



# Chronicling 100 Years of the U.S. Economy

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## Top Influencers

The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) and its journal, the *Survey of Current Business*, are respected sources of data on the health of our national economy due in large part to the individuals who influenced BEA and its predecessor agencies over the past century. From economic theory to the mechanics of producing reliable statistics, their contributions helped make BEA and its accounts the reliable, authoritative sources of economic data they are today. The *Survey* has chronicled the evolution of BEA's output for almost a century.

As we celebrate the centennial of the *Survey*, some of these top influencers will be profiled on the [centennial website](#). This month, we present economist **Carol Carson**.

## Carol Carson

### Creating BEA's Culture of Continuous Improvement

By Andrew D. Reamer

Guided by highly talented directors over the last several decades, the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) has become a consistently vibrant and vital organization. In the realm of national economic accounting, BEA has learned to successfully negotiate the balance between continuity and innovation—employing complex methods to produce reliable numbers on fixed schedules and, at the same time, regularly developing both incremental and radical improvements in those methods in consultation with leading outside experts.

Carol Stine Carson, more than any other single individual, catalyzed the aspiration and realization of BEA's culture of continuous improvement. She did so, with increasing impact, across 23 years at the agency—first as Assistant to Director George Jaszi (1972–1976), then as Editor-in-Chief of the *Survey of Current Business* (1976–1990), Chief of the Current Business Analysis Division (1976–1982), Chief Economist (1982–1985), Deputy Director (1985–1992), and, most particularly, Director (1992–1995).

Carson's substantial body of work and achievements suggests she was guided by—and subsequently imbued BEA's culture with—three principles.

**The first principle is to document and know the history of economic accounting.** Carson believed that for the field to determine where it might go, it had to understand where it had been. Throughout her career, Carson published works that facilitated the construction of a detailed narrative of the field's evolution. As shown in the table below, Carson's works of history extend from her 1971 doctoral



Carol Carson

dissertation on “The History of the United States Income and Product Accounts: The Development of an Analytical Tool” to the opening essay of this *Survey* centennial series, “[Some Inflection Points in BEA's Pursuit of Its Mission](#).”

In her efforts to reconstruct the past, Carson was aided significantly by her close working relationships with two major figures in economic accounting's second generation, both on her dissertation committee—John Kendrick, the chair, and BEA Director [George Jaszi](#), who promptly hired her as his assistant. Kendrick and Jaszi had begun their careers under the tutelage of [Simon Kuznets](#) and [Robert Nathan](#). In this way, then, Carson served as the bridge between the field's storied past and its present.

**The second principle evident in Carson's work is to consistently document, evaluate, and improve economic accounting methods.** She began her professional career as the author of multiple chapters in Kendrick's *Economic Accounts and Their Uses* (1972). In her first decade at BEA, as she recently wrote in the *Survey*, she witnessed firsthand the problems caused by the absence of methodological documentation and improvement. In response, she was instrumental in the *Survey*'s publication of a series of articles, beginning in 1985, that codified BEA methodology. Then, as Director in the 1990s, Carson initiated a top-to-bottom “Mid-Decade Strategic Review of BEA's Economic Accounts” that instilled processes of continuous documentation and improvement, and ongoing engagement of the academic community (through the BEA Advisory Committee), that continue to this day.

Further, as Deputy Director and Director, Carson saw to the completion of the *System of National Accounts (SNA) 1993*, forming a BEA team to lead and coordinate this landmark international effort's final, and most difficult, stages. In so doing, she raised BEA's standing in the international official statistics community. She then reprised her SNA leadership role after leaving BEA, managing the update effort that resulted in *SNA 2008*.

**The third principle observed in Carson's work is to develop and facilitate innovations in economic accounting.** She recognized that in addition to generating a stream of incremental improvements, economic accountants must actively explore opportunities for more radical contributions. In two 1984 *Survey* articles, Carson pioneered approaches to accounting for the underground economy. Most significant for BEA's development, in the mid-1990s, Carson championed the creation of satellite accounts to capture dimensions not visible in traditional economic accounts. While political leadership did not let BEA build its proposed integrated economic and environmental satellite accounts, the National Academies enthusiastically ratified the concept. As a result, over the last two decades, BEA has constructed an ever-growing number of satellite accounts—in sectors such as research and development, health care, digital economy, household production, and tourism, and soon, measures of economic well-being.

Carson recognized that the prerequisite for creating a BEA culture of continuous improvement is appointing leaders who can communicate, and set expectations for, adherence to its principles. In naming Steven Landefeld as BEA Deputy Director, Carson ensured the progressive implementation of her approach—to understanding the past, documenting and enhancing the present, and inventing the future—over the next 25 years. Landefeld, as Director from 1995 to 2014, and Brian Moyer, Landefeld's deputy who became director from 2014 to 2020, wove Carson's principles into BEA's daily operations—resulting in the vibrant, vital agency we see today.

## Carol Carson's Achievements in Economic Accounting, as an Author, Collaborator, and Leader: A Statistically Significant Sampling

Documenting history of accounting	Documenting, evaluating, and improving methods	Developing and catalyzing innovations
"The History of the United States Income and Product Accounts: The Development of an Analytical Tool," doctoral dissertation, George Washington University, 1971.	<i>Economic Accounts and Their Uses</i> , 1972 (collaboration).	
"History of the U.S. National Income and Product Accounts: The Development of an Analytical Tool," <i>Review of Income and Wealth</i> , June 1975.	"An Introduction to National Economic Accounting," <i>Survey of Current Business</i> , March 1985.	
"Tribute to George Jaszi on his Retirement," <i>Survey</i> , February 1985.	"The Use of National Income and Product Accounts for Public Policy: Our Successes and Failures," Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), 1986 (collaboration).	
	"GNP: An Overview of Source Data and Estimating Methods," <i>Survey</i> and BEA Methodology Paper No. 4, 1987	"The Underground Economy: An Introduction," <i>Survey</i> , May and July 1984.
"The Conference on Research in Income and Wealth: The Early Years," in <i>Fifty Years of Economic Measurement: The Jubilee of the Conference on Research in Income and Wealth</i> , 1991.	"The United Nations System of National Accounts: An Introduction," <i>Survey</i> , June 1990.	
"In Memoriam: George Jaszi," <i>Review of Income and Wealth</i> , Series 39, Number 2, June 1993.	<i>System of National Accounts 1993</i> (leadership).	
	"Mid-Decade Strategic Review of BEA's Economic Accounts," <i>Survey</i> , February and April 1995 (leadership).	"Integrated Economic and Environmental Satellite Accounts," <i>Survey</i> , April 1994 (leadership).
"50-Year Retrospective of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth: The Early Years," <i>Review of Income and Wealth</i> , series 45, No. 3, September 1999.	"Fostering the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics," <i>Statistical Journal of the United Nations ECE</i> , Vol. 15, 1998.	
	Creation of BEA Advisory Committee, 1999 (as recommended by Mid-Decade Review).	
	"Manuals on Macroeconomic Statistics: A Stocktaking to Guide Future Work," IMF Working Paper No. 01/83, November 1, 2001 and <i>Statistical Journal of the United Nations ECE</i> , Vol. 19, 2002 (collaboration).	"Toward a Framework for Assessing Data Quality," IMF Working Paper No. 01/25, March 1, 2001.
	"International Data Dissemination Standards" in <i>Accounting Standards for Central Banks</i> , Central Banking Publications, 2003 (collaboration).	
"Some Inflection Points in BEA's Pursuit of Its Mission," <i>Survey</i> , Volume 100, Number 7, July 2020.	"Revisions Policy for Official Statistics: A Matter of Governance," IMF Working Paper No. 04/87, May 1, 2004 (collaboration).	
	<i>System of National Accounts 2008</i> (leadership).	