

# DAILY HAMPSHIRE GAZETTE

## **A powerful cabal's theft of our future**

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I watched with concern and anger the televised punching of a black demonstrator by a white Donald Trump supporter at Trump's Fayetteville rally. I knew that, like most things in politics, the racially infused violence was not an aberrancy, but had long been nurtured by a mainstream culture that has never dealt with either slavery or Jim Crow.

And in more recent years the racism has been spurred by a Republican Party that has vilified and demeaned our first black president.

I write about the environment. Why am I talking about racially and politically motivated violence?

Fox News has described the Tea Party resistance to everything Obama has proposed for the last seven years as a spontaneous rebellion by the angry grassroots. In reality, though, that opposition was the result of a well-orchestrated, heavily funded effort initiated by the brothers Charles and David Koch, who within months of the 2008 election brought together a group of fellow billionaires and their own expanding circles of foundations, nonprofits, lobbying groups and political action groups.

The goals of the "Koch Donor Group," as author Jane Mayer calls them in her authoritative new book, "Dark Money," were to lower or eliminate taxes on the very richest (like themselves), to achieve that through shredding the social safety net including the entitlements Medicare and Social Security and to abolish all regulations on the profit-taking by industry, be they financial or physical.

The first victims of the right-wing onslaught were Obama's stimulus package and Obamacare. The attacks were carried out by a host of Koch-funded groups: Americans for Prosperity, FreedomWorks and the Center to Protect Patients' Rights backed by the "think tank" American Enterprise and Cato Institutes. Racism against the new president was a vehicle to rally the troops among the disaffected and unemployed in the Republican ranks.

Let us remember, though, that in 2008 Barack Obama was elected as the "environmental president," the first to boldly declare that he would combat the rising threat of global warming and environmental destruction.

And one of the most important Koch group targets from the beginning of the Obama presidency was any effort by Congress to cut carbon emissions.

For, you see, Koch Industries is a fossil fuel company, guilty of environmental crimes, the most heinous (documented) being the massive release of benzene into the air in Corpus Christi in the 1990s. In 2010 Koch was rated one of the 10 top polluters in the country by the Political Economy Research Institute at UMass, and in 2012 the EPA labelled it the top corporate producer of toxic waste.

Between 2003 and 2012, \$558 million was poured into 91 different nonprofit organizations to deny that climate change was occurring and to reject all evidence it was caused by humans burning fossil fuels.

Is it any wonder that the largest bankrollers of this effort were the Kochs, joined by their donor allies the Scaife and Bradley Foundations (also fossil-fuel dependent) and, of course, Exxon-Mobil? According to Robert Brulle, quoted in Mayer's book, "Powerful funders are supporting the campaign to deny scientific findings about global warming and raise public doubts about the roots and remedies of this massive global threat."

And their effort worked. "Merchants of Doubt," Naomi Oreskes' eye-opening book and film, documents the high-paid advertising agents and prostituted scientists who created and implemented climate denial, riddling the press with cooked stories opposing the accepted science.

The Koch-based political machine successfully attacked those U.S. legislators who supported the cap-and-trade law that Obama presented. They killed that albeit weak scheme to put a price on emissions that could be traded in a national market.

Any chance for its resurrection was eliminated by a Tea Party Republican takeover of both houses of Congress in 2014. That electoral slaughter was facilitated by the Supreme Court's Citizens United ruling which unleashed corporate (particularly Koch donor group) money in politics.

For a few hours on March 3 we surpassed one more "never before in human history" climate milestone, as across the northern hemisphere the average temperature was fully 2 degrees Centigrade above "normal." Sustained elevations of 2 degrees are expected to usher in runaway global warming and climate chaos through a series of triggering mechanisms — massive methane release from previously frozen tundra and the loss of solar reflection from melted polar ice. That scenario is years away, but only years, much sooner than predicted.

The Koch donor cabal stole precious time needed to implement the enormous efforts required to stop the burning of fossil fuels. We cannot afford to allow that to continue. We must choose those candidates with policies that combat racism, economic injustice and fossil fuel emissions.

Those who conspire to steal our environment and our future should be prosecuted for their wrongdoing.