

Briefings

OTR 77-7303

18 APR 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Director for Administration

FROM: Harry E. Fitzwater
Director of Training

SUBJECT: Questions and Attitudes Regarding CIA
as Discerned through Briefings

1. Based upon questions and comments expressed by the audiences who received briefings on CIA since the first of the year, the OTR Briefing Officer has synthesized the following report:

a. High School Groups: Generally open-minded, curious about CIA, and nonideological in attitude. Questions invariably cover assassination of foreign leaders, overthrowing of governments (Chile), domestic spying, and alleged CIA implication in the assassination of President Kennedy. These are tough questions, but they are not usually asked in a hostile tone. These students are much appreciative of candor. The briefings are well received, as is evidenced by the 2,400 high school students from all over the nation who participated in the 1977 Presidential Classroom. This is the only program for which objective, comparative ratings are available. Of 18 such seminars conducted in 1977, CIA was ranked highest by the students.

b. College Groups: More widely read than the high school students, they have had considerable exposure to the press attacks on CIA. They are now anxious to hear the CIA side. Some are troubled by assassination plots, Chile, and domestic spying--others by secrecy and covert action in general. But one no longer encounters the moral outrage of 1975. One can get through to them better now and help them see things in perspective. Discussion periods are often quite stimulating and sophisticated with these groups.


c. Civic and Professional Groups: Usually more conservative than academic groups and with greater reservations about the press, they are not anti-CIA. However,

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they are not pro-CIA in the sense in which they might be said to be pro-military or pro-FBI. They just don't know CIA and many are more isolationist than internationalist. But they are intelligent and responsive to the appeal of an organization in the service of our country. These groups should not be overlooked, as it is a question of solidifying latent support. This can be done simply by telling the story of CIA's contributions to the nation. Once ignorance is dispelled, they are sympathetic to CIA.


2. We recognize that the briefing effort is relatively minuscule when viewed against the general public's knowledge, or better lack of knowledge, about CIA and its work. We believe, however, that even our relatively limited effort is most worthwhile in contributing to better public understanding, particularly in the local area. Our feedback generally indicates that the groups who are briefed have been impressed with the candor and general quality of the briefings. As many are sponsored by congressmen and other key figures, the effort has the additional value of contributing to a favorable Agency image among such groups' sponsors.

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