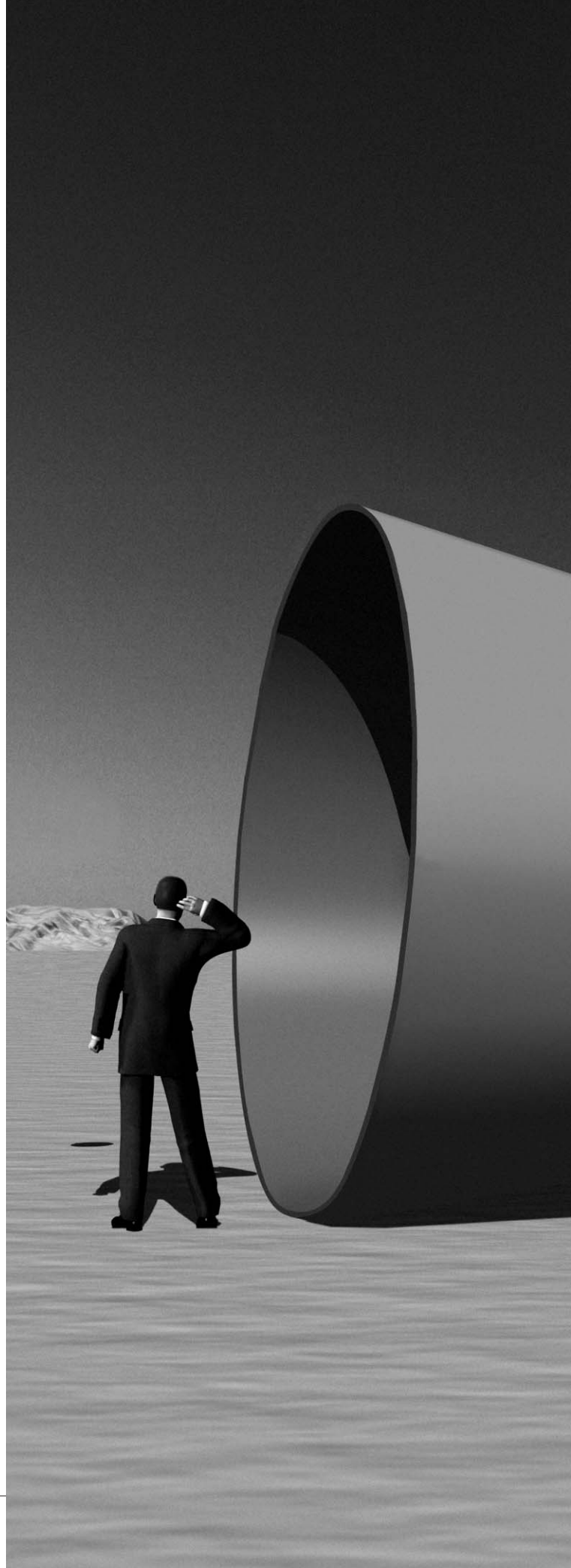
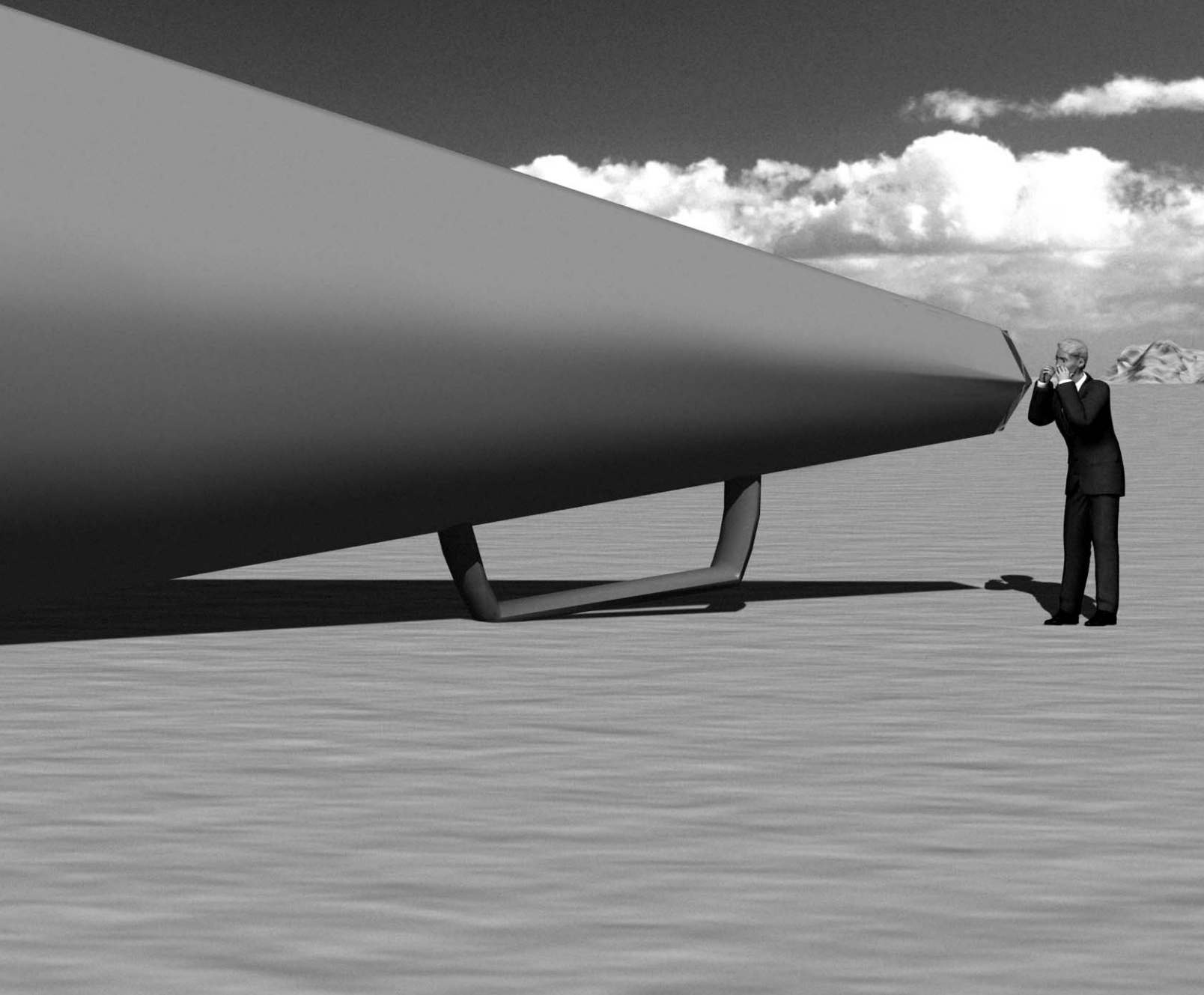


ILLUSTRATION BY BILL BROOKS/MASTERFILE

# War of Ideas

*Why mainstream and liberal foundations and the think tanks they support are losing in the war of ideas in American politics* by ANDREW RICH







## Nonconservative foundations have devoted far more resources than conservatives. This spending simply has not been as deliberate or effective.

that makes no grants in this area.<sup>3</sup> (Table 1, right-hand column.)

To put these amounts in context, I updated an analysis done by Michael Shuman in 1998, published in the *Nation*. In Tables 2 and 3 (p. 21, 23), I have listed the 2002 assets and spending on public policy institutes by 12 notable conservative foundations and 12 of their liberal counterparts.

The conservative foundations, which have been a focus in three reports since 1997 by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCPR), are often characterized as central to the conservative efforts in the war of ideas. These foundations are all significantly smaller than the 15 largest foundations in the United States. The largest one had 2002 assets totaling \$580 million, compared with between \$2.5 and \$32 billion among the 15 largest foundations. The total amount these conservative foundations spent on public policy institutes was about \$29.5 million – less than one quarter of what the largest mainline foundations devoted to such work.

Any idea of a funding edge to the conservative foundations is further diminished after looking at 12 loosely comparable progressive foundations that are members of what's known as the "National Network of Grantmakers," a network of funders focused on supporting causes that promote social and economic justice.<sup>4</sup> These foundations spent \$37 million in support of think tanks. Comparing the two sets of 12 foundations, the progressives spent \$12 million more on public policy institutes in 2002.

Given these numbers, it's hard to attribute the conservatives' success in the war of ideas to their greater resources. The advantage lies in how the money is spent. Conservatives have found ways to package and market their ideas in more compelling ways, and their money is providing more bang for the buck.

Indeed, a closer analysis suggests that conservatives structure their financing much differently than liberal and centrist foundations. A look at the data from 2002 reveals that conservative foundations consistently make funding policy institutes one of their top three priorities, while the liberal and mainline foundations rarely treat it this way. (Tables 2 and 3, right-hand column.) To understand the significance of this difference, it's necessary to consider how the different types of think tanks and foundations evolved.

### From Science to Ideology

Think tanks made their debut just after the turn of the century with missions reflecting a Progressive Era confidence that expertise from the burgeoning social sciences could solve public prob-

---

**ANDREW RICH** is an assistant professor of political science at City College of New York. He is the author of *"Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise"* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), and he is writing a book about the war of ideas in American politics. He can be reached at [ARich@ccny.cuny.edu](mailto:ARich@ccny.cuny.edu).

lems and inform government decision making. Progressive reformers looked to experts to generate the "scientific knowledge" that would move policymaking beyond rancorous logrolling and partisan patronage. The first generation of foundations and the industrialists who established them played a critical role in creating and sustaining the first think tanks. John D. Rockefeller, Sr. and the Rockefeller Foundation, founded in 1913, became the single greatest contributors to the Institute for Government Research (which became the Brookings Institution). The foundation provided similar core support in the early days for the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), formed in 1919.

The industrial magnates who were first interested in supporting social research saw it as wholly desirable for think tanks to become credible voices in policymaking circles without becoming promotional or ideological. Under attack themselves from some corners of government, the industrialists were publicity-shy. They and the foundations they established actively discouraged the think tanks from including high-profile marketing among their efforts. Until 1970, the total number of think tanks active in American politics remained relatively small (fewer than 70). Those that existed had little public profile, devoting their efforts instead to policy research made available quite straightforwardly – and sometimes discreetly – for consumption by public decision makers.<sup>5</sup>

The founding of the conservative Heritage Foundation in 1973 marked the birth of a new type of politically aggressive and openly ideological expert organization. Ideological, marketing-oriented think tanks modeled after Heritage proliferated, particularly on the right (e.g., the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Progress and Freedom Foundation), although also in the center (e.g., the Progressive Policy Institute) and on the left (e.g., the Economic Policy Institute, the Center for National Policy). The number of think tanks more than quadrupled between 1970 and 2000, growing from fewer than 70 to more than 300. More than half of the new think tanks that formed in this period were identifiably ideological. Two-thirds of these were identifiably conservative – mostly producing and promoting work supportive of limited government and free markets.<sup>6</sup>

### How Conservatives Took the Lead in the War of Ideas

The dramatic growth of conservative think tanks in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s was made possible principally with support from a small corps of newer conservative foundations, such as the Bradley, Smith Richardson, and Sarah Scaife foundations. Before the 1970s, many conservative foundations and their patrons reviled government so much that they refused to support efforts related to what was going on in Washington. But with the advent of increased government regulation in the late 1960s, the leaders of these foundations wanted to stop the tide of government activism. Funding organizations to fight the war of ideas

**TABLE 1: SPENDING ON PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTES BY 15 LARGEST FOUNDATIONS**

FOUNDATION	2002 Assets	Spending on "Public Policy Institutes"	Funding Priority for "Public Policy Institutes"
1 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (WA)	\$32,751,466,000	\$1,741,000	25
2 Lilly Endowment (IN)	\$12,814,397,581	\$2,770,335	19
3 Ford Foundation (NY)	\$10,814,696,000	\$38,962,766	8
4 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (NJ)	\$9,044,511,000	\$24,581,845	10
5 J. Paul Getty Trust (CA)	\$8,793,485,757	\$0	
6 David and Lucile Packard Foundation (CA)	\$6,196,520,868	\$12,132,570	17
7 William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (CA)	\$6,080,721,309	\$2,590,000	19
8 W.K. Kellogg Foundation (MI)	\$5,530,494,099	\$6,269,245	8
9 Starr Foundation (NY)	\$4,781,056,809	\$3,197,000	13
10 Pew Charitable Trusts (PA)	\$4,338,580,605	\$11,678,000	9
11 John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (IL)	\$4,215,930,831	\$15,047,200	4
12 Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (NY)	\$4,135,567,000	\$150,000	26
13 California Endowment (CA)	\$3,366,256,100	\$150,933	25
14 Rockefeller Foundation (NY)	\$3,211,126,000	\$7,663,987	6
15 Annie E. Casey Foundation (MD)	\$2,592,378,126	\$14,061,455	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$118,667,188,085</b>	<b>\$136,485,001</b>	

**TABLE 2: SPENDING ON PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTES BY 12 CONSERVATIVE FOUNDATIONS**

FOUNDATION	2002 Assets	Spending on "Public Policy Institutes"	Funding Priority for "Public Policy Institutes"
Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation (WI)	\$579,739,000	\$6,327,500	1
Smith Richardson Foundation (CT)	\$540,477,728	\$6,313,000	2
Sarah Scaife Foundation (PA)	\$315,539,020	\$6,993,500	1
Earhart Foundation (MI)	\$84,121,969	\$678,000	2
John M. Olin Foundation (NY)	\$71,196,916	\$4,748,020	2
Claude R. Lambe Charitable Foundation (DC)	\$34,023,335	\$767,000	1
Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation (DC)	\$31,526,113	\$383,000	3
JM Foundation (NY)	\$24,972,000	\$355,000	2
Carthage Foundation (PA)	\$23,705,949	\$1,660,000	1
Philip M. McKenna Foundation (PA)	\$19,682,099	\$422,590	1
David H. Koch Charitable Foundation (KS)	\$4,900,000	\$800,000	3
Henry Salvatori Foundation (MA)	\$1,747,010	\$0	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$1,731,631,139</b>	<b>\$29,447,610</b>	

became their way of doing it.

During this same period, mainline and liberal foundations scaled back their support of a number of efforts that engaged politics and government in Washington. Many of the older, more progressive foundations were disappointed by what they perceived as the failures of Great Society programs in which they had invested. Perhaps more important, many of the older, non-conservative foundations were operating with less. The endowments of many of the largest foundations lost hundreds of millions of dollars when the stock market declined in the 1970s.

Many older foundations put the brakes on activities in Washington that seemed overtly or overly political.<sup>7</sup> These foundations happened to be those that supported what today are often thought of as more liberal or progressive think tanks and public policies. The Ford Foundation is the best example. For several decades before 1970, Ford was the principal source of support for the Brookings Institution and Resources for the Future, and it provided key support to many more think tanks, including the Institute for Policy Studies. Ford moved to cut much of its core support for think tanks in the 1970s and '80s.



## Concern for neutral, unbiased research is not a preoccupation of the foundations on the right.

Yet the financial advantage that the conservative foundations enjoyed in financing policy work as the mainline foundations cut back was short lived. Despite complaints by some liberal advocates of insufficient backing, in the 1990s, think tanks and policy institutes actually became beneficiaries of restored support from mainstream and progressive foundations, as their endowments grew. The data from 2002 are evidence of this trend.

### The Conservative Advantage

Funding for think tanks was largely restored, but between the 1970s and the 1990s, Ford and other foundations changed their missions, their structure, and, in some cases, their staffing in ways that affect how that funding is distributed. For those on the left who desire more support, the problem is that the mainline/progressive/liberal foundations are now often not organized to effectively provide support to progressive think tanks or other organizations in the broad-based war of ideas – or even to see that as their role. On the one hand, these foundations tend to be organized by issue area. That means that prospective grantees are also organized that way. Think tanks on the left tend to be organized by issue area – around women’s issues, poverty, or the environment – rather than taking on the broad range of issues with which Congress and the president deal.<sup>8</sup>

The specialization of think tanks and advocacy organizations

on the left tends to mirror the programs and organization of their main foundation funders. These more specialized groups can be – and have been – tremendously effective. But they are not organized to do battle in the same ways as their conservative counterparts, across a broad range of topics. Whereas a multi-issue, conservative group can redirect portions of its resources and energy from promoting ideas for, say, environmental regulation to Social Security reform as the immediate priorities of Congress and the president change, more narrowly focused progressive think tanks cannot be so nimble – and, as they are currently organized, many would not want to be.

To make matters more difficult, progressive think tanks have a hard time getting general organizational support. Foundations want to support projects – specific, well-defined, discreet projects. The generally progressive Mott Foundation, for instance, gave slightly more to policy institutes in 2000 (\$7.45 million) than the conservative Bradley Foundation (\$6.53 million), but most of its funding was devoted primarily to specific projects. By contrast, the majority of Bradley’s funding went to general organizational operating support. In this regard, Bradley outspent Mott by roughly eight to one, investing about \$3.8 million to Mott’s \$460,000.<sup>9</sup>

By providing general operating support to policy institutes far more rarely than their conservative counterparts, progressive found-

## Proudly Conservative, Politically Discreet

The John M. Olin Foundation has been one of the leading supporters of conservative think tanks. In 1999, the author interviewed James Piereson, the foundation’s executive director, about its role in the “war of ideas.” Here’s a brief excerpt adapted from the original transcript.

**Q** How would you describe the mission of the Olin Foundation?

**Piereson:** I think our role has been to promote ideas. The tax laws don’t permit you to lobby or anything like that. So what we try to do is to get behind some people or some institutions that can have some influence in promoting

a set of ideas in a lot of different areas. We provide the infrastructure for these sorts of institutions.

**Q** And what are some of the ideas you’ve supported?

**Piereson:** We’ve done a lot of work on taxation and regulation over the years. We’ve done a lot of stuff on political correctness as well as the decline in standards in education at all levels. We’ve done a great deal in the area of law and economics by introducing market-oriented thinking into law schools. In recent years, we’ve gotten more interested in the ideas of educational reform, especially school choice.”

**Q** So what distinguishes you from, say, the Ford Foundation?

**Piereson:** I’ve always seen that whenever anybody calls the Ford Foundation “liberal,” they resist being given that designation. I’ve always found it kind of odd. We don’t resist being called conservative. We sort of acknowledge it; that’s essentially our philosophy.

**Q** What do you think led to the rise of conservative foundations and think tanks?

**Piereson:** The idea of the disinterested expert is at the origins of all of this, and it’s an idea that’s been corrupted

**TABLE 3: SPENDING ON PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTES BY 12 PROGRESSIVE FOUNDATIONS**

FOUNDATION	2002 Assets	Spending on "Public Policy Institutes"	Funding Priority for "Public Policy Institutes"
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (IL)	\$4,215,930,831	\$15,047,200	4
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (MI)	\$2,881,802,805	\$7,028,861	10
Chicago Community Trust (IL)	\$1,302,626,633	\$205,000	25
Joyce Foundation (IL)	\$999,530,958	\$10,076,722	2
Northwest Area Foundation (MN)	\$425,310,360	\$0	
Public Welfare Foundation (DC)	\$410,715,283	\$575,000	13
Otto Bremer Foundation (MN)	\$374,243,621	\$110,000	21
Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation (MN)	\$214,666,565	\$45,000	25
Charles H. Revson Foundation (NY)	\$199,488,289	\$513,050	8
Philadelphia Foundation (PA)	\$195,134,002	\$0	
Open Society Institute (NY)	\$135,447,900	\$4,366,530	11
Hyams Foundation (MA)	\$120,285,437	\$20,000	26
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$11,475,182,684</b>	<b>\$37,987,363</b>	

dations make it difficult for progressive organizations to sustain operating staff and functions. As James Piereson, executive director of the conservative John M. Olin Foundation, commented about his liberal counterparts: "The liberal foundations became too project oriented – they support projects but not institutions. They flip from project to project. ... We, on the other hand, support institutions. We provide the infrastructure for institutions."<sup>10</sup>

### Preoccupation with Neutrality

There is one more distinction between conservative and liberal

foundations that affects the disparities in their level of support: Funders on the left appear to have a different view of the role of the researcher – and the role of the research organization – than those on the right. For many of the mainline foundations and the foundations that are more clearly progressive, the primary concern when it comes to funding think tanks is in funding rigorous research that strives to be neutral. For them, think tanks and policy institutes should be homes to the disinterested expert.

Concern for neutral, unbiased research is not a preoccupation of the foundations on the right. As one longtime think tank

over time. The Progressive Era reformers believed that you could train experts who could tell the policymakers the best ways to do things. What happened from the turn of the century through the wars and into the '50s was the idea of the disinterested expert took over various academic fields – economics and political science and public policy especially – and I think by and large most of these were people who had a bias in favor of the government doing something.

It gradually became clear to conservatives that they had to be able to send their own experts out there to compete. Business understood that at some point, and the foundations did as well.

**Q Back in the 1960s, the Ford Foundation was criticized heavily for backing what some**

**considered political projects, most notably one promoting voter registration in Ohio and another related to school board elections in New York City. Do you worry about facing a similar predicament?**

**Piereson:** I'm somewhat conscious of not getting too mixed up in politics. The Ford Foundation got into trouble by really stretching the limits of the law – they got very close to politics.

**Q But don't you openly support conservative causes?**

**Piereson:** We work in the world of ideas, the intellectual world. Occasionally our people may say things that get them into trouble, but by and large they are people who can and are expected to defend themselves. If you're fairly careful about who you

give the money to, you're protected to some extent by the tax law. If you make a grant to a tax-exempt institution, you're protected unless you have some reason of knowing that they're going to spend this money in a manner that would violate regulations. You try to give your money to individuals and institutions that are responsible – a Harvard professor and places like the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and Brookings.

**Q Harvard? Brookings? Aren't many of the scholars at those institutions Democrats?**

**Piereson:** A lot of the people that we give money to are Democrats. We don't even ask [about party affiliation]. I suppose they tend to be more conservative Democrats.

# A Tale of Two Think Tanks

The Brookings Institution and the Heritage Foundation rely heavily on the support of foundations, but their histories, missions, and reputations are poles apart. A quick comparison of the two reveals how conservative and mainline foundations achieve very different ends with grants to the two think tanks.

## ORIGINS

**Brookings Institution:** Founded in 1916 by industrial-era capitalists to be a source of neutral expertise for government, prescribing solutions to the problems that industrialism brought to the nation.

**Heritage Foundation:** Founded in 1973 by former Republican congressional staff to produce and market policy-relevant research from a conservative perspective.

## OPENING COMMENT

**Brookings Institution:** Its founders observed, “It is essential for the permanent standing of an institute of economic research that it should early establish its reputation as scientific, impartial, and unprejudiced in its finding and presenting of the facts as to economic and social conditions.”

**Heritage Foundation:** One of its founders remarked, “We realized that we not only needed a Republican Study Committee on the inside [of Congress] to help the congressman with internal staff, but we needed something on the outside to promote ideas and do the longer-term research, but still research that is policy-relevant. Hence Heritage.”

## MISSION STATEMENT

**Brookings Institution:** “The Brookings Institution ... is an independent, nonpartisan organization devoted to research, analysis, and public education with an emphasis on economics, foreign policy, governance, and metropolitan policy.”

**Heritage Foundation:** “The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute – a think tank – whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.”

## TRIBUTES

**Brookings Institution:** On the occasion of its 50th anniversary, President Lyndon Johnson remarked: “The men of Brookings did it by analysis, by painstaking research, by objective writing, by an imagination that quested the ‘going’ way of doing things, and then they proposed alternatives. ... After 50 years of telling the government what to do, you are more than a private institution. ... You are a national institution, so important ... that if you did not exist we would have to ask someone to create you.”

**Heritage Foundation:** On the occasion of its 20th anniversary, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich remarked: “[The Heritage Foundation] is without question the most far-reaching conservative organization in the country in the war of ideas, and one which has had a tremendous impact not just in Washington, but literally across the planet.”

## CLOUT AND CREDIBILITY

**Brookings Institution:** In a 1997 survey of congressional staff and journalists about 27 think tanks, Brookings ranked as the second-most influential and as No. 1 in credibility.

**Heritage Foundation:** In the same survey, Heritage ranked as No. 1 in influence and ninth in credibility.

Founding statement of Institute of Economic Research: interview with Heritage Foundation president Edwin Feulner, July 30, 1996; Brookings Institution, Heritage Foundation; “Public Papers of the President of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966, Book II” (Government Printing Office, 1967); The Heritage Foundation 1994 Annual Report; Andrew Rich, “Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise.”

leader observed, “Liberal foundations are liberal not just in their belief in social and economic justice, but also in their belief in the possibility of neutrality, which makes them uncomfortable with making grants that seem too ‘political.’” The comments of a research director of a new progressive think tank are even more pointed: “If you’re on the left, you have to go to the foundations and say you’re neutral, unbiased – not politicized. You’re

certainly not liberal. If you’re ideological, they don’t want to support you. It’s frustrating – because, by contrast, if you’re on the right, the foundations will only fund you if you toe the ideological line, if you want to do battle for the conservative cause.”

So where is much of the money from the more progressive or liberal foundations going? It is going to think tanks that shun being classified as either liberal or conservative, including the



Brookings Institution, the Urban Institute, and Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). This type of think tank – think tanks of no identifiable ideology – makes up the greatest proportion operating in American politics, and these groups receive the biggest portion of resources that go to think tanks. In 1996, there were more than twice as many think tanks of no identifiable ideology (96), like Brookings and MDRC, operating in national politics than think tanks that were identifiably liberal (38); the total dollar amount devoted to these think tanks of no identifiable ideology was more than six times more than that spent on liberal think tanks.<sup>11</sup> For the most part, however, these groups are not major players in the war of ideas. They are not a counterweight to conservative think tanks, and they don't want to be. The Brookings Institution is qualitatively different from the Heritage Foundation. Brookings and its researchers are not so concerned, in their work, in affecting the ideological direction of the nation. Brookings tends to be staffed by researchers with strong academic credentials, whereas Heritage is staffed by researchers with more political experience.

And while Brookings devotes most of its budget to research, Heritage puts a substantial portion into media and government relations. In 2004, Brookings spent 3 percent of its \$39 million budget on communications; in 2002, the most recent year for which information is available, Heritage spent 20 percent of its \$33 million budget on public and government affairs.<sup>12</sup> Reflecting on this difference, Herb Berkowitz, Heritage's former vice president for communication, observed: "Our belief is that when the research product has been printed, then the job is only half done. That is when we start marketing it to the media. ... We have as part of our charge the selling of ideas, the selling of policy proposals. We are out there actively selling these things, day after day. It's our mission."<sup>13</sup>

Today, it is not so much that progressive foundations will not support policy research. The problem now is that these foundations will not support progressive policy think tanks that are focused, in the ways that conservative think tanks are, on promoting progressive policy change through research, advocacy, and the marketing of ideas.

### Ideas Need Strong Organizations

The war of ideas remains a loosely defined phenomenon and more substantial examination of the ways it is (or is not) being won by conservatives demands further research. Yet the preliminary evidence suggests that conservative think tanks have made marketing conservative ideas a priority with the full knowledge and support of conservative foundations. This is what the conservative funders want them to do, and it is what makes conservative think tanks not only well funded but also influential.

Some new evidence suggests that a few more progressive or mainline foundations may be starting to engage the war of ideas in earnest – more or less on the terms set by their conservative counterparts. The creation in 2003 of the Center for

American Progress (CAP) by President Clinton's former chief of staff, John Podesta, is perhaps the best example. CAP is a new progressive think tank organized to do battle in the war of ideas following a model similar to that of the Heritage Foundation on the right. George Soros and his foundation, the Open Society Institute, provide substantial support to CAP. Still, CAP and several other new progressive initiatives are raising at least as much support from individuals as from foundations, where some of the obstacles outlined in this article are still in place.

New commitments by nonconservative foundations have been modest and suggest that interest in investing in the infrastructure for the war of ideas remains weak. The missions and complicated leadership structures of some of these foundations may make adjusting to the war of ideas difficult or undesirable. But in light of the stakes for American politics and policymaking, non-conservative foundations should at least reconsider their political role, how they do grantmaking, and the return they hope to achieve on their investments.

At this moment, conservatives are still winning in the war of ideas, and that success cannot be chalked up only to the power of their ideas. It is because these ideas have a winning organization behind them. □

1 See Jeff Krehely et al., *Axis of Ideology: Conservative Foundations and Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2004); Callahan, D. *\$1 Billion for Ideas: Conservative Think Tanks in the 1990s* (Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 1999); and Covington, S. *Moving a Public Agenda: The Strategic Philanthropy of Conservative Foundations* (Washington, D.C.: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 1997).

2 A similar argument was made in a 1998 article in the *Nation* by Michael Shuman, former director of the Institute for Policy Studies. He pointed out: "Foundations that support progressive causes actually have lots of money, more than their conservative counterparts. The real problem – and it finally needs to be aired publicly – is that too much of this money is spent foolishly." Shuman, M. "Why Progressive Foundations Give Too Little to Too Many," *The Nation* (Jan. 12/19, 1998): 12.

3 The Foundations 1000, 2002/2003 directory (2002) that I used in compiling the information classify spending into more than 75 categories that range from museums to human service agencies to libraries to international NGOs.

4 This list is similar to the group of foundations that Shuman examined in his 1998 article in the *Nation*.

5 Rich, A. *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

6 Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*.

7 Congressional investigations of the Ford Foundation and foundation activity generally in the 1960s informed some of the changes at foundations as well. These investigations culminated with enactment of the Tax Reform Act of 1969.

8 Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*.

9 Grants are designated as either general operating support or project-specific support depending upon how all, or the bulk, of the foundation support was designated. In cases where the foundation provided both general operating and project-specific funding, the grants are designated under the category where the greatest amount of support was designated for the year, based on information available.

10 Author interview with James Piereson, Feb. 2, 1999.

11 More than \$319.2 million was spent on think tanks of no identifiable ideology; only \$47.8 million was spent on liberal think tanks. In 1996, roughly \$156.4 million was spent on conservative think tanks. See Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*, p. 18-24.

12 These two categories of spending are not directly comparable, but even with a margin of error, the numbers illustrate the stark differences in how Heritage and Brookings are organized.

13 Author interview, July 22, 1996.