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C-SPAN

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12-28-89

Dear Sir: I wish to protest with vigour a habit of T.V. (and C-SPAN) newspeople of constantly referring to "think tanks" when they mean institutes devoted to scholarly research, study and thought. Lets stop insulting our best minds and an activity that America does in an excellent fashion: scholarly research and study in many commendable ways. At least once an evening a news-person says, "think tank", instead of instead of "research institute" or "study center". Think of Einstein spending his later years in the Princeton Think Tank for Advanced Study! If the beer bar knew of study and research centers, they would call them think tanks perhaps.

Think of the image you constantly put before the public : a tank (as for gasoline, sewage, oil, water etc.) wherein thinking is done , held, stored etc.. The thinkers seem to be housed in this tank and do thinking there! What a strange , unaccustomed place to think! Such a stupid metaphor seems unaccountably acceptable in America, a country thickly populated with intellectuals of all sorts!

Do mothers "baby" in "baby holes" or "baby boxes"? Do doctors care for us in "sick tanks" rather than hospitals? Do businessmen do business well enough, you get my drift. Think tank rhymes with stink tanks, or septic tanks.

Incongruously the tank seems to be for "think" stuff. At the very least we might say "thought tank"!

Think tank represents the worst humiliation and put-down of brain work.

Think how those paragons of our electronic journalism, McNeil-Lehrer of Ch. 28 are found saying "think tank". How would you view it if gynecologists insistently talked about "female plumbing"?

If you think this is a dither I am indulging as a word kook, think of the suggestion they are handing our youngsters ' (heaven forfend): thought or study or intellectual work is a goofy activity done in goofy places by ridiculous people!

RE: "THINK TANKS & PUBLIC POLICY"; 12-27-89; Assoc. for Public Policy Mgt.

Yours with hope,

P.S. Your recent discussion program on "Think Tanks" used this ugly phrase* to title itself. Why in God's name for? I'm not objecting to occasional humorous use etc., but to the usage as a standard mode of referral. What the hell for?
*(and repeatedly in the discussion) /sm

Harry Truman Popularized Term 'Think Tank'

BEFORE IT was used as a term describing a research institute, "think tank" was used to refer to the brain.

According to "Safire's Political Dictionary," Harry Truman used the phrase on his 80th birthday in 1964, saying that he hoped to live until he was 90, but only "if the old think tank is working."

During a three-part series airing Dec. 27-Dec. 29, C-SPAN will examine the role and operations of Washington think tanks (see program story page S-1).

The term "think tank" became popular for research institutes in the '60s. In 1967, *New York Times* reporter Richard Reeves wrote a weeklong series of articles

about think tanks titled "U.S. Think Tanks: A \$2 Billion Industry."

"The work of think tanks is often similar to work done by universities, industrial research and development departments, and management consultants," the story said.

"Although the term is used
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C-SPAN Special Examines Role of Think Tanks

*Harry Truman Originally
Used Term to Refer to the
Human Brain*

(from page 1)

arbitrarily, the think tanks have one thing in common: all are groups of men with impressive credentials who conduct inter-disciplinary research."

In his entry on think tanks, William Safire points out the need for think tanks in the hectic world of politics: "In politics as well as science, the necessity for solitude and time to figure out plans and programs in the midst of hectic campaigns is always a problem, and many politicians envy the scientists at think tanks their reflective opportunity.

"When Sen. David Hill of New York was told that Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan was making up to 16 campaign speeches a day, he wondered pointedly: 'When does he think?'"