



## **Jane Mayer's 'Dark Money' details efforts of the Koch Brothers to buy control of the American political system**

Marguerite Renner

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Our democracy faces severe threats devised by a small group of very wealthy men and women who have managed to take control of critical parts of our economic, political and social systems. Do their actions fit the definition of oligarchy?

As author Jane Mayer illustrates, we do not need to argue about it. Her bestseller, "Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right," is filled with anecdotes and hard facts that demonstrate the organized efforts of a few extremely wealthy people to make our society work for them.

Mayer tells the story of how the infamous billionaire Koch brothers, Charles and David, held a private meeting when Barack Obama was elected to plan ways of stopping him and his plans for affordable health care — attacking the new president through newspaper stories and on the Internet. Mayer has done a masterful job of weaving this and other stories like it into a fascinating and frightening narrative on the concentration of power in the hands of a few.

Mayer begins her tome by introducing the Koch family and their friends. Patriarch Fred Koch helped Hitler build oil refineries to meet Germany's need for petroleum. In 1928, Koch the elder did much the same thing for Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, whom Koch loathed, just as he despised communism. He later helped found the John Birch Society, an organization that was so conservative that it considered Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the man responsible for defeating Hitler in 1945, a "communist." He raised his sons to see the world through his eyes — envisioning an end to "corporate cronyism," as the elder Koch called it, in which "government and big business collaborate unfairly," creating measures that cripple capitalists' efforts to profit.

Most of the book is about the efforts of brothers Charles and David to construct a political system that gave them the power to run our country as they chose. Ardent opponents of mainstream political parties, they identified as Libertarians. But their failure to get David elected in the 1980 election as vice president on the Libertarian ticket led both men to shift allegiance to the Republican Party.

Mayer makes good use of chapter titles to reveal the strategies the two men have used over the decades to gain the power they now have. In "Weaponizing Philanthropy: The War of Ideas,"

Mayer introduces readers to initial efforts at identifying potential team players in constructing the new American oligarchy. In Chapter 2, “The Hidden Hand: Richard Mellon Scaife,” we meet the mercurial Scaife, whose billions helped fund the search for other elites. Chapter 3, “Beachheads: John M. Olin and the Bradley Brothers,” reveals the scheming efforts of Scaife, Olin, the Bradleys, Joseph Coors and others to develop think tanks to challenge research efforts of several progressive institutes. These men saw the social welfare programs of the 1960s as a threat to the American way of life and wanted to destroy all of them. So they created the Institute of Economic Affairs, which had a clear-cut political purpose but a name that appeared objective. But this was only one of many such organizations.

Creating “grassroots” front groups became their game in building a political base. They began by creating the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the Hoover Institute. But they were far from finished.

In “Part Two: Secret Sponsors: Covert Operations, 2009-2010,” Mayer reveals the brothers’ efforts to create a host of other front organizations with deceptive names that masked their real corporate interests. These include but are by no means limited to the Young Guns, Sam Adams Alliance, Americans for Prosperity, Americans for Limited Government, Freedom Works and the Center to Protect Patients’ Rights. Next they birthed the Tea Party, which they used to attack Obama, deny climate change, take the Citizens United case to the Supreme Court, and win control of the House of Representatives in 2010 and the Senate in 2012.

“Part Three: Privatizing Politics: Total Combat, 2011-2014” reveals the Koch brothers’ recent efforts to seize political control.

Should we believe any or all of this? Mayer has 55 pages of citations to buttress her research. You be the judge.

When it comes to corporate corruption and political oligarchy, most of us know things are pretty bad. This book makes it clear that conditions are even worse than we imagined. America is in serious trouble.