



## Defending the Koch brothers

Tom Jackson May 2, 2013

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I've advocated all sorts of unpopular causes in this blog — I like Internet freedom, I like peace, I like the Cleveland Indians — so I may as well complete my contrarian portfolio by writing a qualified defense of the Koch brothers, the left's current No. 1 villain.

The two brothers, David and Charles, are reported to be interested in buying eight newspapers, including the Los Angeles Times. The report has prompted a great deal of hand-wringing from Democrats.

Now, I don't know how good a job the Kochs would do in running a chain of newspapers. Maybe they would ruin them.

But I don't think it's fair to assume the Kochs would be bad for the LA Times. And I thought I'd let you know that much of what you read about the Kochs is wrong. I see a great many articles about the Kochs that feature deliberate misinformation, designed to make them look as bad as possible in the eyes of Democrats and liberals.

For example, one of my favorite blogs, Boing Boing, ran a piece by one of my favorite writers, Cory Doctorow, which characterized the Kochs as "billionaire ultra-conservative puppet-masters."

That's incorrect. The Kochs are libertarians.

As Jack Shafer points out in this article, the Kochs support gay marriage, favor cutting defense spending and withdrawing U.S. military forces from the Middle East.

The U.S. Congress has literally hundreds of Republican members. As far as I can tell, the only ones who supports all of those positions is Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan, who has taken over Ron Paul's slot as

the "token libertarian" in the U.S. House, and Sen. Rand Paul. (Both are social conservatives, but they support repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act.)

David Koch was the Libertarian Party's vice presidential candidate in 1980. They have given heavily to various libertarian causes and magazines, including Reason magazine.

Disclosure: Reason recently ran my rave review of the new Cory Doctorow novel, Homeland. You'll notice that Cory doesn't mention this. "Koch-funded magazine praises Cory Doctorow" doesn't fit his narrative.

Although I'm a more-or-less libertarian, I'm not on the same page as the Kochs politically. I'm fine with using the government to help poor people. I strongly suspect global warming is a real problem. The Kochs tend to emphasize libertarian issues that help rich people. I am most interested in peace and civil liberties issues, while the Kochs tend to focus on taxation and the size of government.

But one reason I'm skeptical of the current smear campaign is that I've seen this movie before.

Last year, when the Kochs forced out the director of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, and put in their own guy, there were all sorts of predictions about how the Kochs would "ruin" Cato by purging the peace and civil liberties folks and turning it into a Republican propaganda machine, similar to the Heritage Foundation. I bought these stories and dutifully promoted them on Twitter.