

# THE Nation.

## Koch Brothers Exposed

*Katrina vanden Heuvel on April 23, 2012 - 5:23 PM ET*

With an unflinching investigative look at the Koch Brothers' money and power, Brave New Films has once again created a film full of rollicking and rigorous facts that informs and challenges corporate media with the truth. The latest in a series of tough and sharp social justice films—check out *Rethink Afghanistan*, *WAL-MART: The High Cost of Low Price* and *Sick for Profit*—*Koch Brothers Exposed* should be a wakeup call for people across the political spectrum to take action to halt the selling off of our democracy.

As radio and television host Ed Schultz says of the film, “Every person in this country who cares about democracy should care about this work.”

I was interviewed for the film—seemed a valuable project because it raises perhaps the central question of our time: are we a democracy or are we now a plutocracy? And what kind of country, what kind of society, what kind of economy do we want to live in?

Throughout American history—though there have been major challenges and pitfalls—there has been a degree of balance between government and market. But we are now living in a moment when the extremist right wants to shatter that balance and is using its resources to throw the country back to Gilded Age inequality.

No one is pursuing that course more aggressively than Charles and David Koch.

This film exposes tactics used by the Koch brothers to sway political power in their favor, while illustrating the dangers of unchecked influence concentrated in the hands of the few. This includes their efforts to suppress voter rights, re-segregate public schools, weaken EPA regulation, and privatize Social Security.

The strategy pursued by the Koch Brothers has a potent history. As Bill Moyers [describes](#) in his *Nation* cover story “How Wall Street Occupied America,” the late

Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell's confidential memorandum in 1971 to his friends in the US Chamber of Commerce was "a call to arms for class war waged from the top down." It was a blueprint for what is now coming to fruition with the phenomenon of the Koch brothers, *Citizens United*, and a right-wing activist Supreme Court ready to roll back decades of New Deal jurisprudence.

Moyers lays out how "the Powell Memo"—in response to bipartisan support for new regulation of air quality, lead paint, pesticides and the creation of the EPA—urged corporate America to "fight back and fight back hard. Build a movement. Set speakers loose across the country. Take on prominent institutions of public opinion—especially the universities, the media and the courts. Keep television programs 'monitored the same way textbooks should be kept under constant surveillance.' And above all, recognize that political power must be 'assiduously cultivated; and that when necessary, it must be used aggressively and with determination' and 'without embarrassment.'"

In his memo, Powell called for the creation of think tanks, legal foundations and front groups aligned through "careful long-range planning and ... consistency of action over an indefinite period of years, in the scale of financing available only through joint effort, and in the political power available only through united action and united organizations."

Moyers notes that corporate PACs and lobbyists subsequently multiplied, as did "other organizations united in pushing back against political equality and shared prosperity": for example, the Business Roundtable, the [American Legislative Exchange Council \(ALEC\)](#), the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the Manhattan Institute, Citizens for a Sound Economy (precursor to what we now know as Americans for Prosperity).

"They triggered an economic transformation that would in time touch every aspect of our lives," writes Moyers.

Now the Koch Brothers have become a symbol of something that is corrosive and dangerous to fulfilling the great possibilities of this country. They are the poster boys for the 1 percent. Brave New Films has done a service in researching and calling out their actions and activities.

Most of these activities are devised to deploy the Koch's political agenda. Sure, people have a right to fight for the political society they want to live in. But when the

concentration of power and wealth is so great, and what Robert Reich in his new book calls “the Regressive Right” is so strong, we are in peril of losing our democracy.

The film exposes the impact of Koch activities on public policy. Take Social Security, which the Koch Brothers are working to dismantle by funding an echo chamber of think tanks. Brave New Foundation researchers reveal a \$28.4 million Koch effort that has manufactured 297 opinions and commentaries, 200 reports, 56 studies and six books distorting Social Security's effectiveness and purpose.

“The Koch Brothers are funding think tanks spreading an enormous amount of disinformation about Social Security,” Senator Bernie Sanders says in the film.

Koch-backed groups are also pushing onerous voter ID requirements on minorities and the poor. They have funded efforts to potentially thwart 21 million Americans from voting by writing and proposing voting suppression bills in thirty-eight states.

“The Koch Brothers support laws that are the most aggressive attempt to roll back voting rights in this country that we’ve seen in over a century,” says Benjamin Jealous, president and CEO of the NAACP.

One of the film's most wrenching sections tells the story of a low-income neighborhood near a Koch chemical plant in Crossett, Arkansas. The facility emits large quantities of formaldehyde, a known human carcinogen. The surrounding area is noticeably affected by air pollution—especially in a minority neighborhood dying of cancer.

“We have fifteen homes in this area, and maybe eleven people have died with cancer,” says one resident.

Not surprisingly, the Kochs have gone on the attack against filmmaker Robert Greenwald and Brave New Films. Greenwald responds by arguing that Americans should not fall for the Kochs' attempt to change the subject from their own disproportionate and deleterious impact on the country.

“The smears and name-calling may not be pleasant but [it] won't stop the film from being shared by [25 groups](#) partnering with us and thousands of people online,” Greenwald writes.

Indeed starting May 8 the film will be available in millions of homes via streaming outlets. Stay tuned too for house parties, screenings, and [actions](#) around the country. Don't miss this film.

"Corrupt corporate forces are trying to buy our democracy, with disastrous consequences," says former Senator Russ Feingold. "*Koch Brothers Exposed* helps shed a light on how."