



## Koch Brothers Could Be Modern-Day Colonel McCormicks

By: Edward McClelland – April 23, 2013

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Long after anyone got the joke, comedian Bob Hope used to tell an anecdote about Franklin D. Roosevelt housetraining his Scottish terrier, Fala, on the Chicago Tribune. It was a reference to Roosevelt's greatest hater, *Tribune* publisher Robert R. McCormick, an orotund aristocrat who considered the New Deal indistinguishable from Communism.

McCormick's grandfather, Joseph Medill, had founded the *Tribune*. McCormick took over the paper in the 1920s, turned his new acquisition into a brag sheet for his eccentric right-wing opinions and a journalistic laughingstock. An isolationist, anti-Communist and Anglophobe, "the Colonel," as he insisted on being called, hated FDR. He hated the League of Nations. After the League of Nations collapsed, he hated the United Nations. He hated the World Court. He hated liberal Democrats. He hated liberal Republicans. He hated Wall Street. He hated the entire East Coast. He hated Rhode Island so much he flew a flag with 47 stars, until informed that was illegal. McCormick hated everyone and everything who didn't conform to his brand of small-minded Midwestern conservatism, of which his paper was the leading voice. His enemies called him "the greatest mind of the 14th Century."

So the news that the Koch Brothers are thinking of buying the *Tribune* means the paper now has a chance to return to its former glory, as what *Life* magazine called "a worldwide symbol of reaction, isolation, and prejudice by a man capable of real hate." The Koch Brothers are billionaires who have used their fortunes to advance conservative politics, funding the Cato Institute, the Federalist Society, Americans for Prosperity and the Libertarian Party. They donated \$1 million to Restore Our Future, a SuperPAC that supported Mitt Romney's presidential campaign. David Sirota, a columnist for Salon, predicts that, like Colonel, the Kochs will use the *Tribune* to advance their right-wing agenda. The Brothers' interest in the newspaper "is all about a set of new-era Citizen Kanes buying the kind of properties that can powerfully suffuse the entire news ecosystem with a hard-edged ideology – the kind that serves those Citizen Kanes' political interests."

Which is encouraging, because lately, the *Tribune* has lost its edge, as it attempts to adapt to life as the flagship newspaper of one of the nation's bluest states. After not endorsing a Democrat for president in its first 161 years (and even reporting the election

of one Republican who didn't actually win), the Tribune twice endorsed Barack Obama. The paper still has a few conservative columnists -- most notably John Kass, who spent a lot of time hanging out with Ed Vrdolyak on the East Side back in the 1980s, and now plays the role of a white-flight suburbanite pining for the restoration of Ronald Reagan. But its hard to imagine the *Tribune* writing an editorial suggesting global warming is a left-wing hoax.

If the Koch Brothers buy the paper, we may see editorials like that every day. The Colonel would love it.