



How Charles Koch Is Helping Neo-Confederates Teach College Students

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Billionaire industrialist and conservative political mega-donor Charles Koch first entered the political world through the John Birch Society, a secretive, anti-Communist outfit which campaigned against the civil rights movement. Since then, he and his brother David amassed enormous wealth and put together a powerful conservative political network that rivals either major party in size and funding.

A new report from activist group UnKoch My Campus shows that Charles Koch's ties to white supremacy have persisted throughout his adult life. The report details an array of instances where Koch has funded neo-Confederate scholars—a largely unnoticed aspect of the Koch Industries CEO's ambitious higher education funding project. Most alarming is a collaboration between Florida Atlantic University, the Charles Koch Foundation and a major private prison company, which is led by a professor who was a member of the research arm of a white nationalist hate group.

While raking in corporate profits as the head of the family's oil refining business in the mid-1960s, Charles Koch and his top tactician, Richard Fink, developed The Structure of Social Change, which they would deploy to pull America as far to the right on taxes and regulations as they could. Koch, a libertarian, had resigned from the John Birch Society after opposing its position on the Vietnam War, and created a regressive sphere of influence. The first step in this strategy was funding higher education, because, as he said at a 1974 gathering of the Institute for Humane Studies, now a George Mason University center the he finances and directs, “educational programs are superior to political action, and support of talented free-market scholars is preferable to mass advertising.”

Koch and his family foundations have donated hundreds of millions of dollars to colleges and universities around the United States. In 2013, the Charles Koch Foundation began donating to Florida Atlantic University, offering \$5,000 that year. By 2016, the annual donation had risen to \$32,000.

Marshall DeRosa, who runs a prison education program with financial backing from the Koch Foundation, is a Florida Atlantic University political science professor who has written extensively on the Confederacy. He also has ties to its modern remnants.

From 2000 until at least 2009, according to archives web pages, DeRosa was a “faculty member” at the League of the South Institute, the “educational arm of the Southern independence movement” where “the South’s finest unreconstructed scholars” taught summer institutes and seminars. The LOS Institute acts as the charitable nonprofit of the League of the South, which the Southern Poverty Law Center considers a neo-Confederate hate group and supports a second Southern secession in order to form a nation ruled by “Anglo-Celtic” people.

The LOS was co-founded in 1994 by an original member of the Center for Libertarian Studies, which launched in 1976 with seed money from Charles Koch. Michael Tubbs, a white nationalist who once stockpiled military weapons and planned to target businesses owned by African-Americans and Jews, is still the current chairman of the Florida LOS chapter, according to Newsweek, and is pictured with LOS president Michael Hill as recently as January 2018. In 1987, Hill and three accomplices called themselves “guardians of the gene pool.”

The League of the South Institute is “the educational branch of the Mary Noel Kershaw Foundation,” named after the wife of the late Jack Kershaw, longtime leader within the violent White Citizens Council and founding board member of the League of the South. In 1998, Kershaw erected a statue of Ku Klux Klan leader Nathan Bedford Forrest and declared, “Somebody needs to say a good word for slavery. Where in the world are the Negroes better off today than in America?”

Recently, LOS was a prominent white nationalist force at the infamous “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. Hill, a board member of the Kershaw Foundation, had told supporters to prepare for violence. Another LOS member was charged in January for brutally beating a 20-year-old black man at the rally.

Regarding his LOS affiliation, DeRosa told *The Nation* “That was a long time ago. I disengaged early on. They’d invite me to things and I’d go to talk about my scholarship, especially the Confederate constitution, but I got an inkling as to some of the characters involved...I didn’t feel comfortable.”

Experts on hate groups have a different view. “The LOS was different when DeRosa was involved, not as militant, but it still had very, very bad racial views,” said Heidi Beirich, an expert on rightwing extremism and director of the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center. “He can’t scurry away from fact that for a long time he was member of a group that had white supremacist views.”