



## The Koch family's Nazi ties are more entrenched than you think

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In *Dark Money*, Jane Mayer's book published today, the *New Yorker* journalist reports that the Koch family patriarch Fred Koch built an oil refinery for the Third Reich that was used to fuel Nazi warplanes. That looks pretty bad for the political mega-donors.

You know what else looks bad? Financing the publication of Holocaust denial literature over the course of several decades. Which is exactly what Charles Koch did between the 1960s and the 1980s.

The Koch brothers, David and Charles, plan to donate \$900 million to presidential campaigns in 2016, as much money as each major party, so the origins and past uses of their family fortune have some heavy political implications.

To be fair, there's no solid evidence that the Koch brothers themselves are secret neo-Nazis. In fact, there are major ideological differences between the Kochs' libertarian politics and the Third Reich's—on the most basic level, dictatorship doesn't really square with limited government. But the Koch family has a history of patronizing Nazi sympathizers, starting with Fred Koch in the 1930s.

Fred wasn't only a Nazi business partner or profiteer. He was also an admirer of the Axis powers. His biographer David Schulman notes that he "saw something laudable in the rise of fascism." His private letters indicate that he was impressed with Hitler's Germany.

In addition to his dealings with Hitler, Fred Koch also did business with Stalin. He came away from that experience a staunch anti-communist. In 1958, he even co-founded the radical right-wing John Birch Society, a charming bunch of paranoiacs who believe the strings of internationalist politics are being pulled by a "one-world socialist government."

But Fred's experience in Nazi Germany did not result in a corresponding devotion to anti-fascist activism on the home front. Instead, after building an oil refinery for Hitler, Fred hired a dogmatic Third Reich sympathizer to nanny his sons at home. Which means the Koch brothers were toilet trained by a Nazi.

When it came to cozying up to Nazi sympathizers, Charles followed in his father's footsteps, experiencing his own political awakening under the tutelage of libertarian theorist Robert LeFevre. In 1956, LeFevre founded the Freedom School in rural Colorado where students came to hear lectures about free-market economics and anti-collectivist political theory.

The rustic log-cabin campus nestled in the Rocky Mountains was like a far-right libertarian sleep-away camp—a corrective, perhaps, to the Boy Scouts, which LeFevre worried was succumbing to communist influence.

Soon the Freedom School morphed into an unaccredited four-year institution called Rampart College, which produced a newsletter called the *Rampart Journal of Individualist Thought*. Charles Koch sat on the school's board of trustees and directed its parent foundation. He was a diligent student and enthusiastic cheerleader for the institution, as well as a major donor.

Through the Freedom School and Rampart, Charles Koch encountered two bloviating pseudo-historians with Nazi sympathies—Harry Elmer Barnes and James J. Martin—whose work he financially supported over the next two decades.

Barnes' anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial had already eroded his academic credibility when, in 1966, the *Rampart Journal* published an article in which he referred to “alleged extermination in gas ovens.” Barnes argued that even if the Holocaust were real, the Allies had been far crueler to their prisoners than the Nazis were.

The issue in which this article appeared was devoted entirely to historical revisionism, or the idea that the Axis powers weren't so terrible after all. Another article in the same issue was written by James J. Martin, an infamous Holocaust denier who served as the chair of Rampart's history department. Martin also sat on the editorial board of the Institute for Historical Review, whose “purpose is to promote Holocaust denial and defend Nazism,” according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which lists it as a hate group.

We don't know how close Charles Koch was with these charlatans at the Freedom School. Maybe they whispered secrets through tin-can telephones strung between their bunk beds, or maybe they barely acknowledged each other in the chow hall. Maybe they were even on opposing teams during Capture the Flag. Either way, Charles Koch financially contributed to an institution that employed Nazi sympathizers and routinely published their work.

In the 1970s, he shifted his fundraising efforts to the libertarian publication *Reason Magazine*. Like the *Rampart Journal* before it, *Reason* published articles by Holocaust deniers, including Martin. In 1976 *Reason* published an interview with Martin in which he said he didn't believe “that the evidence of a planned extermination of the entire Jewish population of Europe is holding up.”

Martin's interview appeared in *Reason's* special issue on historical revisionism, which included an article by Austin J. App—an anti-Semite who, the same year, wrote a pamphlet called “The Six Million Swindle.” Another contributor to the issue was Percy L. Greaves, who went on to found the anti-Semitic Liberty Lobby. *Reason Magazine* and its parent Reason Foundation have been beneficiaries of Koch family donations since the '70s.

*Reason Magazine* and the *Rampart Journal* both published a lot of authors over the years, many of whom were not genocide apologists. But if you think the connection between the Kochs and Holocaust deniers is tenuous, consider this: In 1977, Charles Koch founded the libertarian Cato Institute think tank, and brought in his brother David Koch as a shareholder. Three years later, the organization published a book of revisionist World War II history by Barnes with a foreword by Martin.

Barnes, who called Jews “swindlers of the crematoria” who “derive billions of marks from non-existent, mythical and imaginary cadavers,” had died back in 1968. But the Cato Institute resurrected his work and published it again anyway. It’s the kind of memorializing gesture you’d make for someone you shared a canoe with at anti-communist summer camp—or a political theorist you admire.

For decades, the Koch family fortune, built in part with Third Reich money, helped give Nazi sympathizers a voice. In light of these details about the brothers’ ideological bedfellows, the Nazi oil refinery revelation is not simply a dirty secret buried in the distant past. It’s an unnerving window into the political inclinations of America’s wealthiest radicals.