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MR. SUNSTEIN'S NEIGHBORHOOD

WON'T YOU BE OUR CO-AUTHOR?

Paul H. Edelman & Tracey E. George!

In Six Degrees of Cass Sunstein: Collaboration Networks in Legal Scholarship¹ we began the study of the collaboration network in legal academia. We concluded that the central figure in the network was Professor Cass Sunstein of Harvard Law School² and proceeded to catalogue all of his myriad co-authors (so-called Sunstein 1's) and their co-authors (Sunstein 2's). In this small note we update that catalogue as of August 2008 and take the opportunity to reflect on this project and its methodology.

Collaboration networks, which map connections based on pairs of people working together, are one example of the application of network theory to human behavior. Network theory has been applied to any number of human institutions to study links between blogs, judges' citations of other judges, social acquaintances, and so on. The number and patterns of connections can reveal various aspects of the human activity under consideration. Thus, the fact that any single person may be introduced to another person through five or fewer acquaintances may reveal that the world is a smaller place than we otherwise imagined.

A collaboration network seeks to examine the interconnectedness of an occupation, field, or industry such as movies, as in the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon game, or mathematics as in the almost as famous Erdős number. Such networks may tell us something about an individual in the network. For example, the closer a person is to a central figure in an industry – the fewer the degrees of separation between an actor and Bacon or the lower a

¹ Edelman is Professor of Law and Professor of Mathematics and George is Professor of Law and Professor of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. We thank Yun Chen for valuable research assistance on this project.

¹¹ Green Bag 2d 19 (2007); see also Paul H. Edelman & Tracey E. George, Sunstein 1s and 2s, in The Green Bag Almanac and Reader 473 (Ross Davies ed., 2008).

² Sunstein, who is the most cited legal scholar and one of the most prolific, joined Harvard as the Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law in 2008. www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/directory/index.html?id=552. At the time of our first article Sunstein was at the University of Chicago Law School. This raises a number of interesting questions about the effect of collaboration on faculty mobility, but such a study will have to be postponed for a later time.

scholar's Erdős number – arguably the more central that person is to the discipline. A collaboration network may also tell us about the industry itself: The lower the average degrees of separation between people in the industry, the more tightly connected the field.

At the time of our first paper, Sunstein — the legal academy's Erdős — had co-authored with 73 different people. Those 73 people had 837 co-authors who had not themselves co-authored with Sunstein. As of August 2008, those numbers have risen to 96 (Table 1) and 1632 (Table 2) respectively. The relevant tables are appended to this article. What explains this dramatic increase? We can imagine three possible explanations that we'll consider in turn.

First, the publication of any network revealing a central figure will create an incentive to work with that person or at least to work with someone who has worked with the central figure. Simply put: Our article explains the dramatic increase. Skeptical? Well, consider that someone auctioned on Ebay the opportunity to be an Erdős 3 – the seller was an Erdős 2 who was willing to give a co-author credit for a fee. Our own experience lends some credence to this theory as well. After posting the original article we received quite a number of e-mails from Sunstein 1's and 2's who mistakenly had been omitted from the original listing. All that being said, we too have doubts that this explanation is compelling, leading us to the next possible explanation.

An alternative – or additional – factor could be that the numbers reflect an outlier publication – one with an unusually large number of coauthors – that has skewed the results. Collaboration networks define collaboration as working together in the same capacity whether as actors in a movie (Bacon) or co-authors on a published work (Erdős). We define collaboration in our study as being a co-author on any published scholarly work. This requires defining co-authorship and scholarship. To be a coauthor, an individual must be listed in the "by" line. Thus, contributors identified in an acknowledgement footnote – even those who offered significant input – are not included. We also did not include editors of work published in an edited collection because editors typically are not engaged in the collaborative process in the same way.

We admit that individuals not listed as co-authors often are working closely with authors without this credit. However, we chose - as other

³ It is worth noting that the editors of this fine publication are quite explicit on this subject: "Colleagues who make substantial contributions should share the byline. Colleagues who are helpful in small ways should be recognized in something printed by Hallmark, not the *Green Bag.*" www.greenbag.org/submissions.php. We know of no other publication that is as specific in its rules for allocating credit.

studies have chosen – to emphasize a comparable role in the creative process. But, not all listed co-authors are actually co-creators. Co-authorship status may be assigned to individuals who were not closely involved in a work because the other authors wanted to grant some credit to a person, such as a graduate student, who provided meaningful assistance to one or all co-authors, or had to give credit to someone who was initially committed to the project but failed ultimately to participate. Of course, we can't know whether listed co-authors were meaningfully involved in the work without being part of that process ourselves. And we need an efficient, relatively effective measure of true collaboration. While a large number of co-authors on a paper might make one suspicious about whether all of them were truly involved, a small number might just as easily underestimate the contribution of an uncredited individual. At the end of the day, we stand by our co-authoring criterion as being the best possible compromise.

A final possible explanation is that there is an underlying intellectual trend that isn't visible to us given the structure of our data. We began collecting data last year, and our data is not organized by year. Thus, we don't know whether this increase is consistent with the rate of increase in recent years. There are reasons to imagine this might be the case. Law has become increasingly interdisciplinary over the past decade, and Sunstein has been a leader in collaboration with scholars in other fields including psychology and economics. While the rate of co-authorship in law appears to have stagnated, social science articles are more likely to be authored by multiple individuals. Thus, as Sunstein writes with more psychologists and economists, the resulting work is more likely to be authored by more than two people. And, those social scientists also will be one of several co-authors on their own work.

We sought to evaluate these alternative explanations by focusing on the new Sunstein 1's. There is little doubt that a single article is responsible for much of the increase in Sunstein 1's. Sunstein co-wrote an article with 24 people and 20 of them were first-time co-authors. If Sunstein worked in high energy physics, this would not be so unusual, but for a legal academic such an article is highly unusual.

⁴ Kenneth Arrow, et. al., The Promise of Prediction Markets, 320 Science 877 (2008).

⁵ Opening the current issue of Physical Review Letters one finds the article: "S. Leoni, G. Benzoni, N. Blasi, A. Bracco, S. Brambilla, F. Camera, A. Corsi, F. C. L. Crespi, P. Mason, B. Million, D. Montanari, M. Pignanelli, E. Vigezzi, O. Wieland, M. Matsuo, Y. R. Shimizu, D. Curien, G. Duchêne, J. Robin, P. Bednarczyk, M. Castoldi, B. Herskind, M. Kmiecik, A. Maj, W. Meczynski, J. Styczen, M. Zieblinski, K. Zuber, and A. Zucchiatti, *Probing the Order-to-Chaos Region in Superdeformed* ¹⁵¹Tb

More than unusual, this article is highly problematic for our methodology. Our study is predicated on the assumption that a joint publication is evidence of a collaborative relationship. Should we believe that the article in question represents a collaborative effort on the part of the authors or merely a joint assertion of their individual positions? Our instinct is that the latter is more likely than the former. On the other hand, it is almost certain that in the writing of the article there was some level of collaboration. Is an exercise in joint writing, even if the ideas themselves are not jointly conceived or developed, sufficient to be called "collaboration?"

A similar issue arose in our first paper, although we did not mention it at the time since the effect was less noticeable. In 1995 the Yale Law Journal published a comment titled *An Open Letter to Congressman Gingrich* that was signed by 17 law professors. It fit the criteria for inclusion that we had set out, and so we included it in our study. Nevertheless we had qualms at the time that the article had more of the qualities of an amicus brief than those of a scholarly publication.

While we find the inclusion of these articles problematic, it is hard to know how to respond. In order to do an empirical study of this sort, objective criteria for inclusion must be specified and the results tolerated. There are too many papers to consider each one separately using a "totality of the circumstances" standard. Publication in the Yale Law Journal should count for something and disqualifying articles with more than some fixed number of authors would bias the study in a different direction. Thus, we have opted to retain our original coding methodology – which mirrors that used in other collaboration and related network studies – and acknowledge the inherent limits posed by this method.

Although the number of academics within two degrees of Sunstein has increased substantially, neither of us made it to either list. Maybe next year?



and 186Pb Nuclei with Continuum 7 Transitions, 101 Phys. Rev. Lett. 142502 (2008)."

Bruce Ackerman, et. al., An Open Letter to Congressman Gingrich, 104 Yale L. J. 1539 (1995).

⁷ Voting Rights Act, 42 USC §1973 et seq. (2000), at § 2(b).

Ackerman, Bruce	Adler, Matthew D.
Yale Law School	Univ. of Pennsylvania Law School
Amar, Akhil Reed Yale Law School	Arrow, Kenneth J. Stanford Univ. Dept. of Economics
Ashley, Kevin D.	Baird, Douglas G.
Univ. of Pittsburgh School of Law	Univ. of Chicago Law School
Balkin, Jack M.	Barnett, Randy E.
Yale Law School	Georgetown Univ. Law Center
Bell, Anthony	Benartzi, Shlomo
Univ. of Chicago Dept. of Pediatrics	UCLA School of Management
Bloch, Susan Low	Bobbitt, Philip
Georgetown Univ. Law Center	Univ. of Texas Law School
Branting, L. Karl	Breyer, Stephen G.
BAE Systems, Inc.	U.S. Supreme Court
Cortes, Ernesto Jr. Industrial Areas Foundation	Dam, Kenneth Univ. of Chicago Law School
Elliott, E. Donald	Ellman, Lisa Michelle
Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP	Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw LLP
Epstein, Richard A. Univ. of Chicago Law School	Fallon, Richard Harvard Law School
Forsythe, Robert E. Univ. of S. Florida College of Business	Frank, Robert H. Cornell Univ. School of Management
Glaeser, Edward L.	Goldsmith, Jack L.
Harvard Univ. Dept. of Economics	Harvard Law School
Gorham, Michael IIT School of Business	Hahn, Robert W. AEI-Brookings Joint Ctr for Reg. Studies
Hanson, Robin D. George Mason Dept. of Economics	Hastie, Reid Univ. of Chicago School of Business
Holmes, Stephen NYU School of Law	Houston, Christopher E. Ropes & Gray LLP

^{*} Author information for Sunstein 1s reflects institutional affiliation in spring 2008, if available. If we were unable to locate the author, we report the institution affiliation, if any, listed in the publication.

Kahneman, Daniel J. Princeton Univ. Sch. of Pub. & Int'l Aff. King, Robert E. S. Orange Cty Community College Dist. Kurland, Philip Univ. of Chicago Law School (dec.) Ledyard, John O. Cal Tech Dept. of Economics Lessig, Lawrence Stanford Law School Levmore, Saul Univ. of Chicago Law School Margolis, Howard Univ. of Chicago School of Public Policy Meares, Tracey L. Yale Law School Michelman, Frank L
S. Orange Cty Community College Dist. Kurland, Philip Univ. of Chicago Law School (dec.) Ledyard, John O. Cal Tech Dept. of Economics Lessig, Lawrence Stanford Law School Levmore, Saul Univ. of Chicago Law School Margolis, Howard Univ. of Chicago School of Public Policy Meares, Tracey L. Yale Law School
Univ. of Chicago Law School (dec.) Ledyard, John O. Cal Tech Dept. of Economics Lessig, Lawrence Stanford Law School Levmore, Saul Univ. of Chicago Law School Margolis, Howard Univ. of Chicago School of Public Policy Meares, Tracey L. Yale Law School
Cal Tech Dept. of Economics Lessig, Lawrence Stanford Law School Levmore, Saul Univ. of Chicago Law School Margolis, Howard Univ. of Chicago School of Public Policy Meares, Tracey L. Yale Law School
Stanford Law School Levmore, Saul Univ. of Chicago Law School Margolis, Howard Univ. of Chicago School of Public Policy Meares, Tracey L. Yale Law School
Univ. of Chicago Law School Margolis, Howard Univ. of Chicago School of Public Policy Meares, Tracey L. Yale Law School
Univ. of Chicago School of Public Policy Meares, Tracey L. Yale Law School
Yale Law School
Michelman, Frank I.
Harvard Law School
Milgrom, Paul R. Stanford Univ. Dept. of Economics
Murphy, Kevin M. Univ. of Chicago School of Business
Neumann, George R. Univ. of Iowa Dept. of Economics
O'Neill, Catherine A. Seattle Univ. School of Law
Payne, John W. Duke Univ. School of Business
Pildes, Richard H. NYU School of Law
Post, Robert

Rapoport, Miles S. Demos	Ritov, Ilana Hebrew Univ. School of Education
Rosen, Sherwin	Rowell, Kristen Arden
Univ. of Chicago Dept. of Econ. (dec.)	Perkins Coie LLP
Rubenfeld, Jed	Sawicki, Andres
Yale Law School	Judicial Law Clerk, USCA 2nd Circuit
Schelling, Thomas C. Univ. of Maryland School of Public Policy	Schkade, David A. UCSD School of Management
Seidman, Louis Michael Georgetown Univ. Law Center	Shiller, Robert J. Yale Univ. Department of Economics
Smith, Vernon L.	Snowberg, Erik
Chapman Univ. School of Law	Stanford Univ. Graduate Sch. of Business
Spitzer, Matthew L. USC School of Law	Stewart, Richard B. NYU School of Law
Stone, Geoffrey R.	Strauss, David A.
Univ. of Chicago Law School	Univ. of Chicago Law School
Strauss, Peter L. Columbia Univ. Law School	Sullivan, Kathleen M. Stanford Law School
Tetlock, Paul C.	Tetlock, Philip E.
Yale Univ. School of Management	UC-Berkeley School of Business
Thaler, Richard H.	Tushnet, Mark V.
Univ. of Chicago School of Business	Harvard Law School
Ullmann-Margalit, Edna	Utkus, Stephen P.
Hebrew Univ. School of Education	Vanguard Center for Retirement Research
Varian, Hal R.	Vermeule, Adrian
UC-Berkeley School of Information	Harvard Law School
Viscusi, W. Kip	Waldron, Jeremy
Vanderbilt Law School	NYU School of Law
Weisbach, David A. Univ. of Chicago Law School	Wellington, Harry New York Law School
Wolfers, Justin	Zitzewitz, Eric W.
Univ. of Pennsylvania School of Business	Dartmouth Dept. of Economics

TABLE 2. ALL SUNSTEIN 2 AUTHORS (AUGUST 2008)

Abram, Thomas G. Abreu, Dilip Abt, Clark C. Ackerman, John Ackerman, Susan Rose Acquisti, Alessandro Acs, Zoltan J. Adamowicz, Wiktor Adams, Charles Adda, Jerome Ades, Alberto F. Adler, Barry Agee, Bobby Aha, David W. Aharon, L Akerlof, George A. Albright, James Aldrich, John Herbert Aldy, Joseph E. Aleinikoff, T. Alexander Alesina, Alberto F. Aleven, Vincent Allen, R. Michael Alstott, Anne Althoff, Klaus-Dieter Amar, Vikram Reed Amir, Eli Anderson, Elizabeth S. Anderson, John Anderson, Philip W. Anderson, Soren Anderson, Terry L. Andreon, James Ansolabehere, Stephen Antonanzas, Anton Antonanzas, Fernando Appelbaum, Paul S. Appiah, K. Anthony Argote, Linda Ariely, Dan Arkes, Hall R. Atlen, Jenniter H. Armor, David Asher, Thomas Athanasoulis, Stefano G. Athey, Susan Autman Chris Austin, John Ausubel, Lawrence M.

Avery, Christopher

Avro-Babad, Dinah

Axtell, Robert Ayres, Ian Azabou, Mongi Azar, Ofer H. Babcock, Linda Backerman, Sleven Baer, Arthur A. Baer, Susanne Baily, Martin Neil Baize, Harold R., Jr. Baker, Lynn A. Baker, Tom Baker-Brown, Gloria Ballard, Elizabeth J. Ballbach, John Daniel Baltussen, Guido Bankman, Joseph Banks, Jeffrey S. Barankin, E. W. Barberis, Nicholas Bar-Gill, Oren Baron, Ionathan Barr, Michael S. Barrett, Christopher Barry, Norman Bart, Susan T. Barth, James R. Bateman, Jan Bates, Robert Bator, Francis M. Baumol, William J. Baxter, William F. Bazerman, Max H. Beatty, Jackson Bebchuk, Lucian Arye Becker, Edward R. Becker, Gary S. Becker, Mary Becker, William Beckmann Marin Behbinder, Eckard Belkin, Auton Bell, Jason Bell, Nancy Bellman, Steve Belsky, Esic Sen-Ishat, K. Berther, Youthan

Berg, Joyce E. Berg, Thomas C. Berger, James E. Bergin, Tom Bergkamp, Lucas Bergmann, Ralph Bergstrom, Theodore C. Berkman, Richard Berkowitz, Bruce Bernanke, Ben Berndt, Ernst R. Bernstein, Donald S. Bernstein, Peter L. Bernzweig, Jane Berry, Christopher K. Berry, Donald Berry, Jane M. Besen, Stanley Betman, James K. Bierer, Michael F. Bilder, Richard B. Binder, Denis Bishop, Richard C. Blackmon, Gleen Blackwell, D. Blair, Irene V. Blair, Margaret Blanchard, Olivier J. Blitzstein, David Block, H. D. Bloom, Jeremy Bluck, Susan Blume, Andrew Blume Lawrence Boettger, Richard Bollag, Burton Bollinger, Lee C. Boltock, Richard Roman Eric Band, Christopher S. Borner, Sarah E. 55.00 Borick, Matthew Fort, Patricia 5101 No. of the State o Bosworth, Barry Boudreaux, Donald I

Bensoussan, Alain

Benston, George

Bove, Timothy Bowles, Samuel Bowlus, Audra I. Boycko, Maxim Boyd, Roy Bradley, Curtis A Bradlow, Eric Brady, Henry E. Brainard, Lael Brana, Francisco I. Bratton, W. Kennethi Brauer, Jurgen Brauristein, Myron L. Breger, Marshall I. Breiter, H.C. Brennan, Donald G. Breslauer, George W. Bresnahan, Timothy F. Brest, Paul Brilmayer, Lea Brinkley, Alan Bris, Arturo Brock, Timothy C. Brodsky, Steve Brody, Richard A. Bromage, Robert C. Bromwick, Market Brontman, Corinne M. Brookshire, David S. Droom, Patrick Brown, Thomas P. Brucato, Jr., P.F. Brumbaugh, Jr., R. Dan Bruninghaus, Stefanie Brunschwig Jacques Bryan, Angela Buccola: Steven Buchman, Thomas A. Bulfin, Robert L. Bunzel, Henning Burdett, Ken Burkell, Jacquelyn Burkholder, Steve Burnett, Jason K. Burnham, Terence Burtless, Gary Busemeyer, Jerome Butler, Judith Bybee, Jav S. Cagan, Phillip Caginalp, Gunduz Cain, Becky Cain, Louis Calabresi, Guido

Calabresi, Steven G. Calfee, John E. Califa, Antonio I Callaway, Charles B. Calomiris Charles Camerer, Colin Campbell, Bradlev M. Campbell, John Y Campbell, Joseph Cane, Peter Canina, Linda Cantu, Norma Capan, D.T. Caplan, Marc Caprio, Gerard Capron, William M. Carlin, Alan Carten, Deinis W. Carmines, Edward G. Carroll, John S. Carron, Andrew S. Carvallas, Iranica Case, Karl E. Casa, Glers Casa, Ronald A. Cate, Fred H. Cavallo, Garald Cavanagh, Sheila M. Carrie Cocot, Caroline Charceyk, D. Chan, Yee-Holl Charles Shall be Chang Shirte Charlest, Gall Charles Maria Chemericaky, Enviro Chen, January Chenery, Hollis B. Charles of the same Chesson, Harrell W. Chichilmisky, Graciela Chinnis, Jr., James O. Choi. Stephen I. Charles I and I a Chopen Navin Chorvat, Terrence R. Charles on Bentle Clark, Karen

Clesse, Armand Coglianese, Cary Cohen, Daniel Cohen, Joshua Cohen, Linda R. Cohen, Marvin S. Cole, William R. Collins, Ronald K.L. Colombatto, Enrico Colvin, Mary K. Connaughton, James L. Conover, C.J. Conquist, Herrik Conway, Lucien Gideon III Cook, Philip J. Cope, David Coppinger, V. Corfman, Kim Coricelli, Georgio Corkran, Kelsi Brown Corley, Dan Cosmides, Leda Costa-i-Font Joan Cottle, Richard W. Coupey, Eloise Courant, Paul Coursey, Don L. Cowen, Tyler Cowgill, Bo Cox, Adam B. Cox, James C. Cox, James D. Cramion, Peter Crandall, Robert W. Crandall, Ronald M. Crawford, Colin Crawford, Vincent Cremers, Martijn Creyer, Elizabeth H. Crider, A. Crocker, Jennifer Crockett, Sean Cropper, Maureen L. Crosby, Faye Crosby, Travis Crum, Roy L Cuccias, Matthew J. Curamings, Ronald G Cummins, Jason G. Cutier, David M. Cutler, Lloyd N. Daalder, Ivo H. Daily, Gretchen Date: A.

Claybrook, Ioan

Damiano, Peter Danovitch, Gabriel M. Dasgupta, Partha Daughety, Andrew F. Davidson, Cliff Davidson, Ralph K. Davis, Steven J. Dawes, Robyn M. Dawson, John P. Day, Richard Hollis Day, Robert De Bondt, Werner F.M. de Figueiredo, Miguel F.P. de la Garza, Rodolfo De Soto, Hernando de Sousa e Brito, Clara Sattler Deakin, Simon Debreu, Gerard Deere, Donald Dejong, Douglas V. Del Rossi, Alison Delgado, Mauricio R. DeMuth, Christopher Deng, Gang Denton, Michael Destler, I. M. (Mac) Desvousges, William H. Deutch, John M. Devereux, Michael P. Devine, Terry deVries, Brian DeWitt, Diane Diascro, Matthew N. Dickens, William T. Dickhaut, John Diederich, Adele Diener, Ed Dietrich, I. Richard Dikens, William T. Dinar, Anel Dinkin, Samuel H. Dionne, E. J. DiPasquale, Denise Djankov, Simeon Dockins, P. Christen Dolan, Paul Donnelly, David Donoghue, Kristen A. Donohue, John J. III Dorf, Michael C. Dorfman, Howard L. Douglas, H. Lugene

Dowlatabadi, Hadi

Dovle, Michael W.

Dreben, Elizabeth K. Dreyfus, Mark Drogosz, Kayla Meltzer Drory, Amos Dubin, leff Dubinsky, Paul Dudek, Daniel J. Dudley, Patrick M. Dumais, Guy Durbin, David Durham, Yvonne Durlauf, Steven N. Eads, George C: Eaves, B. Curtis Eberly, Janice Edell, Julie A. Edley, Jr., Christopher Eggleston, Karen Ehrlich, Isaac Ehrlich, Paul Eisenberg, Theodore Eizenstat, Stuart Elam, Joyce Eli, Michael Bar Ellickson, Robert Ellison, Glenn Elms, Laurel Elson, Sara Beth Emerson, Michael Encaoua, David Engelbrecht Wiggans, Richard Enthoven, Alain C. Erev, Rapporteur Ido Ericsson, K. Anders Eskridge, William N. Esposito, Joseph J. Esptein, David Estanol, Albert Banal Estlund, David M. Estrich, Susan R. Evans, William Fagan, Jeffrey Fair, Ray C. Fan. Elliott T. Faralli, Carla Farina, Cynthia R Farmer, J. Doyne

Feld, Scott L. Feldman, Jack Feltus, William Feng, Qi Fernandez, Irma-Becerra Fernandez, Jorge Ferrara, Alessandro Fershtman, Chaim Fessler, Daniel M.T. Feustel, Bruce Fiechter, Ionathan Field, Martha A. Fienberg, Stephen E. Fikentscher, Wolfgang Fine, Janice Fink, Howard P. Finkelstein, Claire Finney, Hal Finnis, John Fiorito, Jack Fischer, Gregory W. Fischer, Oliver Fischer, Stanley Fishback, Bowman Fisher, Anthony C. Fishkin, James Fiske, Alan Page Fiske, Susan T. Fitzsimmons, Stephen J. Flach, Stephen Flanders, Chad Fleischmann, Andrew M. Fleming, Lee Fletcher, Joseph F. Flom, Merton C. Flyer, Fredrick Fontana, David Forrest, Anne Foster, Vivien Fox, Craig R. Fox, Eleanor Foxhall, Lesley C. Frain, Laura Franciosi, Robert Frederick, Shane Fredrickson, Barbara L Freed, Mayer G. Freeman, Jody Freeman, Richard T. reied, Charles Friedland, Nehemia Friedman, Benjamin M. Friedman, David Friedman, Lawrence

Faro, David

Fauth, Gary

Feld, Peter

Farrell, Joseph

Faulhaber, Gerald R.

Feather, Timothy D.

Temberg, Kenneth R.

Friend, Irwin Fries, Erin Froot, Kenneth A. Fryer, Jr., Roland G. Fuchita, Yasayuki Fudenberg, Drew Fullerton, Don Furchtgott-Roth, Harold Gaba, Anil Gaines, Brian J. Gale, William Galebach, Brian Gallant, Jack L. Garcia Swartz, Daniel D. Garrett, Elizabeth Gaspar, Jess Gaston, Robert S. Gates, Susan Gati, Itamar Gauna, Eileen Gaver, Ted Geanakoplos, John Gelband, Hellen genannt Döhmann, Indra Spiecker Gentry, William M. Gentzkow, Matthew Gerhardt, Michael I. Gersen, Jacob Gertner, Robert Gessford, John Getman, Karen Ghiselli, Edwin E. Ghosh, Prodipto Gibbard, Allan Gibbs, Brian L Gigone, Daniel Gillis, Floyd E. Gilovich, Thomas Ginsburg, Ruth Bader Girshick, M. A. Gitenstein, Mark Gillin, Todd Gjerstad, Sieven Glaser, James M. Gleason, Abbott Glendon, Spencer Glewwe, Paul Glosten, Larry Glover, Jonathan Goetz, Stephan J. Goldberg, Julie H. Goldberg, Victor P.

Goldfeld, Stephen M.

Goldgeier, James M. Goldin, Claudia Dale Goldman, John T. Goldstein, Thomas C. Golove, David Goodman, Paul S. Gordon, Roger H. Gorham, William Gotfryd, William T. Gottlieb, Joshua D. Gould, William Goulder, Lawrence Grabowski, Henry Grafman, Jordan Graham, Carol Graham, John D. Gramm, Wendy L. Grant, Paul Green, Donald Philip Green, Melanie C. Green, Philip Greenberg, Karen J. Greene, William Gregory, C. Greif, Avner Greve, Michael S. Grey, Thomas C. Griffin, Dale W. Griffith, Rachel Griliches, Zvi Grimmelman, James Grofman, Bernard Gross, Leo Grossman, Michael Grossman, Sanford J. Groves, Theodore Grullon, Gustavo Grundfest, Joseph A. Guasch, J. Luis Gürkaynak, Refet S. Guinier, Lani Gulati, G. Mihi Gulbranson, Christine A. Gunnthorsdottir, Anna Gunter, David Gunther, Gerald Gurman, Jesse Guttentag, Jack Guttieri, Karen Gyourko, Joseph Haass, Richard N. Hagan, John

Hahn, F. H. Haig, Susan White Hair, Penda D. Hakes, Jahn K. Hakim, Peter Hall, Robert E. Halperin, Morton H. Hamilton, James T. Hammerle, Oliver Hammond, III, John S. Hammond, Kenneth R. Hanemann, Michael Hanley, Dena E. Hannum, Kristen A. Hansmann, Henry Hanson, James A-Hanushek, Eric A. Hao, Li Harbord, David Harcourt, Bernard E. Harrington, Jr., Joseph E. Harrington, Scott Harris, Theodore E. Harrison, Glenn W. Hart, Warren Harvey, Lewis O. Harvey, William Burnett Harwood, Alison Hassler, William T. Hastings, John Hatfield, John William Hauerwas, Stanley Hausman, Leonard Hawkins, David Hawkins, Scott A. Hazlett, Thomas W. Heal, Geoffrey Heaton, Paul S. Heffetz, Ori Heinzelman, Susan Sage Heinzerling, Lisa Hekeler, Richard W. Helft, Paul R. Hemelrijk, Charlotte K. Henderson, Dale W. Henderson, M. Todd Henderson, Stanley D. Henik, Avishai Henik, Erika Hermann, Douglas J. Herring, Richard J. Herrmann, Richard K. Hersch, Joni Hershey, J.C.

Hagel, III, John

Hagen, Michael G.

Hertwig, Ralph Hesse, Carla Hester, Gordon L. Higgins, Tracy Hines, It., James R. Hinich, Melvin J. Hipps, Robert Hird, John Hirsch, Alan Historier Tack Ho, Katty Hoch, Stephen I. Hoffenberg, Marvin Hoffman, Elizabeth Hoffmann, Stanley Holbrook, Morris Holmstrom, Bengt Holt, Charles A. Honkapohia, Seppo Hopkins, Thomas D. Horowitz, Alan B. Horowitz, Idel L. House Daniel Hout, Michael Howard, Matthew Howe, Amy Howitt, Richard E. Howev, Paulin Hace, Christopher K. House, Mary Huang, Peter H. Huber, Joel Hughes, James Huntington, Samuel P. Harriez Leonid Husbands, lo L. Hildrens Robert M. Hutchinson, Dennis J. Harrison John D. Hyman David A. Harris Marie M. Dieva, Vladmina A. Indeed Forum Desire Berry Intriligator, Michael D. Invitation (

Jackson, Thomas H.

Jacobs, Ann L. Jacobsen, Richard T. Jacowitz, Karen E. James, Bryan Lames, Mark Jarman, M. Casey Jarvenpaa, Sirkka L. Tefferis, Eric S. Jeffries, Jr., John C. lensen, P. Tensen, Shane T. Jeon, Bang Nam Tervis, Robert lezer, Marty Paraciani, R. Johnson, Eric J. Johnson, Joseph M. latera Selmer M. Johnson, Simon Johnson, Suzanne Nora (onathan Haidt, Rapporteur Jones, Donald R. Jones, William M. Tadd, Charles M. Juhn, Chinhui Jung, Chulho Jung, Jeeman Kafry, Ditsa Kahan, Dan M. Kahin, Brian Kahro Alfred E. Kahin, Barbara E. Kahn, Jeffrey P. Kahn, Matthew E. Kallal, Hedi D Kalt, Brian Kalt, Joseph P. Kalven, Harry Jr. Kameda, Tatsuya Kaminski, Robert J. Kamisat, Yale Kamlet, Mark S. Kanda Hideki Kane, Rosalie A. Kapiow, Louis Karasik, Arma D. Karlawan, Jason H. Kass, Lean

Katyal, Neel Katz, Eddan Katz, Joel Katz, Lawrence F. Katz, Michael L. Katz, Wilber G. Katzen, Sally Kaufman, George G. Kautsky, Nib Kawagishi, Norikazu Keart, James R. Keeney, Raigh L. Kanta Randi Kehoe, Timothy J. Keidar-Levin, Yadi Keinan, Giora Kendrick, Assi Kennedy, Danisas Kennedy, Maureen Kerr, William R. Kerwin, Jeffrey Keeder, Daniel P. Keter, Nicholas M. Kibistrom, John F. Kibourne, Lynda M. Kims, Ise U Carbrough, Erik King Descript S. King, Ronald K. Kingsbury, Benedid Klein, Berjamin Keinmantz, Orn N. Karana Alexandra Kiepper, Steven Kleizer, Lori G. Kingman, Danseit Control Marie Kara Peter Kalanda Kalanda Constant Comment of the Comment K. Name

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Mark Snyderman, a friend who clerked with [Lawrence] Lessig on the Supreme Court and is now a labor lawyer for Coca-Cola Co., witnessed what was perhaps Lessig's first demonstration of the power of computer code over the legal system, when as a clerk he was enlisted to help show Justices Scalia and O'Connor the difference between composing a decision on the court's ancient mainframe system compared to a personal computer. Both he and Snyderman were at computers — Snyderman using a terminal connected to the mainframe, Lessig using a PC. "We had identical documents on both computers," Snyderman recalled. "Larry said, 'Now imagine you're writing something and there's a word you've written and you think there's got to be a better word that works here. What do you do under the old system?"" Snyderman's response at the time was to stand up, go to a shelf and get a thesaurus. "What do you do under the new system?' Larry hit the thesaurus key. Scalia went wild. That's it, he was completely sold."

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