

Have you perhaps heard of the word “follow the money?” Made popular by the movie that was produced in 1976 titled All the President’s Men, it was utilized by the FBI informant called Deep Throat to describe a money trail that would bring about corrupt politicians. However, is the corrupting influence of money in politics still a thing we have to be scared of?

You bet.

This book chapter shows how two brothers called Charles and David Koch, and their conservative friends made use of their huge financial resources to sway and change politics in the United States over the previous decades. We’ll explore where this connection comes from, and also the techniques the Koch brothers use and the effect they’ve had on the nation’s political aspect.

Therefore, let’s follow the dark trail of money and discover how it has promoted the rise of radically conservative politics in the United States.

## Chapter 1 - The Koch brothers run a network financed by billionaires who are strong-minded to dominate US politics.

When we talk about US billionaires, you might consider Mark Zuckerberg or Bill Gates. However, there are other people who have greater power, who are still in the shadows.

The billionaire brothers called Charles and David Koch head Koch Industries, the country’s second-biggest private company, which was established in 1940 by their father, Fred Koch.

Fred Koch began accumulating his wealth by creating oil refineries for the Soviet Union and Josef Stalin, which made Koch’s company hired to build a huge oil refinery for Nazi Germany during the year 1934.

Fred was really a Nazi sympathizer at that point. He even employed a nanny who was a Nazi sympathizer to watch his children. As a matter of fact, the nanny was really an ardent Nazi

supporter that she relocated back to Germany after Hitler's attack of France in 1940 when Charles was only five years old and David was a just given birth to.

Ultimately, Charles and David would grow up and turn out to be business partners, and since the 1970s they've been creating an elaborate network of political contributors and fundraising associations. This network has a lot of branches and extends deeply into the heart of American politics, called the Kochtopus.

Eventually, the aim has been to disseminate their message of libertarian values. These values concentrate on backing up a free market and small government devoid of regulations, taxes or any other thing that might hinder profits.

In 1980, this movement made David Koch do a brief contest for office as the Libertarian Party's vice-presidential candidate. In that year, the Libertarian Party only succeeded to get about 1% of the national vote.

However, the experience taught the brothers' future political tactics. They got to know that a politician is just a public voice – real power is forming and shaping the information that those voices project.

Therefore, the Koch brothers agreed to stay behind the scenes from that moment onward and started channeling their energy on an ambitious long-term plan.

## Chapter 2 - The Koch network makes use of nonprofits to make political donations unknown and free of tax.

In order for the Koch brothers to effectively change the public view, they understood they had to look for a subtle means for their notions to gain power. They ultimately stumble upon a perfect method to do that: camouflaging their political plan as philanthropy.

They immediately started disseminating their libertarian belief through nonprofit organizations like advocacy groups, think tanks and private foundations. It showed to be a great plan since nonprofits are both cost-effective and need a bit of public disclosure.

This signified that donors can anonymously make donations and the total price could remain unknown to public view. Donors could write any amount of check they wished to donate, and everything could be kept secret.

This anonymity is where the work “dark money” originates from. Nonprofits make it impossible to determine the number of millions of dollars that are being channeled in, who the money is from and what the money is used for.

However, there’s another significant purpose why the Koch brothers make use of these organizations: and the reason is nonprofit donations are also tax-deductible. Therefore, by donating their family inheritance to a charitable foundation, the brothers can dodge paying inheritance tax while assisting fund the cause the like.

Over time, their network of institutions would include a lot of huge political names, like Senator Ted Cruz and Chris Christie the New Jersey Governor. Huge donors of their organization comprise financial giants such as Charles Schwab and Richard DeVos the co-founder of Amway, both of whom had donated a minimum of one million dollars between the years 2010 and 2011.

This money adds up to offer the Koch brothers with great financial incomes.

By 2013, they ran more than 100,000 of these private foundations, with combined assets of more than \$800 billion. Heritage Foundation is one of the oldest and most powerful branches of the Kochtopus with resources of \$174 million.

That’s a huge amount of money to use influencing public policy. A huge amount of money evading the inspection of voters, dodging political transparency laws and taking advantage of tax gaps.

### Chapter 3 - The Koch network comprises educational programs and think tanks concentrated on long-term effects.

To successfully influence the view of the public and reduce the possibility of a future fight, educational organizations and programs became a key aspect of the Koch brothers' conservative fundraising network.

The notion was to contribute to esteemed universities that would give back the favor by offering a space to raise a new generation of conservative thinkers. This would lead to an increase in their influence on society by producing future political leaders who would have learned the Koch ideology –this is the reason law schools immediately became a key target.

The Olin Foundation which was named after John M. Olin (the director of the arms manufacturing company Olin Industries) was one of the first right-wing educational establishments.

Olin was the architect of the Mansfield's Program on Constitutional Government at Harvard, which got a \$3.3-million contribution from the Olin Foundation. This program offered a conservative explanation of the American government and the students from there proceeded to teach at Georgetown, Harvard, and Yale.

Another technique for backing the conservative plan arose in the form of conservative think tanks, which became an effective method to increase uncertainties about scientific information.

For instance, the George C. Marshall Institute is one of the leading conservative think tanks and the beneficiary of contributions from the Koch network.

This institute is the home of physicists Fred Seitz and Fred Singer, who were the leaders defying the science behind climate change. In spite of Seitz and Singer's lack of knowledge in the field, their message of uncertainty successfully got the public's attention.

Think tanks like to assert that they offer an essential balance to scientific debate; however, what they're actually providing is deceptive data with only a little academic value. They're basically conveying the findings of suspicious research backed up by people who wanted favorable outcomes that could be used to support their plan.

During the Reagan management, these think tanks were mainly influential: a copy of the Heritage Foundation's Mandate for Leadership was given as a playbook to all the members of Congress.

## Chapter 4 - The Tea Party movement turns to a means to create grassroots credibility.

By 2009, the basis for a political movement had been established by the Koch brothers. It was time for those patiently fostered nonprofits and educational programs to repay them in the form of the Tea Party movement, which eventually brought libertarianism to the mainstream.

The roots of this uprising can be traced back to Richard Fink who is the Koch brothers' right-hand man, and his Structure of Social Change manifesto from the 1980s.

This strategy provided accurate information on how to begin a legitimate political movement. Firstly, the information should flow from the brains at the think tanks to the politicians at the stands. Afterward, there will be time to send off the foot soldiers and convey the message around the streets.

This final phase is precisely what occurred all through the 90s and early 2000s, as the Koch network delivered the essential money needed to stage authentic-looking uprisings. Although these incidences were anything except spontaneous and honest, the public was misled into trusting that they were.

In order for it to resemble a genuine political movement, it was essential for the libertarian message to be viewed as "grassroots" and arising from normal people. However, since it was entirely created by the Koch brothers, it would eventually be called the "astroturf" movement, getting its name from the brand of synthetic grass.

Their goal was also aided considerably by the extent of right-wing media publicity it got.

While Rick Santelli the CNBC reporter frequently receives praise for assisting launch the Tea Party movement, he was essentially reacting the way Wilbur Ross, Jr. intended he would react.

A dear friend of David Koch called Ross was on CNBC to criticize President Barack Obama's strategy for assisting people to avoid the mortgage crisis. Santelli took the bait and criticized Obama's strategy as an illustration of "promoting bad ack" and questioning the cause why people's tax dollars should aid pay for the second bathroom their neighbors couldn't pay for.

Other Koch-funded think tanks known as Freedomworks spent more than one million dollars for Glenn Beck the conservative media personality to deliver and read the think tank's "embedded content" on Fox News.

## Chapter 5 - A Supreme Court verdict in support of Citizens United offered the Koch brothers even greater power.

In 2010, things took an intense change when the case of Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission got to the Supreme Court.

The conservative think tank Citizens United eventually won their case, and the verdict mentioned that organizations have the right to freedom of speech. It was a game-changing decision, and it allowed things that were previously not allowed and also for even more money to go into the Koch network.

What actually changed was that both nonprofit and for-profit organizations could now spend any amount of money they wish to either support or oppose a political runner. Exceptionally, the limit on the amount a person could donate to these organizations would also vanish shortly.

This effectively reversed significant century-old laws that had been set to make sure that an even political playing field wouldn't be confused by rich supporters.

Also, this verdict got another long-term aim of the conservative think tanks: it damaged solidarity among liberal groups, as a lot of liberals became part of the fight to advocate for broader First Amendment rights.

A thing that didn't change was that donors could still maintain their anonymity, and this secrecy only assisted grow the amount of dark money in politics.

Citizens United got a lot of contributions after the verdict— a lot that they were able to use and spend up to 49% of their whole income on political activity.

Also, they could transfer full multimillion-dollar donations to a different group in the network for a totally different reason, forming a never-ending network of untraceable money, totally changing hands out of the public sight.

With these new guidelines, the Kochtopus was now capable to flex new, even stronger muscles in the times leading up to the 2010 midterm elections, making their achievement even more of an inevitable decision.

## Chapter 6 - Koch's REDMAP strategy provided Republicans power of main states and the House of Representatives.

In 2008, after the Democrats won the presidential election and expanded their majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, Ed Gillespie the Republican strategist devised with a strategy called REDMAP.

The aim was simple: make a lot of Republicans as possible get elected to Congress in the 2010 midterms so they would gain the legislative power needed to then redraw the congressional districts in 2011.

The act of redefining the borders of a state's congressional districts just to serve a particular party is known as gerrymandering. For REDMAP, it operated by changing the borders of these

districts so that a lot of citizens who had a tendency to vote for the Democratic Party were combined together in one district.

This would make the Democrats have an important majority in that single district; however, they would then be underrepresented at every other place, making them have just a minority of districts in each state.

This strategy was really set before the Citizens United verdict; however, it gained a lot from it. Millions in dark money were utilized to sponsor Republican candidates and hit Democrats in weak states through spiteful attack advertisements.

North Carolina is an ideal illustration of where the REDMAP strategy functioned as gangbusters. Art Pope the longtime friend of Koch and donor, gave amazing financial support in the state, and the Republicans won 18 of the 22 local legislative races. Due to that, for the first time in 140 years, Republicans represented North Carolina in both Congress as well as Senate.

Also, the strategy prospered at the national level, with the Republicans managing the House of Representatives in 2010. With their majority in the House set, the party was now able to redraw the borders of congressional districts and change electoral results for future years.

Once more North Carolina provides an ideal illustration of the terrible consequences that the REDMAP gerrymandering had. As part of the Koch brothers' small-government plan, unemployment aids in the state was hugely reduced, leading to the state with the nation's fifth-highest unemployment rate getting one of the least numbers of federal benefit.

As we now know, you don't need to be in the White House to take charge of public policy and pass your vision, which is precisely what the Koch brothers did.

## Chapter 7 - The Kochs chased the Obama government and climate change with a Republican majority.

The Kochs' strong detestation of Barack Obama was frequently talked about during their semiannual donor summits.

During June of 2011, Charles Koch copied a word from Saddam Hussein to talk about the conflict they were about to go into and their anticipations of being able to hinder Obama all the time. He named it, "The mother of all wars." All thanks to the success of REDMAP, and the radical Republican representatives that were chosen; so, they progressed to plan the government shutdown of 2013.

Mark Meadows is the person who is frequently praised as the architect of the shutdown. He was part of the North Carolina congressmen who gained from gerrymandering and was chosen during the midterm elections in 2012.

Meadows wrote an open letter to Republican leaders in the House of Representatives, urging them to hold back the funds that were needed to put in place the Affordable Care Act, better called Obamacare. Everyone was aware that if the Democrats didn't withdraw, the government would stop working.

Also, this new wave of Republican extremists in the Senate put a stop to any expectation of there being a sensible debate on matters such as climate change.

Whether you believe it or not, global warming was formerly a bipartisan matter that united Democrats and Republicans, as both wings understood the extreme and imminent risk of environmental degradation. But, over time, a lot of Republicans backtracked and condemned climate change as a non-subject or even a joke, as the power and control of the Kochtopus continued to increase.

Climate change was constantly a thorn to the Kochs, as over a multimillion-dollar lawsuit had threatened their businesses as a result of the health and environmental risks they caused.

Due to that, they had used years publicly condemning well-renowned environmental scientists and telling another story, that is to say, the government's climate change guidelines were an assault on people's freedom.

Meanwhile, the power that the Kochtopus had on the Republican party was close to getting to a disturbing stage, as we'll find out in the last chapter.

## Chapter 8 - America is seriously getting close to becoming an oligarchy.

At the core of the American Dream is the conviction that anybody can make their dreams come to reality, irrespective of their upbringing. Still, the work of the Koch brothers has broadened the country's economic divide. The rich are becoming richer and it's becoming more and more hard for anybody to defy their authority.

As a matter of fact, their network is really huge that it's basically taken control of the Republican party.

Any politician who acts inappropriately has to experience the rage of the Koch brothers, as well as previous Koch's favorite and Republican Speaker of the House, John Boehner, who challenged the Koch brothers and declined their demands.

The outcome? He was basically forced to quit by the ultraright-wing Representatives that had been refined and appointed with the network's assistance.

This is an obvious illustration of how a democratically elected official can be ruled by a few of the country's richest people.

Truly, it would mean that the nation's political system is far nearer to an oligarchy than a democracy because an oligarchy is precisely that: a government ruled by the decree of its wealthiest people, irrespective of the decree of the people.

Still, there is a billionaire who can afford to disregard the powerful Kochtopus: Donald Trump.

Trump can call himself as supporting the working class by disagreeing against tax gaps that billionaires such as Kochs gain from.

But, Trump's decision for vice president was Mike Pence, who is one of Charles Koch's preferred politicians. Leading up to the 2016 presidential election, experts predicted that the

Koch network would spend a sum of \$889 million to sway the result, an obvious indication of the unbalanced edge they have over their contenders.

However, the Kochs aren't the only ones. A minimum of eleven of the 200 people that were present at their June 2010 retreat was on the Forbes 400 Wealthiest Americans list, with a combined wealth of \$129.1 billion.

All of us are aware that money equals power; however, that doesn't signify that we should allow a minor group of wealthy men to take charge of the "Land of the Free." Also, the United States is the "Home of the Brave," and it's time to reclaim it.

## Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right by Jane Mayer Book Review

American politics is controlled by a few billionaires run by the Koch brothers. Their key goal is to shape policies to their own self-interest, irrespective of whether those policies have a negative impact on the whole population – or even the world. Working to their advantage is a suspicious network of mostly untraceable dark money, which lets the Koch brothers spend billions to make loyal politicians elected and extend their agenda.

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