



5 Things You Should Know About the Koch Brothers—Who Just Gave Black Colleges \$25M

Here are five facts about the right-wing billionaires who just cut a check for \$25 million to the United Negro College Fund.

By Charles D. Ellison
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You may often hear the words “Koch brothers” during casual flips through tense cable TV talk shows or when a campaign attack ad invades your television screen. But you might also be among that half of all Americans who don’t really know who they are, according to an April Wall Street Journal-NBC poll.

But when you hear that two mega-rich right-wing white dudes just dropped \$25 million on the United Negro College Fund, you can’t help but wonder: Who exactly are Charles and David Koch (and what’s the most polite way to pronounce their name)?

Leave it to nervous Democrats and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.)—who said that Republicans are “addicted to Koch”—to draw huffy caricatures of the billionaire duo, and you conjure up visions of evil twins questing for world domination along the lines of the 2012 political spoof *The Campaign*. Dig deeper and you find that the loot-heavy Kochs are the most controversial and consequential high rollers in American politics. Just this month, Politico reports, they unveiled their newest super PAC—Freedom Partners Action Fund—in time for the 2014 midterm elections.

You won’t find them working the cable news chitlin circuit—nor are they itching to give *60 Minutes* a sit-down anytime soon. They are, however, a combined \$42 billion worth of family fortune. Forbes just listed their namesake Koch Industries as the second-largest privately held company in the country, valued at \$115 billion. Not surprising, then, that they didn’t have much trouble finding a spare \$400 million in 2012 for an all-out (albeit unsuccessful) effort to unseat President Barack Obama.

They’re players, and now they’ve put a big bet down on HBCUs. And so, as the Kochs shape a political landscape defined by shadowy super PACs and anonymous donors with fat pockets, it’s worth reviewing some of their other interests. Here are five things you probably didn’t know about these insanely wealthy ultradonors of the right—until now.

“Stand Your Ground” Brought to You By ...

Any major legislative campaign giving trigger-happy gun owners a legal bullet up on self-defense needs more than gun-friendly politicians. For that kind of lift, you need ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council. The name sounds like that of a mad robot in a futuristic movie, but it's actually a Koch-supported political machine for conservative state-elected officials concentrated into one massive national political hammer that passed versions of the fateful “Stand your ground” law in 30 states.

Climate Deniers Need Money, Too

You know those fanatics who stick their heads in the sand as if scientific proof of climate change were cooked up on Wikipedia? They didn't come from nowhere. They're part of a lucrative industry, including think tanks and political partisans who continually spin climate denial in a perpetual closed feedback loop. Gallup notes that 1 in every 4 Americans are skeptical of the obvious, and that speaks volumes about the power of more than \$120 million of climate-denial advocacy fueled, in large part, by a Koch-funded effort to keep environmental regulators out of the fossil fuel industry's bread and butter.

No Love for Labor

If there's one thing team Koch hates most, it's “big labor.” Unions are fast becoming dinosaurs nearing extinction, with membership rolls declining nearly 10 percentage points since 1983, which also means that Koch-brother-funded advocacy is paying off. Sophisticated and relentless campaigns, supporting a large cast of anti-union lawmakers such as presidential hopeful Gov. Scott Walker (R-Wis.), keep the heat on everyone from the AFL-CIO to teachers unions.

The Tea Party Is the Son of Koch

Still wondering why the Tea Party won't go away, despite the fact that only 33 percent of Americans support it? In this age of pitchfork-pushing populists unseating Republican incumbents while fanning the flames of anti-Obama-ism, political insurgents can't run on passion alone. Every good movement needs coin to keep it moving, and Koch-brother moolah is the dark matter of modern grassroots on the right. A recent University of California, San Francisco, study even dug into the weeds and discovered Koch money seeding Tea Party activities as far back as the Reagan years.

The “Reason” Libertarians Went Mainstream

It's no coincidence that the once-fringe libertarian movement suddenly went mainstream just as the Koch brothers got hip to its politics. In fact, they've managed to align both libertarians and conservatives in such a way that they could form a potent force in the 2016 elections—perhaps backing White House aspirant Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.). Seeing potential, the Koch brothers have gone from helping to spawn less-government causes like the Cato Institute to sitting on the boards of libertarian news outlets like Reason magazine ... which Reason seems cool with.

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