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### Brookings Report Re-examined

From: "Keith Woodard" <qwoodard@worldnet.att.net>  
Date: Sun, 30 Nov 1997 06:28:45 -0800  
Fwd Date: Sun, 30 Nov 1997 10:20:05 -0500  
Subject: Brookings Report Re-examined

The 1960 Brookings Institution Report is these days on the lips of everyone from aging ufologists to Johnny-come-lately Art Bell listeners. The popular impression, partly rooted in sensationalized press reports of the time, is of a document prepared for NASA's 'Committee on Beings in Space', part of NASA's "research project to look into UFO phenomena". According to conventional ufology, Brookings concluded that society could well "collapse" were the public to learn of intelligent aliens, and warned that all such evidence must be suppressed for the sake of civilization itself.

The truth is quite different, albeit to some degree open to interpretation. The Brookings Report was actually prepared for NASA's Committee on Long-Range Studies. (I feel confident no 'NASA Committee on Beings in Space' ever existed, despite its mention in a UPI dispatch.) The report's purpose was to assist in the development of "a comprehensive and long-term program of research and study regarding the social, economic, political, and international implications of the use of space for peaceful and scientific purposes."

It is large: 219 pages, with another 100 pages of footnotes. (The full text can be extracted from:

[http://www.in-search-of.com/frames/nasa\\_brookings](http://www.in-search-of.com/frames/nasa_brookings)

then:

nasa\_bell.html

A direct route exists, but can't be here revealed because of a conflict between the posting rule on line length and that on complete URL's.) In the report is a section, occupying scarcely a page and a half, entitled, 'The Implications of the Discovery of Extraterrestrial Life'. (There are also three-and-a-half pages of footnotes to this. All the relevant portions of the report body and footnotes are conveniently found on Richard Hoagland's website at:

<http://www.enterprisemission.com/brooking.html>

What the report actually recommended with regard to these "implications," was "continuing studies to determine {the public's} emotional and intellectual understanding and attitudes -- and successive alterations of them if any -- regarding the possibility and consequences of discovering intelligent extraterrestrial life." It did raise the possibility of withholding information, but took no position on its

advisability. "Questions one might wish to answer by such studies," intoned the report, "would include: how might such information, under what circumstances, be presented to or withheld from the public for what ends? What might be the role of the discovering scientists and other decision makers regarding release of the fact of discovery?" Those two sentences comprise the report's entire commentary on the subject of covering up the truth.

Lamenting the paucity of data on which to base predictions, the report pointed out that public reaction could become both extreme and transformational. However, the authors did not view this in purely unfavorable terms. "The knowledge that life existed in other parts of the universe," they observed, "might lead to a greater unity of men on earth, based on the oneness of man or on the age-old assumption that any stranger is threatening."

The report did find the POSSIBILITY of severe disruption worrisome, most forcefully expressing this with the remark, "Whether earthmen would be inspired to all-out space efforts by such a discovery is a moot question. Anthropological files contain many examples of societies, sure of their place in the universe, which have disintegrated when they have had to associate with previously unfamiliar societies espousing different ideas and different life ways; others that survived such an experience usually did so by paying the price of changes in values and attitudes and behavior."

It seems to me this passage contains much room for interpretation. Was the dissolution of primal cultures invoked only to dramatize the disruptive potential inherent in first contact, or were the authors actually considering this a realistic possibility for our own civilization? I find it significant that this sentence (and one summarizing it, if we consider the report and the report summary) contains the sole reference in the entire report to any sort of large-scale calamity menacing the public. (Ironically, the authors, in a footnote, seemed more anxious about the "devastating" psychological effects "it has been speculated" might befall scientists and engineers rather than risk to the public at large. Including this latter concern, then, I count three sentences. In a fourth, a footnote predicts that fundamentalists would find the news "electrifying.")

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