

Dark Money Study Guide

Dark Money by Jane Mayer

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Summary

Seasoned reporter and staff writer of *The New Yorker* Jane Mayer delivers an in-depth, wide-spanning analysis of the rise of outside money in the political arena, specifically on the right, with *Dark Money*. Going back almost fifty years, Mayer provides a timeline of the progression of one of the most influential yet most covert movements in American political history. At every turn, Mayer's investigation led her to Charles and David Koch, referred to in the book and in public jointly as the Koch brothers. The Kochs are not the only financiers of the conservative movement, yet they capture the vast majority of Mayer's attention. Presumably, the Kochs represent a convergence of all the efforts of the conservative movement, from weaponizing philanthropic efforts, to investing in academia, to buying state legislatures. The brothers have used their million-dollar fortunes to further own self-interest on the political stage. Mayer uses *Dark Money* to exemplify the Kochs as the epitome of what is wrong with the current political system; dark, outside money is corrupting American politics, and though the corruption has been taking place for decades, it has not been publicized until now.

Mayer has divided her investigation into the rise of the far right into three sections. The first section, titled "Weaponizing Philanthropy: The War of Ideas, 1970-2008" covers the longest span of time of the three sections (25). The first three chapters detail the corporate and political endeavors of four of the largest families who helped lay the foundation for the modern far-right conservative movement: the Kochs, the Scaifes, the Olins, and the Bradleys. These chapters are the only in which Mayer dedicates background information of the main donors and their families. Equipped with an unrealistic fear of losing their fortunes, these wealthy families used their checkbooks to wage a war of ideas, with the long-term goal of shifting American political discourse as far right as possible. This war was fought using philanthropic organizations as weapons, as the title of the first section suggests. As a way to take advantage of tax breaks for donations given to philanthropic organizations, the families established their own pseudo-philanthropic organizations ingrained with their own far-right, free-market theories. Mayer chooses to focus on these families because of the precedent each one set for the conservative movement and the paths they paved for future wealthy donors. Richard Mellon Scaife and his family perfected the art of weaponizing think tanks to achieve political initiatives. The Olins and the Bradleys created a way to cement far-right ideologies into the next generation of scholars. Finally, Charles and David Koch converged these two strategies among others to launch a full-scale conservative movement, to which Mayer has dedicated the remaining two sections of her book.

Mayer's second section, titled "Secret Sponsors: Covert Operations, 2009-2010" dedicates almost as many pages to one year as the first section dedicates to thirty-eight years (157). Undoubtedly, this speaks to the importance of this year along the timeline of the conservative movement, but it also speaks to how involved those in the Kochs' donor network were during this crucial year. From the Tea Party Movement, to the anti-climate change science crusade, to the Citizens United decision, and the 2010 midterm elections, this was undoubtedly one of the busiest and most successful years for the conservative movement. The long-spanning section makes it easy for the reader to

forget that Mayer is focusing primarily on one year. However, the fact that so many aspects of the political realm- grassroots movements, the judiciary, and the congress - were being influenced by far-right operatives made it hard for average people and political analysts alike to track the source of the funding of these operations. At the heart of the spending, though, as Mayer's investigation proves, was the Koch brothers and their extensive network of wealthy corporate donors.

Mayer's third and final section, titled "Privatizing Politics: Total Combat, 2011-2014," briefly describes the spoils enjoyed after the pivotal 2009-2010 political year before examining the decline of the conservative movement and the subsequent revival its image received (269). Because of how fresh many of the events in this section are, this section reads as a recap of modern political history. Many of the events described in this section still receive their fair share of air time on major news networks, such as initiatives pushed by the remnants of the Tea Party leaders in Congress, American's call for a presidential candidate outside of the political system such as Donald Trump, and the long-lasting debate over Obamacare. To finalize the book, Mayer shifts her focus from exclusively centered on the conservative movement to identifying the wider-reaching implications of the movement on the political system and the electorate. Wealthy far-right operatives had the foresight to know they needed to launch an all-encompassing assault aimed at shifting the existing political establishment. As Mayer's investigation proves, this assault was successful; by 2015, she deems that any hope of campaign finance reform appeared "hopeless" (374). The previous two sections have been dedicated to the process of building an infrastructure that would allow wealthy corporate interests to covertly assume control of political power. The final section weaves these efforts together to identify what Mayer believes are the implications of the well-financed, far-right conservative movement.

Radicals: A Koch Family History

Summary

Mayer begins this chapter on the history of the Koch family by briefly describing the early life of family patriarch, Fred Koch. Born in Texas in 1900, Fred was “bright and eager to get out from under his overbearing old-world father,” which led him to study chemical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (27). By the age of twenty-seven, Fred Koch invented an effective new process for extracting gasoline from crude oil. Shut out by wealthy competitors in the U.S., Koch took his business ventures abroad, specifically to the Soviet Union.

Fred Koch earned his fortune primarily in the Soviet Union, where his company taught and trained Russian engineers to extract and refine their own oil. His presence in the Soviet Union had faded by 1932, and his corporate presence altogether ceases, on paper, until 1940. Mayer fills in the incomplete corporate history of Koch Industries, describing Koch’s controversial presence in Hitler’s Third Reich. Improving Germany’s capacity to refine her own fuel was crucial to the Nazi war effort; thus, when Koch was approached by fellow oil tycoon William Rhodes Davis, he eagerly accepted the promising economic investment. By 1941, Koch was asked to lend his “chemical engineering prowess to help refine high-octane fuel for the American warplanes” as well (31). Ironically, Fred Koch was invested on both sides of one of the world’s largest and most bloody conflicts.

Fred Koch, after meeting his wife Mary and expanding his fortune considerably, fathered four sons. Mayer devotes the next section of the chapter to the early childhoods of Freddie, Charles, Bill, and David Koch. Fred Koch set a high level of expectation for his sons, leading to a continuous sense of tension and sibling rivalry. He was distant from his children yet he made them crave his approval. Fred and Mary traveled extensively, for business and pleasure, leaving the boys to be raised by a series of nannies and housekeepers. Behavioral concerns and constant bullying eventually led to all four brothers being sent to strict boarding or military schools.

Along the political spectrum, Fred Koch proudly represented the extreme far right. He was hypercritical of the federal government and taxation, and a member of the John Birch Society, “an archconservative group best known for spreading far-fetched conspiracy theories about secret Communist plots to subvert America” (38). He imposed many of his political views on his sons; David Koch recalls growing up with “a fundamental point of view that big government was bad” (38). When Charles returned home after college to help run the family business, he became obsessed with the dynamic relationship between politics, society, and economics. At the same time, his father was adamantly preaching about the socialist nature of taxation, presumably a notion that stuck with Charles throughout the rest of his life.



Mayer dubs Charles and David Koch “the primary underwriters of hard-line libertarian politics in America” (53). Liberty, as the brothers believed, was the absence of government and “the unfettered accumulation of enormous private wealth” (58). The government “should be reduced to a skeletal function: the protection of individual and property rights” (58). Charles actively gathered like-minded libertarian thinkers and launched a plan to push their ideals onto the existing societal paradigm. This plan included a heavy focus on universities, educational organizations, and think tanks to shift society’s political ideology from the ground up. The Libertarian Party believed in the abolition of almost all government regulations on business; it attacked social welfare programs, condemned high taxation, and regarded environmental regulations as unfair. Mayer notes that these are extremist ideas by reminding the reader that “robust government was almost universally accepted as a necessary instrument for social and economic betterment” (59). Thus, the Libertarian Party and the Koch brothers were fighting the prevailing political and social status quo of the time.

Analysis

Mayer begins this chapter by describing the life’s work of Koch family patriarch, Fred Koch. Presumably, some of Fred’s business tactics, lessons learned, and attitude toward others can be seen as vital to the mental development of Charles and David, his sons and subjects of this book. For example, though Fred Koch was bright and innovative, his early ideas were squandered by big-moneyed interests. Prolonged court battles eventually led Fred to believe that one of the judges was bribed by his competitors, and he was correct. Mayer believes that this set the precedent that Koch would pass on to Charles and David: “justice can be bought, and the rules are for chumps” (28).

Mayer clearly articulates Fred Koch’s personality in this chapter, from his strong work ethic to his crippling greed. As noted above, Mayer presents these characteristics to convey the type of upbringing Charles and David Koch experienced. Being the family’s patriarch and a business mogul himself, it is safe to assume that Charles and David learned a lot from Fred Koch. When discussing Fred Koch’s decision to invest in oil refineries in the Soviet Union, Mayer notes that at first, Koch claims to have torn the telegram asking for his help, expressing a deep concern about working with Communists. However, Koch’s desire for profit outweighs his convictions, presumably in a way that Charles and David adopted as well. Mayer notes that “after securing an agreement to get paid in advance, [Fred] overcame his philosophical reservations” (28).

In their early childhood, the Koch boys were raised primarily by a German governess, who Mayer identifies as a “fervent Nazi sympathizer” with a “dictatorial approach to child rearing” (32). While it is impossible to know exactly the effect this experience with authority had on the children, Mayer offers that it is interesting that Charles’ “lifetime preoccupation would become crusading against authoritarianism while running a business over which he exerted absolute control” (33). It is possible that his obsession with control stemmed from the harsh control this German governess held over his childhood.



Continuing to delve into the Koch brothers' childhood, Mayer employs the work of research historian Clayton Coppin to speculate about the impact the brothers' upbringing had on their future business and political endeavors. Coppin was employed in 1993 to draft a complete and confidential history of Koch Industries, which gave him unprecedented access to the inner workings of the Koch family. Ten years later, he was enlisted by fellow Koch brother Bill to draft a confidential analysis of his brother Charles' political activities. Mayer digresses to discuss all four brothers' childhoods, referencing their behavioral differences yet acknowledging that all were sent to boarding or military schools. Competition, bullying, and resentment categorized the brothers' relationships with each other; Charles was sent away to boarding school for his brothers' sake, according to Mary Koch. The different tasks that Koch brothers, over the years, have enlisted Coppin's help with represent the innate differences that exist between brothers themselves. Each of the brothers is intelligent enough and have the resources necessary to hire an experienced researcher such as Coppin, but they clearly enlist his help to serve different moral purposes.

Interestingly, Mayer begins the next section of this chapter with a quote from David Koch, who claims that their father "tried to indoctrinate the boys politically," yet she devotes the remainder of the section to Charles', not David's, reaction to his father's political advice (38). Here, Mayer is inferring that politically, Charles and David Koch operate as the same apparatus. Charles presumably showed an interest in politics because of his father's strong political ideas. Fred Koch despised the Communist party, to the extent that he was later ashamed of the work he completed for the Soviet Union. He was highly critical of the way Communists were using "churches, public schools, universities, labor unions, the armed services, the State Department, the World Bank, the United Nations, and modern art" to push their political agenda (39). Decades later, Charles and David Koch would be accused of drafting the same, all-encompassing plan to shift society's political ideology, presumably a tactic learned from their father's political advice.

Mayer relies on the research of historian Clayton Coppin again in this chapter to reiterate the idea that Charles Koch's anti-authoritarian beliefs stemmed from his childhood. Coppin's research into Charles' political activity led him to conclude that "Charles harbored a hatred of the government so intense it could only be truly understood as an extension of his childhood conflicts with authority" (53). Whether the authority of his stern father, his cold mother, or the strict schools he was sent to, Charles had a history of retaliation against authority. Coppin writes that Charles Koch "was driven by some deeper urge to smash the one thing left in the world that could discipline him: government" (54). While these claims alone are highly speculative, Mayer reminds the reader that Coppin had unprecedented access to the Koch family, presumably giving him the necessary evidence to make such claims.

To spread his libertarian ideals, Charles Koch wrote a paper for the Center for Libertarian Studies in New York City (after a \$65,000 contribution) claiming that a successful political organization should model itself on the John Birch Society. Charles' allusion to the society in his paper speaks to how heavily his father influenced his political ideals; though Charles did not subscribe to all the groups' ideas, he respected

and embraced his father's affinity for the John Birch Society. Charles could separate the structure of the group, which he found impeccable, from the groups' actions, which he found too focused on conspiracy theories. He presented to the Center for Libertarian Studies a working model for a libertarian political front which, most importantly, modeled the secrecy of the John Birch Society.

By 1980, Charles and David had a sizable hold over the Libertarian Party and its policies. To push their agenda further, younger brother David ran for vice president alongside Ed Clark, effectively bypassing campaign finance laws by involving Koch as an individual rather than a corporation. David poured two million dollars into the campaign and yielded only one percent of the vote, proving to the brothers that they could not purchase the government through one election alone. Charles Koch was quoted saying that politics "tends to be a nasty, corrupting business," and rather than getting directly involved in politics, he was "interested in advancing libertarian ideas" (58). Charles and David knew the power of money, and because of their failed 1980 election bid, they knew their approach had to be all-encompassing. Mayer attributes this developing ideology to the birth of the "Kochtopus," which she defines as "the many-tentacled ideological machine" the brothers built by funneling millions into seemingly independent organizations (58). This experience solidified the brothers' early strategy of maintaining secrecy; they could accomplish more by staying behind the scenes than they could on the ticket.

Vocabulary

lore, inveterate, excised, invidious, milieu, jodhpurs, nascent, fervent, commensurately, domineering, paragon, carte blanche, prostrate, emanated, steely, foment, subterfuge, endemic, pernicious, overarching, abstruse, impetus, seminal, denigrated, bastion, implacably, bilge, evinced, filial, acrimony, affable, assiduously, consternation, pedagogy

The Hidden Hand: Richard Mellon Scaife

Summary

As Lyndon Johnson gained national popularity for his presidential campaign on the back of his Great Society platform, Richard Mellon Scaife and other wealthy, conservative extremists began meeting to “plot against the country’s liberal drift” (61). Scaife helped found the Carthage Foundation in 1964, which represented a fleet of deep-pocketed conservative organizations aimed at shifting the political landscape away from liberal policies. At the forefront of this effort was Richard Mellon Scaife, who was credited by one reporter as “the progenitor of a new form of hard-hitting political philanthropy” (62).

Mayer begins her analysis of Richard Mellon Scaife by briefly describing his family history. Judge Thomas Mellon, Richard’s great-grandfather, was the founder of the family’s fortune. Though he seems hard-working and sensible from the brief information Mayer provides, his inheritance has been tarnished with greed and alcoholism by his descendants. Sarah Mellon, Richard’s mother, was called “a gutter drunk” by her own daughter, and married failed businessman Alan Scaife (63). The couple’s two children, Cornelia and Richard, lived a noticeably more affluent life than their peers, which Richard recalls with a shameless feeling of entitlement. Later, he would write that “inheritance comes to the person but also to his community and country,” claiming that his fortune has given him the opportunity to “put dollars to work in the battle of ideas” (67). Keep in mind that this claim was written retrospectively; Scaife effectively reframed the millions he has poured into the political system through the misleading veil of philanthropy.

Richard Mellon Scaife’s upbringing was riddled with behavioral problems. By the age of fourteen, he was an unashamed drinker, a quality that followed him during his tumultuous path through college. His grades were below-average, yet he was accepted into Yale. After several drinking incidents, an arrest, belittling the dean, and one expulsion that was briefly corrected by his father’s money, Scaife was finally expelled and forced to finish his education at the University of Pittsburgh. Despite his lackluster performance in grade school and college alike, Scaife entered the family business – Gulf Oil – shortly after graduating. Mayer notes that despite his elevated social status, “alcoholism and freakish tragedy continued to dog his adult life” (68).

The death of his father marked a turning-point in Richard Mellon Scaife’s life. As his father had done, Richard was now responsible for managing his mother’s massive estate, giving him access to millions of dollars to invest. His mother’s estate was partly divided into trusts for her children and her grandchildren, mainly to avoid having to pay taxes. The interest accumulated on these trusts would be donated to charity for a certain number of years in exchange for tax-free inheritance to the trust’s beneficiaries. Mayer summarizes this system: “In other words, two decades of philanthropy was the price for a tax-free inheritance” (68).

Scaife turned to deep-pocketed advisors such as corporate lawyer Lewis Powell to decide how his charitable funds should be spent. Powell was the main orchestrator behind a plan to build a conservative establishment to counter the existing “bloated and self-satisfied” liberal establishment (72). This plan relied on “corporate conservatives” who were “intent on implementing a pro-business – and, critics would say, self-serving – political agenda,” but most importantly, who could mask themselves as the existing establishment, “which regarded itself as non-partisan” (72). Thus, Powell and Scaife knew their radical fringe ideas had to be masked by a non-partisan aura to take any significant hold in society. Powell drafted a memo that Mayer claims “electrified the Right, prompting a new breed of wealthy ultraconservatives to weaponize their philanthropic giving” by investing in the promotion of their ideas in universities, think tanks, newspapers, churches, and courts (76). His words called wealthy conservatives to arms, in what Mayer calls an attempted “conservative takeover” of society (73).

For Scaife, think tanks were the most effective tool to begin this conservative takeover. He proudly invested in hundreds of think tanks which all masked themselves as non-partisan by changing society’s perception of the existing political establishment. Scaife and other wealthy conservatives argued that existing media outlets, schools, and other sources of information were actively spreading liberal ideas while regarding conservative ideas as extreme. Under the rhetoric of balancing the playing field, Scaife successfully introduced (and sponsored) a wave of conservative ideology into society through think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute.

Analysis

Like the way Mayer used Fred Koch’s political ideas to demonstrate how his son Charles’ political ideas formed, in this chapter she uses Richard Mellon Scaife’s father, Alan Scaife, to demonstrate the development of Mellon Scaife’s views. Scaife’s family fortune was squandered by his forebears, but after marrying Sarah Mellon he found himself in charge of her enormous inheritance. Alan Scaife developed an overwhelming fear that leftist leaning politicians were gunning for wealthy individuals such as himself. Ironically, he was adamant about protecting money he fell into in the first place. Richard Mellon Scaife recalls his father’s fears having a profound impact on his “lifelong infatuation with intelligence intrigue, conspiracy theories, and international affairs” (63).

Mayer provides a dynamic look at Richard Mellon Scaife’s family, even referring to his great uncle and former Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew Mellon, to demonstrate the family’s history of using wealth for political gain. Andrew Mellon vehemently opposed the implementation of a federal income tax; once the tax was instituted by Congress, Mellon did not abandon his anti-tax principles. In his capacity as Secretary of the Treasury, Mellon effectively pushed legislation granting tax breaks to the wealthiest citizens on the promise of economic stimulation. Tax breaks for the wealthy continue to be a highly-contested issue to this day. Thus, Mayer presents this long-winded history of corporate and individual tax dodging to paint the scene of the world Richard Mellon Scaife was born into.



After the death of his father, Richard Mellon Scaife exhibited the same desire to evade taxes as Mayer had identified of his family members. Wealthy families such as the Kochs and the Scaifes had learned to avoid paying inheritance taxes by creating trusts that required a set number of years of charitable donations in exchange for tax-free inheritance for the trust's beneficiaries. While Richard Mellon Scaife may be skilled in this area, Mayer notes that he was not the first to attempt it. Rockefeller Foundations, "the granddaddy of all private foundations" founded by John D. Rockefeller, set the standard by creating private charitable organizations (71); essentially, he avoided inheritance taxes while maintaining control over how the charitable donations were distributed. Mayer suggests that Richard Mellon Scaife followed Rockefeller's example and furthered the practice of using philanthropy as a tax shelter, as evident by his standing as "not only one of the country's richest citizens but also one of its biggest philanthropists" (72). With a combination of his own foundations and his mother's enormous foundation once she passed, he tilted his monetary interests towards public affairs. He used the power of his foundations to push ideas he felt were good for America, but more importantly, ideas that he knew were good for his own interests.

Mayer devotes a lengthy section introducing the rise of think tanks in the political realm. She notes that as Scaife's wealth grew, he became increasingly "disillusioned with more conventional political spending" (76). He donated excessively to a failed libertarian presidential bid with virtually no success, prompting him and other wealthy conservatives to create more effective ways to wield their powerful wallets. Think tanks, Mayer argues, were the solution. Frustration from not being able to influence campaigns directly with large donations fueled the rapid growth in numbers of think tanks. To highlight the prominence of money in the creation of think tanks, Mayer adds that Scaife admitted "that he helped bankroll at least 133 of the conservative movement's 300 most important institutions" (77). This gave Scaife a vast sphere of political influence while remaining seemingly out of the public stage, thus allowing him to act, as Mayer titled the chapter, as a hidden hand.

In a book largely dedicated to the Koch brothers, including Scaife serves a purpose for Mayer's investigation of what she calls the radical right. Much of Scaife's political activism came in the form of providing funding to think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute. Other wealthy conservative businessmen such as Charles Koch would follow Scaife's lead in funneling their charitable funds through think tanks as well. Mayer uses her detailed analysis of Richard Mellon Scaife to describe how think tanks evolved into philanthropic weapons for the radical right. Mayer indicates that the general makeup of think tanks changed in the seventies; she also indirectly suggests that Richard Mellon Scaife was one of the primary motivators this structural change. Conservatives widely believed that the existing political and social establishment was inherently liberal; acting on this notion, Scaife used think tanks as a tool to weave conservative discourse into the mainstream establishment. More important for Mayer, Scaife set a precedent for the conservative movement's weaponization of philanthropy.

Vocabulary

largesse, threadbare, dissolute, calamitous, chicanery, adjudicating, bequeathed, salve, iconoclastic, avowedly, depravity, jeremiad, screeds, harbinger, umbrage, acolyte, regent, pecuniary, anodyne, shills, outmoded, discernible, magnate, lassitude, acumen, trysts, absconding, chagrin, rakish, sub-rosa, groundswell

Beachheads: John M. Olin and the Bradley Brothers

Summary

Mayer's next chapter is dedicated to the economic empire of John M. Olin, which, like the Koch and Scaife fortunes, was wielded to further the conservative political movement. Unlike previous conservative powerhouses, however, Olin relied not only on think tanks, but also on academia. John M. Olin and his colleagues devoted millions of dollars in donations to conservative programs across America's colleges, mainly stressing the importance of a free-market economy without government regulation.

Before delving into Olin's efforts in the political realm, Mayer offers a brief history of the Olin Corporation and the many lawsuits it has faced over the years. Despite considering himself a conservationist and animal lover, Olin's company was one of the Environmental Protection Agency's first targets upon its inception in 1973. The company was accused of releasing absurd amounts of DDT and mercury into populated areas and falsifying records of the chemical dumping. The industry town of Saltville, Virginia provides the clearest example of the Olin Corporation's negligence and the human cost felt by Olin employees. For almost twenty years, the company estimated it spilled one hundred pounds of mercury per day into the town's public drinking supply. Saltville went from a "picture of American industrial prosperity" to a virtual ghost town riddled with diseases as a direct result of Olin's ignorance (97).

Despite claiming his business pursuits and philanthropic efforts were not intertwined, Olin "directed his lawyer to enlist his fortune in the battle to defend corporate America" (100). This effort included fighting environmental regulations, promoting free-market ideals, and ridding corporations of virtually any government oversight. Mayer notes the contradiction that exists between Olin's massive fortune and his (and his associates') fears of losing his wealth; even though Olin and his advisors "had reached pinnacles of American power and wealth," they knew they lacked "influence over the next generation" (102). Thus, the Olin Foundation targeted academia to instill Olin's own conservative ideals into the nation's youth. As the Olin Foundation's President William Simon phrased it, universities "must be given grants, grants, and more grants in exchange for books, books, and more books" (102).

John M. Olin enlisted his colleagues as well as wealthy business associates to create a strategy they called the "beachhead theory," which plotted the conservative ideological takeover of American academic institutions (103). The theory suggested that the Olin Foundation (and similar foundations) invest in the most influential schools, regardless of their known political affiliation. While donating to conservative schools was much easier, establishing seemingly-neutral economic programs on Ivy League universities would ensure that their ideas were being taught at the highest level money could buy. The foundations would find right-leaning professors at the school, and offer grant money in

exchange for a rightward shift in their course materials. Olin's experts behind the plan believed attacking the larger, more prestigious institutions first would prompt smaller schools nationwide to follow suit, creating a domino effect of conservative ideas.

Mayer believes the Olin Foundation's most significant beachheads were established on America's law schools. At these institutions, the foundation underwrote the growth of the discipline of Law and Economics, which "stresses the need to analyze laws, including government regulations, not just for their fairness but also for their economic impact" (107). Supporting this discipline was admittedly a stealth strategy of Olin's associates, as it allowed them to spread conservative economic ideas under a neutral-sounding name. The foundation regarded judicial influence as crucial to their overall strategy; thus, focusing on students of law was only half of the equation. The Olin Foundation invested in Law and Economics seminars for federal and state judges as well, which looked more like luxurious vacations as opposed to informational seminars. Olin also helped bankroll the Federalist Society, which has grown into "a powerful professional network of forty-two thousand right-leaning lawyers, with 150 law school campus chapters and about seventy-five lawyers' groups nationally" (110). Olin's conservative influence thus effectively permeated nationwide judicial discourse.

Michael Joyce, former executive director of the Olin Foundation, was credited by one colleague for having "invented the field of modern conservative philanthropy" (113). Unsurprisingly, then, he was aggressively courted for a leadership position at the Bradley Foundation, where Mayer estimates he gave away "\$280 million to his favorite conservative causes" (113). Joyce unabashedly followed the same steps he and his colleagues did at the Olin Foundation, from funding conservative beachheads on college campuses, to subsidizing right-leaning think tanks, and stressing the importance of free-market economics. The corporation behind the Bradley Foundation, a merger between the Allen-Bradley Company and Rockefeller International, gained most its \$290 million in assets through government contracts, despite contributing millions in donations to think tanks and academic programs stressing the dangers of big government. Joyce described his "overarching purpose" for his work at both Olin and Bradley "was to use philanthropy to support a war of ideas," a common theme among likeminded wealthy conservatives (119).

Analysis

To begin this chapter, Mayer references a 1969 uprising at Cornell University which marked an influential shift in the conservative movement. The increased liberalization of public schools and universities, exemplified by the uprising, prompted wealthy conservatives to focus more heavily on spreading their ideas to students across the nation. The uprising was conducted by disgruntled African-American students wielding large guns and hailing books out of the library windows. Ultimately, the students were successful in securing amnesty for their actions and getting the university president to promise to establish a black studies program. They were also successful in launching wealthy far-right conservatives such as John M. Olin into an "ambitious offensive to reorient the political slant of American higher education to the right" (93). While Mayer

notes that this was not the only contributing factor to Olin's decision to focus on education, it was undoubtedly influential.

Following in the steps of fellow conservative powerhouse Richard Mellon Scaife, John M. Olin focused his charitable donations toward like-minded think tanks and political organizations, to ultimately weaponize his philanthropic giving. However, Olin's efforts via the funding of think tanks was nowhere near as successful as Scaife's, causing Olin to look for other pathways to spread his ideology. Mayer presumes that the Cornell Uprising in 1969 was the turning point in Olin's thinking; he began focusing on weaponizing his philanthropic efforts to further his political agenda through the realm of academia. Though Richard Mellon Scaife paved a clear path for weaponizing think tanks, this method was not enough for Olin. Establishing a presence in universities nationwide would be Olin's main form of political activism.

The beachhead theory, to which this chapter owes its name, was concocted by a group of elite, wealthy, and highly self-interested colleagues and employees of John M. Olin. The two most influential contributors according to Mayer were William Simon, the Olin Foundation's president, and Michael Joyce, the foundation's executive director. Together, these two men hatched an intricate plan for spreading free-market and anti-regulatory economic principles throughout academia, starting at the most influential universities. Mayer claims that "the formula required subtlety, indirection, and perhaps even some misdirection," a note to the founders' willingness to deceive others for their own benefit (103). Mayer interjects her own aside during this discussion to identify "the beau ideal" of the beachhead theory, the Madison Program at Princeton (104). This program invested in right-leaning professors and capitalized on their willingness to accept grants in exchange for a shift in curriculum slightly further right.

Establishing beachheads on universities was not possible if Olin's (and like-minded conservative's) ideas came across as too radical. To avoid this confrontation, programs subsidized by those involved in the conservative movement opted for neutral-sounding names for their curriculums. Such thinking spurned names such as the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University. James Pierson, former executive director and trustee of the Olin Foundation, recognized the importance of concealing the political nature of their programs as to not "raise questions about academic integrity" (103). In other words, if the programs came across as politically motivated, students and faculty would recognize the imposed slant and call attention to it. In the same way, the Scaife family masked tax evasion and political action under the veil of philanthropy, Olin and his team wanted to mask conservative education under the veil of neutrality.

One of the core strategies of the conservative movement was spreading information to as many people as possible. Mayer notes that the installation of beachhead programs such as that at Princeton effectively "trained the next generation of conservatives," ensuring - in a way that no other investment could - the preservation of their ideals (105). Harvard's John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies proudly boasted that, of eighty-eight fellows, fifty-six went on to teach at prestigious institutions such as MIT, Yale, and Dartmouth. Thus, investing in one well-planned conservative educational



program allowed for Olin's influence to trickle throughout academia nationwide. His programs were not aimed at merely influencing one class of fifty or sixty students, but rather, they aimed to transform the entire scope of the economic and political mindset of society.

Though Mayer's tone never comes across as hostile, she dedicates several pages to the blatant ethical dilemmas present in the Olin Foundation's philanthropic practices. One of Olin's most effective tools was Law and Economics; this discipline supported an economic, bottom-dollar analysis of laws and regulations. The conservative movement used Law and Economics courses, programs, and seminars to further their ideology in a covert way. Mayer notes that the Olin Foundation was offering students thousands of dollars in grant money to take Law and Economics courses or attend Law and Economics seminars. Only one school turned down Olin's money, claiming that the foundation was "taking advantage of students' financial need to indoctrinate them with a particular ideology" (109). In a similar unethical fashion, Olin was funding luxurious, vacation-style Law and Economics seminars for judges. Mayer cites that "40 percent of the federal judiciary participated" in the seminars, where the judges would listen to lectures and book excerpts from Law and Economics experts before breaking to play golf or enjoy a massage (110). These real, physical incentives offered in exchange for one's ideological loyalty is, Mayer claims, blatantly corrupt.

Mayer dedicates the final pages of this chapter to a philosophical brother of the Olin Foundation, the Bradley Foundation. The Bradley Foundation actively courted Michael Joyce, former executive director at the Olin Foundation, by claiming they wanted to become "Olin West" (113). Their political strategy mirrored that of the Olin Foundation, especially in their support of academic programs. Mayer claims that under Joyce's direction, the Bradley Foundation supported the same universities, programs, and even individual professors as the Olin Foundation, creating a continuation of far-right conservative ideas stemming from John Olin.

Mayer's choice to include the brief analysis of the Bradley Foundation within Olin's chapter is her way of exemplifying "intellectual cronyism" (113). In previous chapters, Mayer has devoted lengthy descriptions of some of the leading philanthropic conservative foundations such as the Charles Koch Foundation, the Scaife Family Foundation, and the Olin Foundation. She notes several times throughout the book that these were some of the biggest players in the conservative movement, but they by no means acted alone. The Bradley Foundation is an example of one of the (relatively) smaller foundations that followed in the footsteps of giants like Scaife and Olin. Not only did the smaller foundations share the same strategies as the larger ones, they were sometimes, as in Joyce's case, led by the same people.

Vocabulary

wrest, brandishing, bandolier, capitulated, consternation, placate, hydrazine, effluents, elegiac, ignominious, intemperate, milquetoast, capos, furor, castigating, inculcated, monolithic, jurisprudence, riven, circuitous, anathema, decamped, profligate

The Koch Method: Free-Market Mayhem

Summary

Mayer begins this chapter by telling the story of Donald Carlson, a Koch employee at an oil refinery who died of cancer after being exposed to harmful chemicals for his twenty-one years of employment. Koch Industries settled the case outside of court, escaping any real accountability. Mayer laments that this is unfortunately a common story in the history of Koch Industries. This chapter is dedicated to what Mayer calls “The Koch Method,” which is exemplified by Donald Carlson’s story (120); the Koch method, in a condensed form, puts profit before all else, including human life.

Koch Industries’ profits skyrocketed during the last decades of the twentieth century, as did the number of lawsuits it faced. Most notably, federal prosecutors brought a massive case against the company for violations of the Clean Water Act. Federal prosecutor Angela O’Connell led the case, which charged Koch Industries with “lying about leaking millions of gallons of oil from its pipelines and storage facilities in six different states” (126). During the investigation, however, O’Connell felt she was being spied on; her trash was being taken away, and she was skeptical her phone was bugged. While she could never prove it, she confesses that to this day she feels a sense of uneasiness when talking about the brothers. Despite their alleged efforts to thwart the case, Koch Industries was ultimately slapped with a \$30 million fine, “the biggest in history at that point” (127). O’Connell left the case still disheartened at the lasting physical effects the Kochs’ pollution will have on the environment and on people.

The most striking example of Koch Industries’ negligence that Mayer provides was the tragic and untimely deaths of two Texas teenagers, Danielle Smalley and Jason Stone. According to court documents, Koch Pipeline Company was aware of a leaking gas pipeline in the teens’ neighborhood, but did not stop using the pipeline or warn any families in the surrounding area. While Danielle Smalley was driving to use a neighbor’s phone to report a gas smell, her car stalled. Upon restarting the car, the ignition lit a cloud of butane gas that was leaking from the pipeline, causing a fire that killed the two teens. Koch Industries was found guilty of both negligence and malice and awarded Smalley’s father the largest wrongful death award on record, \$296 million. A former Koch employee claimed that when he brought a similar leak to his supervisor’s attention, he was told “it would be cheaper to pay off the damages from a lawsuit than make the repairs” (130). Ultimately, Mayer provides this example as an example of the Koch Method: profits before people.

At the same time the Smalley case was being settled, Koch Industries found itself the center of a Senate investigation which alleged Koch Oil of “a widespread and sophisticated scheme to steal crude oil from Indians and others through fraudulent mismeasurements” (131). This investigation was helped, in a “fraternal version of the comic *Spy v. Spy*” by younger brother Bill Koch, who felt he was cheated out of his proper share of the company and did not want his family reputation sullied by what he

called organized crime (134). After an Oklahoma grand jury cleared Koch Industries of any responsibility in their criminal case, Bill Koch launched a civil case on the same grounds. Bill produced a “devastating list of witnesses,” all who confessed under oath to stealing oil for the company (136). One employee testified “If you bought crude, you’d shorten the gauge. They’d show you how...It all involved weights and measurements, and they had their thumb on the scale. That was the Koch Method” (137). Ultimately, Koch Industries was found guilty of “making 24,587 false claims to the government,” and fined \$25 million, \$7 million of which was to go to brother Bill Koch (137). The court settlement paralleled an uneasy settlement between the brothers, but it made a lasting impact on the Koch family name.

Analysis

Mayer uses the final two chapters of her first section to summarize and contextualize the first three. Although the Koch family by no means acted alone in perpetuating the conservative movement, they were undoubtedly one of the largest driving financial forces behind it; thus, the Koch family and, specifically, the Koch brothers are the primary focus of Mayer’s book. To create a fluent picture of the political and social context in which the brothers gained their power, Mayer dedicates the first three chapters to some of the largest financial backers of the right: Fred Koch, Richard Mellon Scaife, John M. Olin, and the Bradley brothers. The final two chapters of Mayer’s first section are dedicated to how Charles and David Koch operated their business and political endeavors within the previously described context.

Mayer begins this chapter with the story of Koch Refining Company employee Donald Carlson, who died after over twenty years of working too close to dangerous chemicals. Again, Mayer uses this example to clarify the context of the situation. She states that while the Kochs were “financing an ideological war aimed at freeing American business from the grip of government,” people like Donald Carlson were feeling the real, human cost of said war (120). Mayer interjects her own analysis of Charles Koch into her story of Carlson, reminding the reader that Koch believed government regulation “was an illegitimate encroachment on free enterprise and a roadblock to initiative and profitability” (121). This profit-driven attitude ultimately resulted in the negligence that caused Donald Carlson’s cancer and subsequent death.

Mayer briefly hints to her views on libertarianism in this chapter, by referencing Koch critic Thomas Frank’s description that it is “a corporate front, masked as a philosophy” (123). Libertarian ideals include abolishing almost all government regulations, including agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency and labor unions, on the basis that such regulatory machines hinder economic growth. However, Mayer alludes to the notion that abolishing such agencies serves only one real purpose: the company’s bottom line.

Mayer describes the corporate and legal practices of the Kochs as something like organized crime. Low-level and federal investigators alike were allegedly followed, intimidated, and had their trash seized to find reputation-damaging materials. Legal

battles were settled in dollar amounts outside of documented court proceedings. A lawyer representing the father of a teenager wrongly killed because of Kochs' negligence found small transmitters in his office while working on the case. Another lawyer claimed that the Kochs sent emissaries, other lawyers, and even senators to persuade him to end his investigation, a tribute to the effort they spent in concealing their corporate and political motives. The examples Mayer provides paint the Koch brothers as corporate bullies who have the resources and funds to persuade almost anyone.

The Kochs are unashamed supporters of free-market economics, meaning that markets and overall economies function more efficiently when they can operate freely. One of the main principles in this school of thought is that corporations do not need regulations to prevent greed, because competing corporations will naturally eradicate one party becoming too wealthy or too powerful. This exact situation took place when Koch Industries was ousted by larger competing companies for stealing oil from Native American lands, mainly because they considered it cheating. However, Koch Industries blamed government overreach for the intrusion, not the free-market at work.

Mayer finalizes this chapter by acknowledging the reality that the Koch brothers' influence was present in every aspect of American politics. After horrible environmental ratings, the Kochs moved their investments primarily to the financial sector, where there was much less regulation than in the oil industry. Their profits grew exponentially while the amount they were legally obligated to pay to the federal government was minimized at every step of the way by fighting regulation and avoiding proper documentation. The Koch Method was ultimately an all-encompassing takeover of American politics that could only be possible through the millions of dollars the Kochs had at their disposal.

Vocabulary

benzene, expedience, disentangle, surreptitiously, deposed, soliloquy, enmity, recusal, kibosh, stymied, wended, salacious, spate, panoply

The Kochtopus: Free-Market Machine

Summary

The Kochtopus was the name given to the enormous “vertically and horizontally integrated” strategy Charles Koch used to infuse anti-regulatory, free-market economic principles into mainstream political discourse (142). Charles Koch and his political lieutenant, Richard Fink, ran their philanthropic endeavors with the mechanical efficiency of engineers. This strategy began with an in-house lobbying operation centered in Washington, D.C., founded on the idea that corporate America was under attack by the existing political establishment. Koch and Fink’s plan was three-tiered, requiring a merger of “all forms of political spending – campaign, lobbying, and philanthropic – into one investment aimed at paying huge future dividends to the donors” (145).

In David Koch’s words, their strategy was to “minimize the role of government and to maximize the role of the private economy,” which they accomplished through their wide-spanning investments across academia, think tanks, and lobbying efforts (145). He justified this multi-pronged approach by claiming he was “trying to support different approaches” to achieve his objectives, downplaying the value of his multi-million dollar investments (145). The Koch brothers funded hundreds of channels of “the same pro-business, limited-government goals” through their political action committee, KochPAC, their lobbying presence, and the numerous non-profit groups they funded (146). Most importantly, Mayer notes, was the brothers’ ability to keep their political spending covert because of the seemingly endless laundry list of enterprises they funded.

The brothers, in accordance with Fink’s plan, developed several outlets for social change by supporting “institutions that could hatch scholarly ideas in line with their own thinking” (153). They established their own academic beachhead at George Mason University, which quickly became a hub of libertarian economic theory. Richard Fink moved his right-leaning economic think tank, the Mercatus Center, to the center of the college’s campus, masking it under the veil of political neutrality because it was housed in a public institution. Mayer claims the Koch brothers “donated some \$30 million to the school, much of it going to the Mercatus Center” (149). The think tank’s proximity to D.C. heightened its influence, as the center’s fellows regularly testified as economic experts for Congressional hearings. One reporter called it “the most important think tank you’ve never heard of” (153).

The Mercatus Center was powerful in its own right, but it is also an indispensable example of the Kochtopus at work. By focusing on perpetuating ideas rather than on individual politicians or special interests, the Koch brothers could spread their value system and ultimately get rising lawyers, lobbyists, and analysts to fight the political battles they’d been secretly waging for years. Mayer notes that by 2008, “George Mason University was both the largest single recipient of Koch funds for higher education and the largest research university in Virginia” (155). Strategic investments,

largely orchestrated by Richard Fink, allowed the Kochtopus to permeate political discourse while the brothers covertly focused only on their bottom line.

Analysis

To begin this chapter, Mayer claims the “humiliating losses in the courts and congress” prompted the Koch brothers to “engage far more strategically, funneling money into the pursuit of power in a whole new way” (141). This way was the Kochtopus, a term that Mayer defines as a “publicity-shy, multiarmed assembly line” which spanned from “idea creation to policy development to education to grassroots organizations to lobbying to political action” (142). The driving force behind the Kochtopus was Richard Fink, the Koch brothers’ political lieutenant.

In previous chapters, Mayer has hinted at her own feelings of doubt about the sincerity of the Libertarian Party’s platform. In this chapter, she notes that Libertarians had their doubts as well; not about their platform, but about the intentions of the Koch brothers after they became major financiers of the Republican Party. Genuine concerns over the future of their profits forced the brothers to think outside of the Libertarian Party’s capabilities, and turn to the conventional two-party system. Though they remain the most significant perpetuators of libertarian ideals, their actions “confuse a lot of people in the libertarian world, who think of them as sellouts” (143). Though this example is small in the larger context of the chapter, it speaks to Mayer’s underlying skepticism of libertarianism.

While the majority of Mayer’s analysis is factual and rather dry, she frequently invokes quotes from those formerly associated with the Koch family and their various subsidiaries. Because of the size and scope of the Kochs’ power, many choose not to be named, but the information they provide is vital to Mayer’s prose; including real human testimony brings the larger political and financial jargon into terms that are easier for the reader to digest. In this chapter, Mayer provides two examples of ex-employees in a brief but crucial paragraph which summarizes the Kochs’ history of weaponizing philanthropy. One unnamed Koch-defector claims philanthropy is “just the best option for them,” and “if they didn’t give it to their causes, they would have to give it to the government” (148). Thus, the Koch brothers’ political and ideological battle is a manifestation of their desire to exert complete control over their enormous fortunes. With one quote from an inside observer, Mayer summarizes dozens of pages of her own analysis.

The Koch brothers maintained a well-known level of “unusually tight personal control” over the philanthropic entities they funded (148). At the Cato Institute, for example, Charles Koch fired one of the five original shareholders and a pinnacle of libertarian principles, Murray Rothbard. According to Mayer, those who supported Rothbard through the rift believed Koch was “more interested in power than in principle,” a criticism that Mayer has noted previously as well (149). Referring to the previous chapter, the Koch Method, which is presumably the driving factor behind the Kochtopus, puts profits above all else, even ideology or political affiliation.

One of the Koch brothers' most impressive skills is their ability to remain largely behind the scenes in the political arena. They achieve this by their carefully constructed academic programs such as the Mercatus Center and the Institute for Humane Studies, which spread a philosophy, or a way of thinking, instead of forcing specific ideas onto students. This emphasis on the spread of ideals or values has resulted in many authors, lawyers, and economists who emerge from Koch-funded programs and begin to wage the same anti-regulatory fight the Kochs have dedicated millions to over the years. For example, an economist and top official at the Mercatus Center, Susan Dudley, fought the EPA's attempt to reduce surface ozone by claiming that ozone was effective at preventing some cases of skin cancer. Her argument was accepted at first by lower-level judges (who coincidentally attended all-expenses-paid Koch funded judicial retreats) but quickly reversed by the Supreme Court, who argued that laws were not subject to a cost-benefit analysis. Both the funding and the initial anti-regulatory sentiment expressed by Dudley could be traced indirectly back to the Koch brothers, while their names largely evaded publicity.

Vocabulary

garish, supplanted, indemnify, barrage, flout, prescient, coffers, credo, putsch, iniquitous, patrimony, aggrandizing, lambasted, fealty, hilt

Boots on the Ground

Summary

This chapter begins the second section of Mayer's investigation, and it is dedicated to some of the most important political precursors to the conservative movement. Blazing the trail for such precursors was the Koch-funded Citizens for a Sound Economy, which Mayer defines as a "fake populist movement secretly manufactured by corporate sponsors" (159). Instead of the grassroots movements these groups attempted to emulate, they were quickly referred to as "Astroturf" groups (159). In less than ten years, the Koch brothers donated at least \$7.9 million to Citizens for a Sound Economy.

Mayer has noted in previous chapters that the Kochs were disinterested with conventional politics, leading them to focus on funding ideas rather than individual candidates. Adhering to this strategy, Citizens for a Sound Economy "mobilized fifty paid field workers, in twenty-six states, to rally voters behind the Kochs' agenda of lower taxes, less regulation, and less government spending" (160). The group's membership claims were highly contested; one critic investigated a subsidiary of Citizens for a Sound Economy named Citizens for the Environment, which had no citizen membership whatsoever.

In 2003, insiders claim that a confrontation over control of Citizens for a Sound Economy caused a rift between the Kochs and board chairman Dick Armey. Armey formed FreedomWorks, while the Koch brothers founded Americans for Prosperity; both organizations mirrored the deceptive political nature of Citizens for a Sound Economy and continued to further free-market agendas sponsored by wealthy conservatives. Mayer does not delve too far into the ideology and history of Americans for Prosperity, but she has mentioned the organization in her first chapter as one of the Kochs' strongest political arms. What Mayer does mention, though, is the Kochs' chosen leader of their political endeavors, Tim Phillips. Phillips had a proven reputation for being "the religious Right's savviest political operative" (163). Mayer argues that choosing Phillips represented the Kochs' increasingly more aggressive political strategy.

Analysis

While this chapter is significantly shorter than others at a mere five pages long, the name of the chapter speaks to its importance to the flow of Mayer's investigation. Before any successful conservative takeover could occur, investors needed "boots on the ground," to give the movement the aura of concrete grassroots support (159). The free-market ideology was there, the funding was there, but what they needed was actual human voices perpetuating their message.

The Koch brothers sought a solution through Citizens for a Sound Economy, which Mayer outright claims represented "a new kind of weapon in the arsenal of several of



America's biggest businesses – a fake populist movement secretly manufactured by corporate sponsors" (159). Citizens for a Sound Economy classified itself as a non-partisan educational group, and by 1990 it boasted a membership of 250,000. However, one critic claimed that CSE's membership reports were "intellectually dishonest," which Mayer corroborates with the example of a CSE spinoff group, Citizens for the Environment (161). Citizens for the Environment produced reports deeming acid rain and other environmental myths, yet investigative reports found the organization had "no citizen membership of its own" (161). According to the actual practices of Citizens for a Sound Economy and its sister groups, having "boots on the ground" actually meant having the appearance of boots on the ground (159).

This chapter begins the second section of Mayer's investigation, titled "Secret Sponsors: Covert Operations, 2009-2010" (157). While the first and second sections of the book are comparable in length, they cover significantly different stretches of time. Section one covers almost forty years, while section two is entirely devoted to one year. Mayer provides the first section as a history of the precursors to the conservative movement; section two goes further in-depth into what Mayer believes was a pivotal year for conservatives. Before reading any of this section, the reader can presume from the effort that Mayer devotes to this one year the significance of the year's events.

Mayer explained several times throughout her first section that the conservative movement focused more on ideas and principles rather than individual candidates or campaigns. This can be seen as early as David Koch's 1980 failed vice-presidential bid; the Kochs quickly learned that while their money was undoubtedly powerful in campaigns, a true restructuring of society had to focus on broad values and philosophies. Mayer makes this point again in this chapter, through her analysis of Citizens for a Sound Economy, a nonprofit front group funded and ideologically fueled by wealthy conservatives such as the Koch brothers. This organization would ultimately become a prototype for front groups to come, most notably Americans for Prosperity. Such groups were successful at keeping their political motives under wraps by funneling money into educational programs and think tanks that would, in exchange, perpetuate right-leaning ideals and practices. As these ideals and practices took hold in academia, political activists, fueled by conservative education and literature, would unknowingly fight legislative battles on behalf of the Kochs and other billionaires.

Vocabulary

credence, guise, dynamo, ardent

Tea Time

Summary

Mayer begins this chapter by describing the origins of the Tea Party movement, starting with a fiery rant given by business and trading expert Rick Santelli in 2009. Santelli's rant quickly went viral; most notably, conservatives applauded his analogy to the Boston Tea Party. The rant's popularity paired with the likening of a conservative movement to the Tea Party is the creation myth, Mayer argues, for the entire Tea Party movement. Mayer notes that the Koch brothers were asked numerous times about the extent of their involvement – either financial or ideological – to the movement, accusations they always denied. Without stating it outright, Mayer insinuates that the Kochs were, in fact, covertly behind the Tea Party.

Immediately, Mayer begins to dissect the Tea Party's creation myth, beginning with the movement's claims to non-partisanship, anti-elitism, and spontaneity. Groups funded specifically by the Koch brothers, which gave birth to the libertarian ideological basis for the Tea Party movement, have previously attempted to invoke the memory of the Boston Tea Party to advance their antitax, anti-regulation interests. Both Citizens for a Sound Economy and Americans for Prosperity launched separate Tea-Party-inspired rallies in the nineties, and while both failed, Mayer notes that they laid the "rudiments of a political machine" that could "fake the appearance of public support" (169).

The political machine that Mayer references is another name for the Kochtopus, a conservative "national echo chamber" which, in 2009, worked tirelessly at preventing the Obama administration from accomplishing nearly anything (171). The foundations, think tanks, and academic programs supported by the Kochtopus produced essay, articles, and press releases aimed solely at opposing Obama's legislative initiatives, "regardless of any compromises or modifications that the new administration might offer" (170). The sprawling political network thus seemed to stand against more than it stood for, a criticism Mayer has previously said of libertarianism and the Kochs as well.

Long before the Tea Party movement was launched, Mayer claims that "the patrons of libertarianism kept on trying to buy at least the aura of public support" as early as 2004 (178). This included the creation of anti-tax advocacy organizations who feigned grassroots support, and the use of more modern methods such as organizing activists on Twitter. In 2009, "ten thousand hard-core conservative insiders" formed the Nationwide Tea Party Coalition and set a date for national Tea Party protests across the country on February 27 (180). These rallies were organized and funded by groups like the Heritage Foundation, Americans for Prosperity, the Cato Institute, and FreedomWorks, among others. These groups succeeded at capitalizing on American's distrust in government and fear of over-taxation due to frivolous spending. They also provided blueprints for activists to follow that included which of Obama's initiatives to rally against, slogans to use, and even tee shirts for participants at rallies.

Mayer concludes this chapter by introducing Sean Noble, a Republican political operative with his own political consulting firm; among his most prized clients was Randy Kendrick, a lawyer, turned corporate investor, turned think tank chairwoman, who led the conservative fight against Obama's health care plan. In 2008, she loudly enlisted the help of the Kochs' donor network at one of their summits. Afterward, she turned to Sean Noble to construct a plan. Noble co-founded the Center to Protect Patient Rights with Kendrick. This organization existed only as a mailbox in Arizona, yet it donated millions to shadowy organizations perpetuating information and advertisements directly against Obama and his health care plan. The unexpected strength of the Tea Party movement paired with the far-rights' responsiveness and aggressiveness on the health care issue caused "pundits who had fallen over themselves to praise Obama a year before were writing about his political ineptitude" (196).

Analysis

Mayer's skepticism about the legitimacy of the Tea Party movement is clear from the beginning of the chapter. Arguably more than in any other chapters in this book, Mayer employs highly critical and skeptical language when discussing the Tea Party. On the very first page, for example, she deems the story of the Tea Party's creation a "myth," claiming the actuality behind the start of the movement was "a small number of people with massive resources [who] orchestrated, manipulated, and exploited economic unrest for their own purposes. They used tax-deductible donations to fund a movement to slash taxes on the rich and cut regulations on their own businesses" (165). Before delving into the timeline of the Tea Party, Mayer clearly ousts the movement for what she believes it is.

However illegitimate Mayer may view the Tea Party, she does not doubt the sphere of the movement's influence. The Tea Party represents the epitome of what the Kochs and similar donors sought to build with the conservative movement. Long-term investments in the spread of ideas led operatives independent from the Kochs to launch movements such as the Tea Party movement in the name of free-market economics and limited government ideology. The Kochs' main political operative Richard Fink summed it up by claiming "We never funded the Tea Party... We met for 20 or 30 years advancing free-market ideas in universities, think tanks, and citizen groups. I am hopeful these ideas filtered down and were apart of the cause of the Tea Party taking off" (193). Investing vaguely in ideas, the Kochs presumably hoped that someday their ideas would ignite a movement.

Mayer attempts to remain politically neutral throughout her fact-based investigation, but her sympathies for Barack Obama are evident. She claims the same incidents that marked the beginning of the Tea Party movement also marked the beginning of the Obama administration's "precipitous downhill slide" (165). The entire book thus far has been dedicated to the power and influence that money can buy, but in this chapter, Mayer makes it a point to address the effect of outside money specifically on Obama's presidency. She claims "it is hard to think of another president who had to face the kind of guerilla warfare" President Obama had to face, creating an image for the reader of

Obama on the defensive against wealthy conservatives such as those who initiated the Tea Party Movement (165).

While the name of this chapter implies it will focus primarily on the Tea Party Movement, Mayer chooses to focus more heavily on the building blocks that allowed such an extremist movement to gain a foothold in the political system. For example, she begins this chapter by claiming that a fiery rant given by conservative millionaire Rick Santelli helped launch the Tea Party. She then dedicates ten pages to the underlying political forces that appeared to allow such a small event to ignite a movement. These underlying forces included politicians, think tanks, and advocacy groups (most of which were Koch-funded) who worked tirelessly to perpetuate anti-tax, anti-regulatory rhetoric to scholars and common voters alike. Once her foundation is laid, she returns to the events leading up to Santelli's rant. The structure of this example demonstrates the extent and thoroughness of Mayer's investigative work; she identifies an important event, details the underlying causes and motivations for said event, digs for the steps that allowed such an event to happen, then ultimately returns to describe the event itself, in this case ten pages later.

Mayer claims that FreedomWorks was one of the most important driving forces behind the Tea Party movement. She focuses specifically on their so-called advertising investment in Fox News personality Glenn Beck; "they told him what to say on the air, and he blended the promotional material seamlessly into his monologue, making it sound as if it were his own opinion," ultimately creating the illusion that the FreedomWorks was "so important this icon, this hero of the movement, was bragging about them" (183). Mayer also uses FreedomWorks as an example of how important wealthy financiers were to the Tea Party movement. Though the movement claimed to be anti-elitist, billionaire backers such as Richard Mellon Scaife who helped found Mayer's model organization "gave the nascent Tea Party movement organization and political direction, without which it might have frittered away like the Occupy movement" (182). FreedomWorks thus represented the type of front group that wealthy conservatives used to purchase the aura of public support.

Mayer concludes the chapter discussing the conservative movement's fight against Obama's health care proposal, led by Randy Kendrick and Sean Noble. The duo founded the Center to Protect Patient Rights, which aimed to attack Obamacare by labeling it a "government takeover," playing on American's fear of the government intruding on their rights (190). Mayer likens the conservative effort against Obamacare to the corporate-backed battle to defend "smokers' rights," which masked tobacco companies' "financial interest as a matter of great principle" (191). Drawing this parallel allows the reader to see the deceptiveness behind the conservatives' health care strategy; restrictions on cigarette smoking were put in place as a matter of public health, not an intrusion on liberty. However, political spinsters were able to capitalize on American's innate desire to retain their freedoms. Using the same method, conservatives backed by wealthy corporate interests launched a liberty-driven, pseudo-grassroots crusade against Obamacare.

Vocabulary

precipitous, provocation, statism, inapt, metastasizing, neophytes, foment, deriding, minutiae, malignant, quiescent, umbrage, inordinate, irreverent, penchant, ersatz, inchoate, nascent, discomfited, specious, usurious, sequestration, cherubic, opaque, seminal, fitfully, junta, jeremiad, vitriol, effigy, unfurled, raucous, dithered

The Fossils

Summary

In the previous chapter, Mayer applauded the Tea Party's ability to capitalize on economic instability by blaming big government, establishment politics, and government spending. Similarly, Mayer uses this chapter to emphasize that "the same forces stirring the Tea Party" were able to "expertly channel the public outrage at government against scientific experts," resulting in detrimental environmental policies (198). One scientific expert in particular that Mayer references is Michael Mann, whose decade-long study on climate change concluded that "human beings were endangering the earth's climate by burning too much oil, gas, and coal" (198). Mann admittedly was not a political person, but his scientific findings forced him to regard climate change as one of the most pressing political and social issues facing the world. Mayer agrees, claiming that the fossil fuel industry proved to be the biggest and wealthiest opponent of the Obama administration.

Before delving into the scope of the political power of the fossil fuel industry's wealthiest players, Mayer dedicates a section to a brief history of the industry. Most importantly, some of the biggest names in the fossil fuel industry were also the biggest contributors to the Kochs' political machine. The network these wealthy industrialists represented worked tirelessly against environmental regulations that would, in effect, cease a majority of their business operations. Mayer argues that while information on climate change was being made available to the public, wealthy conservatives in the fossil fuel industry were simultaneously organizing a "stealthy state-of-the-art counteroffensive" against climate change research (204). Astonishingly, the director of research at Greenpeace found that "from 2005 to 2008, a single source, the Kochs, poured almost \$25 million into dozens of different organizations fighting climate reform" (204). Other like-minded fossil fuel tycoons followed suit, capitalizing on the years of far-right, anti-regulatory infrastructure established through the Kochtopus.

Leading up to the 2008 election, the scientific community was nearly united in the opinion that climate change was an issue that deserved immediate political attention. Simultaneously, the fossil fuel industry's fight against the legitimacy of climate change became more aggressive and more heavily funded. The climate change debate quickly became a race between the two interests to convince voters. Mayer notes that partisan differences regarding climate change "remained small among the general public but grew into a gaping chasm among elected officials" (211). Obama's election seemed promising for environmentalists, but Mayer notes that the fossil fuel industry was "eager to preserve its perks" secured during the Bush years (213).

The mounting debate over climate change prompted the Koch-funded group Americans for Prosperity to launch a well-orchestrated campaign to convince the public that environmental regulations hurt "ordinary Americans' pocketbooks" (215). In the same way the Tea Party channeled public unrest over economic instability into the kind of



anger necessary to fuel a political movement, Americans for Prosperity and other groups “succeeded to a remarkable extent in channeling the populist anger into the climate fight” (216). According to Mayer, the group mobilized protesters and forged letters to congressmen to feign the appearance of grassroots public support. The Obama administration, after a hard fight, successfully managed to pass legislation placing a cap on carbon emissions. The fossil fuel industry, however, did not give up its fight; wealthy conservatives, primarily the head of the Quintana coal firm, immediately began attacking the legislators who supported Obama’s bill.

To finish the chapter, Mayer returns to the work of climatologist Michael Mann, and how his “life, along with the environmental movement, was plunged into turmoil” at the hands of hackers indirectly funded by the Koch brothers (220). The emails of researchers at the renowned Climatic Research Unit at the University of East Anglia were leaked; anti-climate change groups wasted no time in using snippets of the emails out of context to falsely demonstrate “a willingness to falsify data in order to buttress the ideal that global warming was real” (220). The attack launched on Mann’s credentials coincided with the overall decline in public concern over climate change, due largely to the deep pockets of wealthy conservatives invested in the fossil fuel industry.

Analysis

Mayer states her position outright from the beginning section of this chapter: “If there was a single ultra-wealthy interest group that hoped to see Obama fail as he took office, it was the fossil fuel industry” (200). The Koch brothers, as well as many of their organizations’ largest donors, were modern-day oil tycoons, with empires mirroring that of the Rockefellers and DuPonts. Together, the Kochs and their donors wielded their wallets to fight any legislation that would hurt the bottom line of fossil fuel companies. This fight manifested itself as a fight against environmental regulations, and at a crucial time; modern science was close to convincing not only the electorate but many politicians that global warming was an immediate threat to human health and safety. Mayer notes in the first section of this chapter that the Kochs and their vast network of like-minded, wealthy business owners quickly prioritized fighting environmental regulations. One scientist noted that there was “no depth to which [the Kochs are] unwilling to sink to challenge anything threatening their interests even if it’s science and the scientists involved in it” (200).

In a sort of retrospective lesson, Mayer details the history of American oil tycoons to highlight the similarities many of them share with the Koch brothers. For example, Mayer references Hugh Roy Cullen, who helped build the Quintana oil empire, as a clear comparison. In 1952, Cullen “was the single biggest donor in American politics,” and shared a similar “radically right-wing” political ideology as the Koch brothers and other modern conservative donors (203). This comparison is important because, while Mayer’s study of the far-right focuses heavily on the Koch brothers, she frequently reminds the reader that they by no means acted alone. Their influence may be the easiest to see because of its unparalleled scope and their millions of dollars in



contributions, but their actions may not have been possible without the pathbreaking ideological battles people like Hugh Roy Cullen fought before them.

In previous chapters, Mayer has referenced the name given to the vast fleet of political operatives financed by the Kochs, the Kochtopus. While previous chapters have explained the presence, origin, and structure of the Kochtopus, in this chapter Mayer offers several examples of the physical mobilization of the Kochs' vast, powerful political arm. One such example was unearthed by Drexel University professor Robert Brulle, who found that a privately funded network of conservative donors "waged a permanent campaign to undermine Americans' faith in climate science and to defeat any effort to regulate carbon emissions" (205). Mayer has effectively explained the overall picture of the Kochtopus, and also provided examples such as Brulle's research to demonstrate the actual operations of the sprawling political machine.

The Kochtopus was mobilized in a plethora of other ways, as well. Koch-funded philanthropic groups such as Americans for Prosperity attacked climate change by employing the same principles used to establish academic beachheads on prestigious college campuses. Establishing academic beachheads began with targeting right-leaning professors and enhancing their conservative curriculum with approved information, public relations training, and by lining their pockets. To begin a counterattack on climate change, Americans for Prosperity actively recruited skeptical scientists and began "training them in public relations so that they could act as spokesmen, thereby adding legitimacy and cover to the [fossil fuel] industry's agenda" (208). While the issues of climate change and academic beachheads seem unrelated, the underlying influence of the Kochtopus is evident in the strategies used for both.

At the beginning and end of this chapter, Mayer references one of the most harassed climatologists of the so-called "climate wars," Michael Mann (221). Within days of his and fellow researchers' emails being hacked and leaked, members of congress were demanding an investigation into his work, he was being publicly bashed by conservative radio hosts, his job as a tenured professor at Penn State was in jeopardy, and he was receiving death threats. It took a long two years for Mann's work to be reaffirmed by scientific institutions, at which time public concern over the threat of global warming had dropped, just as fossil fuel tycoons wanted. Mayer includes Mann's testimony not only because of his personal experience with dark money, but to reaffirm her own conclusions on the climate war; she reiterates Mann's claim that he "could see no cause for the United States to move in the opposite direction from science other than money" (224). For the purpose of Mayer's overall investigation into the far-right, the climate wars represent that money is more powerful than science.

Vocabulary

bastion, vitriolic, ancillary, wantonly, parochial, stymied, lucre, denigrated, humdrum, dissemination, colluded, contrarian, tomes, tumult, discordant, louche, boon, offshoots, missives, accosted, saboteur, contemptuous, buttress, roiled, purloined, iniquity, omnipresent, erudite, nebulous, drubbing

Money Is Speech: The Long Road to Citizens United

Summary

Before mentioning the chapters' namesake, the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision in 2010, Mayer references the lengths to which David Koch has gone to use philanthropic giving to mask his political strategy. The monumental decision was a turning point for wealthy conservatives like the Kochs; Mayer claims it "launched the family's covert spending into a new, more electorally ambitious phase" (227). Essentially, the decision allowed corporations to make unlimited donations to independent outside groups such as think tanks and philanthropic organizations, so long as large donations were not made to individual candidates. Mayer expresses her opinion on the Citizens United ruling by first stating its most damning implication: "corporations had the same rights to free speech as citizens" (228).

As the title of the chapter suggests, the Citizens United ruling had a long history rooted in the idea that money and corporations are protected as forms of free speech under the First Amendment. Mayer claims this history began four decades ago with the DeVos family in Michigan. In a testament to their success, in terms of the conservatives' value on secrecy, she notes that the family was "less well-known outside Michigan than some of the other founding families of the conservative movement, but few played a bigger role as its bankrollers" (230). Heir to the Amway fortune Dick DeVos and his wife Betsy became champions for lifting all restrictions on campaign contributions. Mayer claims that "ground zero" in their fight was the James Madison Center for Free Speech, co-founded by Betsy DeVos (234). The organization was spearheaded by James Bopp Jr., who crafted a ten-year plan in which he, "case by case...battered away at the foundation of modern campaign-finance law" (237).

The 2010 Citizens United ruling had many positive implications that helped wealthy donors such as the Koch brothers advance their anti-regulatory agendas with more cash and less transparency. From the beginning of her investigation, Mayer has acknowledged the all-encompassing nature of the conservative movement. The Citizens United ruling represents the conservative shift of the judiciary as orchestrated by wealthy billionaires inside the Kochs' donor network. Mayer concludes the chapter by stating the final implication of the monumental ruling, which is that it "shifted the balance of power from parties built on broad consensus to individuals who were wealthy and zealous enough to spend millions of dollars from their own funds" (239). Thus, the most damaging implication of the decision is the danger it poses to democracy; with unlimited corporate spending, elections can be decided by a small number of wealthy elites, and the common man's vote is obsolete.

Analysis

Mayer begins this chapter by acknowledging the air of philanthropic generosity the Kochs have built for themselves. She has noted in the first section of this book that the Kochs and other like-minded conservatives have nearly perfected the art of weaponizing philanthropy. She uses David Koch as an example; Koch was a million-dollar contributor to theatres, ballets, and museums, boasting that he donated about forty percent of his income each year to charity. What Koch did not brag about, however, was the millions donated in the name of constructing a political “machine that would resemble, and rival, those of the two major political parties,” that was “financed by a tiny fraction of the wealthiest families in America” (227). In this example, Mayer defines her idea of weaponizing philanthropy.

Mayer’s tone in this chapter is clearly hostile toward the implications of the Citizens United decision, which she states outright within the chapter’s first pages; the Court acknowledged that “corporations had the same rights to free speech as citizens,” and “independent spending...wouldn’t result in corruption” (228). She sees this decision as a crucial factor in dark money’s rise to power in American politics. In a dual effort to evade taxes and secure political influence, wealthy conservative activists have “paved the way to weaponize philanthropy” (228). This groundwork paired with the Citizens United ruling allowed the Kochs “and other allied donors [to give] what came to be called dark money to nonprofit ‘social welfare’ groups that claimed the right to spend on elections without disclosing their donors” (229). Citizens United opened the floodgates for dark money, which innately allows for the secrecy the Kochs and other billionaires were so fond of in their tax-deductible donations.

Based solely on the length of the sections in this chapter, Mayer suggests the road leading up to the Citizens United decision is more important than the decision itself. She dedicates a majority of the chapter to the DeVos family, and the millions they contributed in the fight against campaign finance restrictions. While the decision was undoubtedly influential in the progression of the conservative movement, Mayer chooses to focus this chapter on the larger picture. Perhaps more terrifying than the idea that corporations can virtually give unlimited amounts to further the interests of the top one percent, is that the driving force behind the road to Citizens United unabashedly admitted, “we had a 10-year plan to take this all down...and if we do it right, I think we can pretty well dismantle the entire regulatory regime that is called campaign finance reform” (236). The conservative takeover of the judiciary was a carefully-calculated and well-orchestrated dance choreographed by a Koch-taught and DeVos-funded lawyer, James Bopp Jr. Mayer’s choice to focus primarily on the DeVos family in this chapter speaks to their importance to the Koch network and the larger picture of the conservative movement.

Vocabulary

bevy, prodigious, machinations, behest, coterie, quasi, terse, screed, pernicious

The Shellacking: Dark Money's Midterm Debut, 2010

Summary

Mayer begins her analysis of the 2010 midterm elections by addressing a surprising Republican victory in the historically liberal state of Massachusetts. Scott Brown secured a seat that altered the balance of power in the Senate at a crucial moment for the Obama administration; his election ultimately “deprived the Democrats of the sixty-vote minimum necessary to overcome a Republican filibuster” on Obama’s prized legislation, the Affordable Care Act (240). The one vote, to Mayer, represented the beginning of the most active mobilization of the conservative movement to date in her investigation.

Scott Brown’s election was not spurred by a sweeping grassroots conservative shift in ideology in Massachusetts. Rather, it was part of a calculated strategy enacted by wealthy conservatives aimed at using a small-game strategy to block the progression of the Affordable Care Act. This motive became clear at the Kochs’ 2010 donor summit, which took place shortly after Brown’s election and the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision, under a panel titled “The Opportunity of 2010” (241). Mayer focuses a bulk of the beginning of this chapter dissecting the careers and attitudes of those leading the panel: Sean Noble, Ed Gillespie, James Arthur Pope, and Jim Ellis, each of whom Mayer believes represent aspects of the underground political operation that would rout Democrats in the year ahead” (242).

The four men, according to Mayer, orchestrated “a midterm election like no other,” where the goal was dismantling not only the Affordable Care Act but Obama’s presidency as a whole (247). Sean Noble co-founded the Center to Protect Patients’ Rights, an example Mayer has referred to in previous chapters, which claimed to be a social welfare group but whose office location was a mere post office box. Similarly, Ed Gillespie marched to Texas petroleum tycoons shortly after the Citizens United decision suggesting the “high rollers could now legally funnel limitless amounts of cash to ‘outside’ organizations” which he offered to create (242). James Arthur Pope was a political strategist deeply entangled in the web of the Kochs’ donor network. Finalizing the panel was Jim Ellis, who Mayer claims had a “history of creating fake movements in support of unpopular corporations and causes” (245). Despite the energy these four and other wealthy donors created at the Kochs’ summit in Palm Springs, the Affordable Care Act was passed in March. In the wake of Obama’s monumental legislation, the Koch-funded operatives agreed that they had to “take the political organization they had built to fight the health-care plan and use it to take over the legislative body that had just given Obama his greatest victory” (247).

Mobilizing their political organization could most easily be done by using the new types of outside social welfare groups that, since the Citizens United decision, could give

unlimited amounts to political interests. These social welfare groups allowed corporations to give unlimited amounts of tax-deductible donations, and could keep their donors private. These conservative-funded groups pumped millions of dollars into attack ads aimed at Democratic candidates at every level of government during the 2010 midterm elections. Aside from promoting anti-regulatory, pro-business ads, these groups were also skilled at hiding their donors from the public eye. Mayer concludes that “to the unschooled eye, a rash of spontaneous attacks on Democrats appeared to be breaking out all across the country,” while in reality, it was a carefully constructed plan which had its main roots in the Kochs’ 2010 donor summit (249).

The second Koch donor summit of 2010 saw many of the same players as the first summit, but a recent shock to the finance sector prompted the appearance of many wealthy business owners who were “simply concerned with protecting their continued accumulation of wealth” (255). Among those newly present was Stephen Schwarzman, owner of a private equity firm whose capitalization on a tax loophole earned him an \$8 billion fortune. Mayer claims that the involvement of wealthy special interests such as Schwarzman resulted in “a raging river of cash capable of carrying the whole Republican Party to the right” (255). This river of cash, according to Mayer, totaled at least \$200 million, most of which went to the 2010 midterm elections. The influx of outside money scared Democrats, but it also prompted those on the left to ask: “Where is all this money coming from?” (258).

Regardless of where the money came from in 2010, it helped far-right special interests funded by people like the Koch brothers take a huge step in purchasing the U.S. government. At the cost of a couple hundred million dollars, a relatively low fee for those in the Kochs’ donor network, the conservative movement bought a majority in the House of Representatives, nationwide state-level legislative seats, and control of both the legislature and governor’s offices in twenty-one states. The underlying implication of these elections, according to Mayer, is that “many [elected Republicans] owed their victories to donors expecting radically conservative change,” and these donors were not interested in compromise with Democrats (266). The 2010 midterms vastly widened the available sphere of influence of the attempted conservative takeover.

Analysis

To begin the final chapter of her second section, Mayer dedicates almost thirty pages to one year’s midterm congressional elections, undoubtedly speaking to the election’s importance. Immediately her sympathies for President Obama are apparent again; she claims in the first few paragraphs that “his administration’s momentum had been buried in outside money” during the midterms (241). Though the conservative movement was aimed more broadly at the existing political establishment, Mayer brings the focus back to the real impact the movement had on Obama’s presidency. Several coinciding factors of the conservative movement, according to Mayer’s analysis, came to fruition seemingly in-sync with Obama’s attempts at sweeping progressive reform. Thus, Obama represents the last domino of the existing political establishment, and his failure

to fulfill his administration's promises bode well for the advancement of the far-right conservative movement.

Though the title of Mayer's investigation is *Dark Money*, she delves little into this concept until this chapter. Dark money is outside money used to fund political initiatives that has been kept hidden under the bending and flexing of tax and charity laws. Mayer provides the Koch-funded, Sean Noble-led organization Citizens to Protect Patient Rights as an example of dark money. She states that "at the end of 2010, the Center to Protect Patient Rights reported on its tax return that it spent no money on politics. Yet it granted \$103 million to other conservative groups, most of which were actively engaged in the midterm elections" (248). Essentially, the center enjoyed an unprecedented level of tax-deductible political spending. She provides a quote from a liberal lawyer who claimed that when dark money is involved in politics, "the only ones in the dark will be American voters" (248). Thus, dark money represents a more sinister threat than mere concealed donations; dark money represents a perpetual state of inequality, in which the common citizen is always on the losing end.

Throughout Mayer's book, she has mentioned the several "social welfare" groups funded and ideologically fueled by the wealthy far-right (247). Such groups include Americans for Prosperity, the Center to Protect Patient Rights, Americans for Job Security, Americans for Tax Reform, and Americans for Limited Government, among many others. In this chapter, she takes the time to dissect the complicated, often interconnected nature of the many think tanks, academic programs, and philanthropic organizations behind the conservative movement. The highly skilled operatives behind these organizations saw the opportunity that the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision presented for their interests; the millions of dollars at their disposal could now be funneled through outside social welfare groups to both ease their tax burden and push their own political (anti-regulatory) interests.

While the final pages of this chapter are dense with finance-sector jargon, Mayer's intention is clear. She repeatedly offers examples of billionaire investors and highlights the immense fortunes they control to separate them from the common citizen (and the common reader). For example, Mayer notes that eleven of the two hundred participants at the Kochs' second donor summit of 2010 had an estimated combined wealth of \$129.1 billion. Also, leading up to the 2010 midterm elections, Mayer adds that "the pledged midterm expenditures by ten Republican-aligned independent groups...would likely reach at least \$200 million" (257). For the majority of Americans, these sums are unimaginable, which immediately separates the reader from the objects of Mayer's investigation.

Mayer concludes this chapter with the results and the implications of the 2010 midterm elections. Again, her sympathies for President Obama are apparent. In the final month before the elections, Obama made a last-minute attempt to quell public doubt in his administration's promises. In a quick two years, Obama went from one of the most progressive and most popular presidents, to being, in his own terms, "shellacked" in the midterms (267). The results of the elections at every level were frightening for the President; Republicans won six Senate seats, sixty-three seats in the House, 675 state-

level legislative seats, and twenty-one governor's races. Mayer claims "the map looked red, with small islands of blue," ultimately clearing the way for wealthy conservatives like the Kochs to fast-track their planned conservative takeover (266).

Vocabulary

flummoxed, ebulliently, dais, rout, dint, abstruse, arcane, knell, apoplectic, amorphous, effusive, bacchanal, zealotry, samizdat, quant, furtive, assail, hackneyed, professorial

The Spoils: Plundering Congress

Summary

Mayer opens her third and final section of the book by detailing the spoils enjoyed by the financiers of the 2010 midterm elections. In the title of this chapter, Mayer implies that the prize or the spoils of the 2010 midterm elections for wealthy conservatives like the Koch brothers was the opportunity to plunder Congress. The primary group of congressmen focused on by wealthy far-right backers was the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which wielded control over the regulations most detrimental to the Kochs' bottom line as fossil fuel tycoons.

Due to the unprecedented and unpredictable success of the midterm elections, Charles and David Koch were confident enough to enter more frequently into the public eye. However, as Mayer notes and family patriarch Fred Koch warned, "the downside to the brothers' increasing visibility was growing public scrutiny" (278). In response to this scrutiny, the brothers hired an aggressive public relations team to monitor and maintain their image led by Michael Goldfarb and Phillip Ellender. The team employed "brass-knuckle tactics" that Mayer, alongside other journalists and moderate conservatives, felt firsthand (280).

One of the first congressmen targeted by the Kochs and their donor network was Paul Ryan, the incoming chair of the House Budget Committee. Ryan was well-known for radical fiscal ideas, admitting himself, "there's a lot of sharp knives in my drawer" (286). The budget he was drafting proposed deep cuts in spending that worried the public and politicians on both sides of the aisle, but his efforts received financial and public relations help from the same type of "Astroturf" groups that helped progress the Tea Party movement (287). The Koch-funded TC4 Trust and similar advocacy groups claimed to be helping Ryan develop fiscal policy, but critics claim they were more focused on selling policy.

According to Mayer, Paul Ryan's proposed budget plan shifted the narrative in Washington out of Obama's control. Instead of focusing budget negotiations on his campaign promises of jobs and stimulus spending, the president was forced to accept the inevitability of spending cuts and tax breaks for the wealthy. Soon after a temporary budget agreement was reached, Obama suffered another blow at the hands of wealthy extremists. A group called the Young Guns, backed by Tea Party supporters and far-right advocacy groups like Americans for Prosperity, refused to authorize payment of funds to cover the nation's debt, which experts predicted would lower America's credit rating and deepen the suffering of the recession. For the sole purpose of preventing Obama from a victory, the Young Guns waited as long as possible, then forced the president's hand into accepting a sequester. The political and economic impacts of sequestration were devastating, but Mayer believes the more damaging implication is that a small wealthy group of extremists had "succeeded in rendering the most powerful democracy in the world dysfunctional" (300).

Analysis

Mayer has noted tirelessly throughout her book that the conservative takeover took an all-encompassing approach to shifting the political status quo. This complex approach often intertwines ideas, figureheads, organizations, and even politicians. The Kochs' attention to the House Energy and Commerce Committee is an example of how complex, all-encompassing, and forward-thinking the execution of the conservative movement actually was. Instead of merely focusing on one issue or one member of the House, the Kochs aimed their efforts at an entire committee. The Kochs and their political operatives had the foresight to choose a committee with the most direct influence over the regulations that would most effect their company's bottom line; they also had the foresight to use the midterm elections to grasp control of this committee. Mayer notes that the Kochs' political action committee "donated to twenty-two of the committee's thirty-one Republican members and five of its Democratic members, too" (273).

Mayer criticizes the Kochs' public relations team for their "brass-knuckle tactics [that] were nothing new for the Koch brothers" (280). Mayer is outright about the underlying cause of her criticism- she includes several pages dedicated to the Kochs' attempt at retribution for a New Yorker article she wrote exposing the brothers' pattern of covert political spending. Mayer's personal life was investigated, her colleagues questioned, and most significantly, she was accused by Koch-funded journalists of plagiarism. Though the plagiarism allegations ended up being easy for Mayer to refute, the idea of a journalist being accused of wrongdoing for writing a relatively short investigative piece speaks to the Kochs' aggressive fervor for preserving their image.

The Koch-funded donor network focused heavily on House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan, who was in the process of drafting a radical budget plan. Like many of the conservative movement's other ventures, they mobilized think tanks, academic organizations, and "Astroturf" groups to "create a drumbeat of public support" behind Ryan's budget (287). Mayer notes frequently throughout the chapter that these advocacy groups framed their anti-tax and anti-government arguments as matters of principle rather than matters guided by self-interest. Mayer's analysis of the groups' pursuit of Paul Ryan is highly critical; however, she conveys this critical tone with tame language, choosing not to attack the far-rights' efforts but rather shed light on the willfully deceptive language used to quell public outrage. A president of one Astroturf group admitted "it wasn't about developing policy...it was about selling it" (287). Twice in her brief analysis, she alludes to the importance of being tasked with building the federal budget, claiming that it is both a core congressional function and "a process at the heart of governing" (288). Her obvious reverence for drafting such a sensitive piece of legislation is directly juxtaposed against how the Kochs and their donor network aggressively attempted to manipulate the scales of the budget in their favor.

Mayer concludes this chapter by focusing on the hard-fought, yet losing battles Obama fought against wealthy special interests. Specifically, she references the temporary budget agreement which angered both the left and the right, and the infamous



sequestration which cut spending across the board. While the immediate reaction was to blame the Obama administration, which the right wasted no time doing, both losses were a result of the series of well-funded and expertly-calculated efforts to which Mayer has dedicated this book. Most of the book thus far has detailed the strategy used by the wealthy billionaire class to build a powerful political arm.

These two devastating blows to Obama's legacy were a result of the effective use of said political arm, and the way Mayer tells the story of these legislative losses is crucial to her overall investigation. Perhaps the most expertly cultivated skill of the Koch brothers is their commitment to secrecy. It would have been possible for Mayer to rewrite this entire chapter without a single mention of the Kochs, simply because their influence was so convoluted by the massive sphere of influence their wallets bought for them. Mayer frequently references the involvement of the "Koch donor network" in the progression of far-right ideals and initiatives, almost to the point that the reader can easily glance past the phrase (295). Presumably, this is Mayer's intent; the Koch brothers are present at almost every turn of the political system, but their efforts and motives go largely unnoticed. They and their political operatives were behind two legislative losses that, according to Mayer, "succeeded in rendering the most powerful democracy in the world dysfunctional" (300); furthermore, they were powerful enough to shape the narrative and blame the losses on a "weak" administration rather than their own self-interest (300).

Vocabulary

adjutant, symbiotic, ginned, cordoned, pugnacious, inane, purloined, derisively, anathema, shirk, tendentious, empirical, shopworn, multitudinous, aquifer, oracular, stolid, vociferous, fratricide, hew, internecine, fulcrum

Mother of All Wars: The 2012 Setback

Summary

Mayer dedicates this chapter to what Charles Koch himself called “the Mother of All Wars,” both a crude reference to Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and the title of his June 2011 donor summit (301). This summit gathered almost three hundred wealthy participants in the Kochs’ donor network, who met to strategize how their millions of dollars would be spent to further pro-business political initiatives. With a presidential election looming a little over a year away, the conservative movement had the prime opportunity to use their sphere of influence to purchase the most important election possible. Obama’s falling approval ratings and the economy’s stagnation gave the Kochs an advantageous position; the only thing conservatives needed to do was pick a strong candidate.

As part of their strategy to buy the presidential election, the Kochs created a new type of political front group classified in the tax code as a business league, named the Association for American Innovation. While there remains little in the way of a paper trail, Mayer estimates that AAI received a generous portion of the \$70 million that was earned at the Kochs’ June summit. This business league paired with the sprawling reach of the Kochtopus granted the brothers political influence mirrored only by the two major parties. Mayer claims that in 2012 alone, “the Kochs’ network of a few hundred individuals spent at least \$407 million” advancing their far-right interests on the presidential stage (314).

While the participants at the Kochs’ 2012 summit agreed that the right needed a strong candidate, they were divided on who that candidate was. Unbeknownst to them, the right’s inability to agree would last throughout the remainder of the election, and effectively help Obama secure reelection. David Kochs’ prized support was hard-fought and won by Mitt Romney, while one of the summit’s wealthiest contributors, Sheldon Adelson, fervently supported long-shot Newt Gingrich, and one of the Kochs’ longest-standing investors threw his support and his checkbook behind Rick Santorum. When the dust settled and Romney prevailed, a total of over \$22 million was spent on Gingrich’s and Santorum’s behalf. According to Mayer, Democrats were “ecstatic at the damage inflicted by the rogue donors,” primarily because it was money they did not have to invest to weaken the Republican voter-base (320).

As the Kochs’ donor network settled behind Mitt Romney, an audio recording from one of his fundraising events surfaced to provide another blow to the conservative movement’s 2012 dream. Romney admitted to his audience that 47 percent of the country would inevitably vote to reelect Obama because, in Romney’s words, “I’ll never convince them they should take personal responsibility for their lives” (324). By suggesting that almost half of the country were lazy, dependent on government programs, and ignorant, Romney effectively cast the election as “a fight between a tiny, privileged clique and virtually everyone else” (326).

By election day, Mayer claims that the Kochs and their extensive donor network spent a minimum of \$407 million, “most of it from invisible donors” (330). Despite this valiant effort, Romney failed to connect with voters and his ideas failed to take hold among moderate Republicans. Instead of licking their wounds, the Kochs regrouped and began to strategize ways to achieve their long-standing goal of “advancing a free and prosperous America,” in Charles Kochs’ words (331). Mayer contends that although Republicans failed to secure the White House, their advancement in the spread of ideals and influence counted as a victory. Perhaps most tellingly of the future of the political system, even Obama was disheartened by the outcome. Mayer claims the President feared how the next Democratic candidate would fare against the staggering influence of outside money. Most importantly, he knew the wealthy backers behind the conservative movement would learn from their mistakes in 2012 and come back more ferociously in the future.

Analysis

While Mayer has noted both subtly and outright that the Kochs valued secrecy and privacy, in this chapter she brings attention to the (ironically visible) measures the brothers went through to protect the secrecy of their June 2011 donor summit. One reporter was able to access a partial audio recording of the summit, but in order to do so he had to surpass “a series of loudspeakers...emitting static to the outside world” (301). The Kochs and those in their donor network have long valued keeping their operations covert; now, they remain in a visibility-limbo, where most of their actions may be covert, but the effort put forth to maintain this level of secrecy can be seen from a mile away.

The structure of Mayer’s investigation, while sometimes dry, is effective at weaving recurring themes and people throughout the book. For example, in several points throughout the book, Mayer returns to the influence or involvement of some of the large family foundations that she detailed in the book’s first section. In this chapter, she references the direct involvement of the Bradley Foundation as a key player in Wisconsin’s conservative shift. Long-shot conservative Scott Walker enjoyed an unexpected victory in the governor’s race due to his campaign manager, Michael Grebe. However, Grebe was also serving as the president of the Bradley Foundation, a far-right leaning political front group with assets of \$612 million. In the first section of the book, Mayer describes groups like the Bradley Foundation as having laid the ideological framework for the conservative movement; in this chapter, she provides a concrete example of just how powerful the influence of the Bradley Foundation was through the election of Scott Walker in Wisconsin.

The setback that Mayer references in this chapter’s namesake represents the series of disagreements and contradictions that characterized Republican’s 2012 presidential bid. By the start of 2012, Mayer claims the Kochs and their donor network “were becoming a rival center of power to the Republican establishment” (312). The wealth and power condensed in this network mirrored the wealth and power of a major political party; unlike a party, however, the Kochs’ donor network was not contained by guidelines and

restrictions. This lack of organization ultimately led to the disagreement among the network for a 2012 presidential candidate.

In this chapter, Mayer pays attention to the hypocrisies that exist not only in the conservative movement, but in both Democrats' and Republicans' policies. For example, one of Obama's first campaign ads for reelection capitalized on the growing sentiment that the finance sector was corrupt and largely unfair. Unable to escape the help of wealthy backers, the sitting President faced harsh criticism from Wall Street Democrats, and was eventually forced to reframe his strategy as to not lose key funding. Though Obama championed campaign finance reform, tapping into wealthy elite on the left was inevitable because of what Mayer calls the "new economic reality," which is that politics on both sides of the aisle rely on contributions from wealthy individuals and organizations (322). Even when politicians attempt to tackle the issue head-on and honestly, as Obama did, the reality remains stark.

Because the Kochs' were so skilled in keeping their operations under wraps, few examples of the extent of their political involvement could easily be identified. However, due to California's strict campaign finance laws requiring full donor disclosure, the Kochs' political machine "came perilously close to exposure" one month before the presidential election (326). As they had done successfully in Wisconsin, the Kochs wanted to use their elaborate maze of political front groups to pour millions into shifting the state government of California to the far-right. A shadowy \$15 million attempt to further state-level ballot initiatives hailing from an Arizona non-profit caught the attention of campaign finance watchdogs. State investigators were ultimately able to trace the political money laundering scheme back to Sean Noble, a long-standing Koch political consultant, from whom the Kochs immediately began distancing themselves. The incident in California, while isolated, represents the difficulty associated with investigating the roots of dark money. Only those with a hyper-critical focus on the roots of campaign donations, like Mayer and the California investigators, would be able to trace the million-dollar maze back to the Koch network. For the Kochs' political arm to succeed, anyone following the paper trail is supposed to get lost in the cavalcade of political front groups that the brothers and likeminded wealthy conservatives have established.

Mayer finalizes this chapter by pairing the myth that stemmed from the 2012 election results with what she believes is the underlying reality. When the dust settled, a total of \$2.5 billion had been spent by super PACs, individual donors, and philanthropic organizations to no avail. Political commentators concluded that "money had little or no influence on elections," but Mayer focuses on the larger picture (331). In 2012, the Kochs and their donor network successfully "altered the nature of American democracy" and "privatized much of the public campaign process" through their vast sphere of influence (332). From the outset of her investigation, Mayer has noted that the Koch brothers, Charles specifically, detested the traditional political system. Thus, instead of using their fortunes to buy individual elections, they have dedicated their efforts to the spread of ideas and influence, in the hopes that those they reach will do their bidding for them.

Vocabulary

requisite, furtively, bravura, demurred, guffawed, pilfer, disputatious, entropy, insurrection, scuttled, gaffe, redolent

The States: Gaining Ground

Summary

In the 2012 presidential election, voter turnout swayed in favor of the Democrats, aiding substantially to Obama's reelection. However, a carefully constructed plan developed at one of the Kochs' donor summits had been in effect for years, working covertly at the state and local levels. This plan involved using congressional redistricting as a weapon to secure as many seats as possible in state legislatures. Mayer focuses her examination of this plan on North Carolina, a once-purple state now deep red thanks to the influence of dark money. The biggest influence and benefactor from the conservative takeover of North Carolina was Art Pope, a man who viewed his fortunate inheritance as the well-deserved result of a solid work ethic and fierce intelligence. Pope bankrolled the new governor's campaign, and subsequently gained a position as the state's budget director. Because of the groundwork the conservative movement laid, Pope bought his way to power and wielded a veto-proof influence in North Carolina's state government.

Mayer next goes on to dedicate a brief section to Art Pope's political ideology and motivations. Similar to the Koch brothers and other billionaires who inherited family fortunes, Pope's political views are indicative of his upbringing. As Pope's one-time campaign manager phrased, "he wasn't just born on third base. He started out within an inch of home plate" (345). Common among the far-right, Pope had a deep contempt for the poor, believing they were merely "victims of their own bad choices" (343). He invested heavily in a network of think tanks actively advancing the interests of business owners ideas as policy ideas, quickly making him one of the most influential political figures in North Carolina despite not one vote being cast in his name. The most harmful aspect of this oligarchic control of power, Mayer notes, is that the conservative movement had an Art Pope equivalent in every state.

To unify the fifty plus Pope-esque surrogates and their affiliates, the conservative movement founded the State Policy Network, which Mayer defines as "a national coalition of conservative state-based think tanks" (345). This network was dedicated to mobilizing as many conservative political operatives as possible with a uniform playbook; representatives from think tanks in the network would attend annual seminars where they would be provided with the strategies and resources they needed to achieve conservative reform. Working alongside the State Policy Network was the American Legislative Exchange Council, which the tax code defines as an educational organization but Mayer equates to a "corporate lobbying operation" (346). These two organizations pooled the assets of some of the wealthiest conservative donors to produce "about a thousand bills a year, some two hundred of which became state law" (346). The groups met with state-level lawmakers and their board of investors to draft legislation that would ultimately be presented by the state official with no credit to its real conceivers. The third and final prong of the conservative movement's strategy at the state level, on top of ALEC and the State Policy Network, was the Franklin Center for



Government and Public Integrity, an investigative news outlet. Mayer claims that many of the center's investigative reports "drew on research from the State Policy Network and promoted the legislative priorities of ALEC," making it yet another branch to the sprawling conservative movement's political machine (347).

Mayer devotes the final section of this chapter to an "unrepresentative minority" in Congress whose radical donor base helped secure a firm hand for the conservative movement on the federal stage (349). The money and power wielded by billionaire backers like the Koch brothers had morphed the political system; the fleet of far-right state-level and congressional Republicans funded by special interests now answered not to their party leadership or their constituencies, but to their donors. Mayer credits this small group with being responsible for the 2013 government shutdown, which angered moderates, liberals, and the entire citizenship alike. To defund Obamacare, a donor-backed network of congressmen brought the government to a shutdown. Mayer captures the confusion at the shifting political climate by referencing a conversation between President Obama and Speaker of the House John Boehner; both men, who thought they knew the extent of the role big money could play, were blindsided by more money than they knew how to fight against.

Analysis

Mayer begins this chapter by claiming that despite losing the presidential election, those on the far-right were not discouraged in their fight. In the states, as the title of the chapter suggests, Republicans backed by wealthy special interests dominated the winners pool. Adhering to an all-encompassing approach to political takeover, the Kochs and their donor network built themselves a safety net at the state level, which is ultimately why Mayer contends that 2012 was not a total loss for the conservative movement. While Republicans enjoyed state-level victories nationwide, Mayer focuses heavily on North Carolina, what she calls a "test kitchen" for the Koch machine (333). In North Carolina, state officials backed by extremely wealthy donors used congressional redistricting as a weapon to limit the number of seats possible for Democrats to win in their state. The plan worked so well that Republicans enjoyed majorities in both houses of the state assembly and control of the governor's office. This concentration on state legislatures, like in the "model state" of North Carolina, allowed the conservative movement to continue to funnel its ideas and initiatives despite losing at the national level (333). Even though a Democrat occupied the White House, wealthy special interests earned the Republicans "more than nine-hundred legislative seats and eleven governorships," to aid in the fight against Obama's progressive agenda (337).

In this chapter, Mayer offers a state-level equivalent of the Koch brothers, Art Pope. Pope bankrolled the election of North Carolina's Republican governor, who then appointed him as state's budget director. Presumably because of the security Republicans enjoyed with both majorities in the state assembly, Pope could emerge from behind the scenes and exert direct control in economic policy-making. Looking at Pope as a parallel to the Kochs, one can assume that if a Koch-backed presidential candidate and enough Koch-backed members of congress were elected, then the



brothers would feel safe enough to remove the veil of secrecy they have cultivated for decades. Mayer notes that in North Carolina, mere months after Republicans gained a majority in the state, lawmakers “enacted conservative policies that private think tanks had been cultivating for years” (339). Had Mitt Romney secured the election in 2012, it is possible that the Koch brothers and their cavalcade of political front groups such as Americans for Prosperity would play a more visible and more significant role in the political system.

Mayer also uses Art Pope as an example of the reach of the Kochtopus. According to Mayer, Pope “credited a summer program run by the Cato Institute for first exposing him to free-market theories” (343). By systematically funding think tanks and internship programs like the one attended by Koch-protégé Art Pope, the Kochs perpetuated their political ideology without any direct involvement. They have given the conservative movement the air of legitimacy by posing their political front groups as academically orientated. Toward the end of the chapter, she solidifies this example by claiming that Pope’s influence was unusually powerful, but it was “just one part of the multimillion-dollar system of interlocking nonprofit organizations conservatives had built in almost every state by the time Obama was reelected” (345). Thus, while Art Pope’s influence was staggering, he merely represented the type of wealthy, self-interested conservative leader that now existed at every level of the nation’s government.

Many of the efforts Mayer describes as part of the conservative movement are not sinister or malicious, but rather they represent the efforts that would take place during an authentic grassroots movement. Promoting education based on values and principles is essential to democracy. However, what sets the conservative movement apart, besides their enormous checkbooks, is their evident disconnect from popular opinion and the betterment of the nation’s citizens. For example, Mayer claims that “national polls showed public opinion was overwhelmingly against the shutdown” that halted the government in 2013 (349). The myth surrounding the shutdown was that Congress simply could not agree on a health care compromise; the reality, however, was that far-right political operatives had concocted a multi-front attack on the Affordable Care Act that included withholding congressional funds and subsequently shutting down the government. As a part of the same effort, states were pressured into refusing some of the benefits that came with the Affordable Care Act, which Mayer claims meant deliberately “denying health-care coverage to four million uninsured adults” (351). This blatant disregard for human life clearly separates the far-right conservative movement from a principle or value-based movement, and paints it more accurately as a self-interested power-hungry machine.

Vocabulary

granular, erstwhile, imperiling, ensconced, accede, internecine

Selling the New Koch: A Better Battle Plan

Summary

After an embarrassing loss in the 2012 presidential election, the conservative movement wasted no time licking their wounds; by 2013, far-right political operatives went back to the drawing board. Many within the donor class believed image was part of their movements' problem, thus they launched what Mayer calls "the best public relations campaign that money could buy" (355). This campaign focused on reshaping America's image of conservatives, the effective use of polling technology, and associating everything they did with the trigger word "well-being" (360).

The first step of the conservative movement's image rebranding was to "form and publicize partnerships with unlikely allies" such as the United Negro College Fund and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (361). These steps eventually granted Koch Industries' general counsel Mark Holden an invitation to the White House to discuss economic issues, a sign that Mayer interprets as proof that the brothers' attempts at image rebranding were successful. The next step for the conservative movement was to invest more heavily and more aggressively in academia. Focusing on higher education would allow their ideas to be passed down to the next generation of teachers, scholars, writers, and activists, creating a conservative infrastructure for the Kochs and their allies to more easily achieve their political initiatives. Mayer notes that those present at the Kochs' 2013 donor summit obviously bought into the stress on academia, because at the end of the summit the donors had set a fundraising goal of an unprecedented \$290 million on the next year's midterm elections.

As part of their restructuring after their loss in 2012, those in the Kochs' donor network looked to what the Democrats did right. One of their main advantages over the right was their use of data analytics, which the Kochs' sought to change. They invested "quietly" in i360, "a state-of-the-art political data company" which wasted no time assembling "detailed portraits of 250 million U.S. consumers and over 190 million active voters" (368). The data produced by i360 was so thorough and far-reaching it rivaled and even surpassed the data collected by the Republican National Committee. This forced the RNC to strike a "historic" deal to share data with the Kochs (369). To Mayer, this deal represents the Kochs' successful attempt to supplant the Republican Party.

At the end of the 2014 midterm elections, the Kochs and their donor network were the victors. Republicans had retained control of the House and gained control of the Senate, presumably making the remainder of Obama's presidency all about defense. Mayer claims the Kochs and their donors "poured over \$100 million into competitive House and Senate races and almost twice that amount into other kinds of activism" (370). Even wealthy Democrats invested millions in influencing elections, leaving one political consultant to conclude that "the system is controlled by a handful of ultra-

wealthy people, most of whom got rich from the system and who will get richer from the system” (371). As economic inequality grows and those on the far-right work to further solidify their position at the top, the disconnect between the electorate and their representatives widens. Mayer ends this chapter by warning that the Koch brothers and their wealthy donors will not be satisfied until they have secured the White House; thus, economic inequality will continue to grow and the already persistent distrust in government will only get worse as the donor class continues leading America rightward.

Analysis

To begin her last chapter, Mayer brings the reader to the 2013 Conservative Political Action Conference, where a crowd of conservative political operatives met to “diagnose how the election of 2012 had gone so wrong and deliver a cure” (354). She references a speech given by Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute, to summarize the conference’s findings: “conservatives had an empathy problem” (355). A recent study found that almost all Americans believed “fairness matters,” to which Brooks calmed the crowds’ unrest by saying “I know it makes you sick to think of that word ‘fairness’” (355). The blatant truth, though, was that conservatives needed to clean up their image on matters of equality and personal well-being if they were to win any public support.

Throughout most of her investigation, Mayer has refrained from writing with much emotion. In this chapter, however, she employs more critical language about the motives of the conservative movement. She references an undisclosed recording from a 2014 Koch donor summit as proof of the “stunning picture of the scope and audacity of the Kochs’ designs on the country” (357). In this recording, the Kochs political lieutenant Richard Fink admitted that the image problems surrounding conservative were justified; he boldly stated to what he thought was a closed room, “we want to decrease regulations. Why? It’s because we can make more profit” (358). The Kochs dedication to secrecy presumably allowed candid statements like this to remain under wraps for most of the duration of their political involvement. When Mayer is faced with relaying the harsh truth of the brothers’ motives to the reader, she almost unknowingly employs a more critical tone.

This chapter also identifies a rare example of the Koch brothers being publicly criticized for their involvement in political affairs. Senate Democratic majority leader Harry Reid launched daily attacks against the Kochs on the Senate floor at the start of 2014, exhorting that “it’s time that the American people spoke out against this terrible dishonesty of these two brothers, who are about as un-American as anyone that I can imagine” (356). Almost at the same time, the Republican National Committee released an unusually critical analysis of the 2012 presidential defeat. The analysis did not name the brothers specifically, but warned that “the current campaign finance environment has led to a handful of friends and allied groups dominating our side’s efforts...[and] a lot of centralized authority in the hands of a few people at these outside organizations is dangerous for our Party” (356).

President Obama's reelection in 2012 was an embarrassing blow to the conservative movement, causing the Kochs to use their resources to launch "the best public relations campaign that money could buy" (355). As proof of how successful this public relations campaign was, Mayer references how effectively the Kochs spun one of their many run-ins with the law as an example of intrusive government overreach. In 2000, the Justice Department found Koch Industries guilty of infringements against the Clean Air Act, resulting in a \$20 million fine. Fifteen years later, however, the Kochs' skillful public relations campaign spun this story in favor of the Kochs and against government overreach, despite the guilty verdict in the case. Mayer dubs this performance a "masterful bit of self-promotion" (362).

The final three sections of this chapter cover the implications of the conservative movement, provide a recap of the history of the movement, and address Mayer's predictions about the movement's next steps. These three sections also weave Mayer's lengthy, complex modern history of the rise of the radical right into a fluent story based loosely on the Koch brothers and their extensive network of billionaire backers. Mayer ultimately concludes that with a calculated strategy, seemingly unlimited funds, and forty years' worth of patience, the conservative movement achieved their goal of shifting America to the right. With a sound infrastructure in place thanks to investments in think tanks, academia, philanthropic organizations, and other dark money front groups, the far-right secured a foothold in state legislatures nationwide and both houses of Congress. Mayer contends that despite their success, "there was still a major item on the Kochs' shopping list: the White House" (377). With the Kochs and their donor network estimated to spent \$889 million on the 2016 presidential election, Mayer concludes her investigation by comparing Charles Kochs' actions in the political realm with a quote he was reportedly heard saying as a child when asked to share: "I just want my fair share- which is all of it" (378). Even Charles Koch, himself, knew that he would not stop until he had as much unelected control as possible, which is Mayer's final warning to the reader about the future.

Vocabulary

exhorted, exegesis, consigliere, unsparing, vociferously, nefarious, cajoling, acrimony, relegated, supplicants, iconoclastic, flummoxed, venal

Important People

Charles Koch

Though not the central focus of the book, Charles Koch and his brother David built the political machine that provided the fuel for the far-right conservative movement. Viewing this book as an investigation into the source of the funding for this movement, Mayer follows the paper trail back to Charles and David Koch. Born to a wealthy family, Charles followed his father's footsteps as a successful businessman, but Mayer frequently urges the reader to keep in mind the advantages that naturally come with a higher-class pedigree. Charles and his younger brother David have been major financiers in the political sphere for decades, but recently their political successes have granted them the security to be visible for the first time. With this book, Mayer dedicates almost five-hundred pages to the empire of radical conservatives that Charles and David have been instrumental in funding and mobilizing.

In the first section of her book, Mayer dedicates several pages to the upbringing of Charles and David Koch, as well as their two other brothers William and Freddie. "Fiercely competitive, driven, and self-confident," Charles quickly "emerged as the domineering leader of the pack" of four boys (34). Charles was not the only competitive brother, however. Charles bluntly admitted in an interview that he formed a closer relationship with David than with his other brothers "because he was better at everything," thus more useful to him (35). According to Mayer, Charles Koch "approached both business and politics with the systematic mind-set of an engineer" (142). He was also "in constant rebellion against authority" (36). Thus, he quickly developed a contempt for big government, and the foresight to see America's liberal shift and rally his troops. A family friend and writer enlisted to compile Charles' memoirs concluded that Charles "harbored a hatred for the government so intense it could only be truly understood as an extension of his childhood conflicts with authority" (53).

David Koch

David and Charles Koch are frequently grouped together as the Koch brothers because of their intertwining involvement in each others business and political endeavors. David, younger than Charles by five years, is described by Mayer as the "more cosmopolitan, and more social" of the brothers, though both seem to possess a cold, professional demeanor (53). While both brothers value secrecy, David appears to spend more time in the public eye. In 1980, under the Libertarian Party ticket, David Koch ran as the vice presidential candidate in an effort to evade campaign finance restrictions. Despite investing over \$2 million into the campaign, he and his running mate earned a mere one percent of the vote, prompting the Koch brothers to reorganize their political strategy. The 1980 election taught the brothers that money alone could not buy an election, but it could buy influence. Instead of bankrolling the campaigns of like-minded politicians, the



Kochs began investing in the spread of free-market, far-right ideas in places such as think tanks, educational foundations, and seminars.

Though David Koch had a twin brother, Mayer highlights the close relationship he and Charles shared. Even in their professional careers, one reporter who interviewed both brothers claimed that he "couldn't think of a single issue on which the brothers disagreed" (53). Arguably, this is why Charles and David Koch appear interchangeably or fused together throughout Mayer's investigation. Mayer focuses less on the brothers individually throughout her timeline and more on their endeavors as a whole, but she does pay attention to the brothers' differences early on in her investigation.

Jane Mayer

The author of this thorough and critical investigation into the rise of the far-right is a staff writer at The New Yorker and three-time bestselling author Jane Mayer. This book is written in the tone of an investigative reporter, so details about Mayer's personal views are limited. Some biases and sympathies are evident, but they seem to come from a logical place rather than an ideological place. Mayer's interest in the rise of the far-right, and the Koch brothers, specifically, began with her 2010 New Yorker article shedding light on the brothers' discrete yet powerful influence on the right side of the aisle. What began as a hunch resulted in this book, *Dark Money*- an investigative, fact-based timeline that documents the construction of one of the most powerful, wealthy, and self-interested political machines of all time.

Barack Obama

The entire second section of Mayer's book is dedicated to one year, 2009-2010, which undoubtedly speaks to that year's importance in the timeline of the conservative movement. Elected the year prior on the campaign promise of progressive social reform, Barack Obama symbolized the pinnacle of the conservative movement's enemy. Since the inception of the extremely far-right ideological framework revered by the Kochs and like-minded billionaires, government involvement of any kind was an insult to democracy. A massive government stimulus package along with his namesake healthcare proposal positioned Obama directly in the crossfire of financially powerful special interests. Displaying the stereotypical conservative contempt for the poor, the Koch brothers and their allies invested millions to fight government spending on the lazy, undeserving masses.

Barack Obama is the most mentioned liberal figure in Mayer's book. Obviously the President serves as a figurehead for his party, but Mayer's constant reference to the President reveals a sense of sympathy for the losing battle he fought against a wealthy, powerful special interest-army. In 2010, the far-right invested an unprecedented sum in state-level campaigns during the midterm elections. Conservatives could not attempt for the White House again until 2012, but they could use their wallets to buy congressional seats and effectively prevent President Obama from completing any of his progressive

reform initiatives. Mayer dubs this tactic "guerrilla warfare," and claims no other president faced such a well-calculated and fully-bankrolled attack (165).

Fred Koch

Family patriarch and founder of the family fortune Fred Koch was instrumental in forming Charles and David Kochs' political ideology, as evident by Mayer's inclusion of Fred Koch in the first chapter of her book. Her investigation is not focused on the personal traits of the financiers of the conservative movement, but rather their actions. Charles and David Koch are the only characters in Mayer's investigation whose upbringing plays into the larger picture. While Mayer goes out of her way to ensure the Koch brothers are not the sole subject of this book, her investigation leads back to Charles and David Koch at every turn. Thus, including their unique, privileged upbringing serves a crucial (yet undefinable) moment in the progression of the conservative movement. Fred Koch was undoubtedly an influential factor in the shaping of the brothers' political ideology.

In a few words, Fred Koch was "a tough and demanding disciplinarian" (33). Like most parents, he set a high standard for his children; Koch's standard, however, was rooted in traditional business practices rather than any sort of traditional family values. Fred Koch made his fortune in the oil industry, shamelessly valuing profit above all else, including political ideology or moral obligation. Overlapping his work in Soviet Russia were his investments in Nazi Germany's need for oil; shortly after, Koch was asked by the U.S. government to share his expertise in an effort to more efficiently fuel American war planes. Koch's company was invested in the very oil refineries that he was paid to help bomb. In a pattern that would seem to be repeated throughout Koch-family business endeavors, profit rules above all else.

Bill Koch

William "Bill" Koch grew up "preoccupied with his sense of inferiority" compared to his twin, David and his older brother Charles (37). This feeling would continue to manifest itself as the brothers grew; as early as 1980, a disagreement in how the family company's money was spent forced brothers Freddie and Bill out of the company and, according to them, out of their fair share in severance pay. In 2002, Bill Koch hired research historian Clayton Coppin to compile a report on Charles' political activities and investments. And finally, in 1999, Bill brought a whistle-blowing lawsuit against his brothers for stealing oil. Koch Industries, as a result, was found guilty of "making 24,587 false claims to the government," and forced to pay fines not only to the government, but to Bill Koch as well (137). Whether Bill's skirmishes with his brothers were inspired by a desire for justice or deep-seeded jealousy, he has proved to be one of Charles and Davids' biggest obstacles.

Richard Mellon Scaife

Keeping in mind the title of Mayer's first section, "Weaponizing Philanthropy," Richard Mellon Scaife played an instrumental role in creating the ideas adopted by and strategies used by the conservative movement (26). His family was outstandingly wealthy, and due to distrust in federal government, valued tax-evasion above much else. Scaife's family skillfully preserved inheritance funds by creating trusts in which tax-free inheritance was granted after a period of philanthropy or public benefit. What first began as a way to avoid taxes, however, became an investment in the war of ideas. Mayer claims that Scaife's "private foundations emerged as a leading source of funds for political and policy entrepreneurship" in the form of think tanks (76). Because of the size of his checkbook, Scaife became "the most important single figure in building the modern conservative movement and spreading its ideas into the political realm," according to a former fellow at a Scaife and Koch-funded think tank (83).

John M. Olin

A subject of one of Mayer's earlier chapters, John M. Olin, helps create a comprehensive picture of the foundations of the conservative movement. While Richard Mellon Scaife and his family's foundation specialized in arming think tanks with both money and far-right ideas, John M. Olin invested his fortune in creating conservative activist hubs on America's most prestigious universities. Inspired by an uprising at his alma mater, Cornell, Olin launched an "ambitious offensive to reorient the political slant of American higher education to the right" (93). Political operatives at the Olin Foundation crafted the "beachhead theory," with the ultimate goal of instilling right-wing values to the next generation of academics (103). To the same tune that Richard Mellon Scaife launched the mobilization of conservative think tanks, John M. Olin launched the mobilization of covert academic front groups perpetuating free-market economics and limited government.

Richard Fink

Richard Fink, according to Mayer, served as the Kochs' "main political lieutenant," and was a driving force behind the Kochs decision to invest more aggressively in politics (141). Fink constructed a three-tier investment strategy aimed at an rightward shift in political discourse. His plan paired traditional campaign spending with more covert spending on lobbying and philanthropy; this all-encompassing approach became trademarks of the Koch brothers' political influence. Essentially, Fink merged the paths blazed by billionaire right-wingers like Richard Mellon Scaife, John M. Olin, and the Koch brothers in a full-fledged conservative attack on the establishment.

Mayer also uses Richard Fink as an example of the blatant interconnected nature of Koch employees and political operatives. Fink headed the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, served as the president of several Koch family foundations, and was Koch Industries' head of lobbying. Mayer claims that the "fungibility of his roles hinted at



the fine line between nonprofit and for-profit pursuits within the Kochs' enterprise" (151). Mayer provides a map of the Koch network on the front and rear covers of her book that also illustrates Fink's influence. On the rear cover, a laundry list of universities, institutes, organizations, and foundations show how one man, Richard Fink, controlled a total of \$87.9 million in seemingly charitable donations stemming from three foundations. The main donor, the Charles G. Koch Foundation, invested \$77.6 million in the web of political front groups, presumably speaking to the control the Kochs had over a vast playing field.

Tim Phillips

Tim Phillips is the president of Americans for Prosperity, a "social welfare" group as defined by the tax code but a political front group as defined by Mayer (163). One of the most active arms of the Kochs' political empire, Americans for Prosperity took millions from the Kochs and their extensive donor network. It then redistributed these funds to feign the appearance of grassroots support for far-right causes pushed by the Kochs. Not much personal information is provided about Phillips, but the role he played as the force behind Americans for Prosperity ties him permanently to the Kochs as one of their most covert yet influential operatives.

Sean Noble

After working as a Republican political operative for several wealthy special interests, Sean Noble opened his own political consulting firm. Mayer describes him as "unassuming and fun; even his political opponents found him hard to dislike" (188). With the help of billionaire lawyer Randy Kendrick, Noble co-founded and presided over the Center to Protect Patient Rights (CPPR), which provided a substantial amount to the fight against Obamacare. Despite boasting assets of almost \$62 million by 2010, CPPR's headquarters and only listed address was a post office box in Phoenix, Arizona. Using CPPR as a money-laundering machine before the 2012 presidential election, Noble was almost caught by strict California campaign finance watchdogs. As a testament to the Kochs' devotion to secrecy, Noble was hung out to dry and slowly alienated by the Koch network, despite receiving most of the funds he laundered from the Kochs.

Objects/Places

Kochtopus

Mayer defines the Kochtopus as "the many-tentacled ideological machine" built by the Koch brothers and their enormous fortune (58). Essentially, the Kochtopus is the subject of Mayer's book. Her investigation into the billions of dollars propelling the far-right shift in the political system led her to the Kochs at almost every turn. Thus, while she avoids making the Koch brothers the main topic of her book, the scope and power of their influence in the conservative movement is unavoidable. The Kochtopus takes on many different names during Mayer's investigation, like the Koch network, the donor network, the donor class, or the Kochs' political machine. Throughout the book, Mayer may credit an idea or a political initiative to a group or individual, but always draws a clear line between the group or individual and the Kochtopus. Whether an initiative is funded by the Kochs themselves, a member of their vaguely defined network, or drafted by a scholar at a Koch-funded academic program, each of these avenues represent the Kochtopus.

The Kochtopus is physically made up of a sprawling network of think tanks, philanthropic organizations, business leagues, academic programs, and other politically-minded front groups all advancing the same Koch-sponsored, anti-tax, anti-regulatory agenda. Mayer devotes an entire chapter to the complexities and motivations of the vast network, even though the reach of the Kochtopus can be seen in various examples in each chapter of the book. Some of the most easily-recognizable arms of the Kochtopus are Americans for Prosperity, the Heritage Foundation, and the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. While the ideas supported and spread by the Kochs and their political machine were incubating under the radar for years, Mayer argues that Obama's election was the deciding factor in the mobilization of the Kochtopus. The mobilization enlisted scholars, writers, and public figures like Rush Limbaugh to form a "national echo chamber" of ideas, which ultimately feigned the appearance of public support (171).

Libertarian Party

Charles and David Koch, according to Mayer, were entrenched in the Libertarian Party since the 1970's. While they would go on to invest more heavily in the Republican Party because of the ingrained two-party structure of the political system, their core beliefs still hark back to the foundations of libertarianism. Though the Kochs claim to be relatively new to the political stage, Mayer quotes an unnamed Koch associate who asserted otherwise: "He has been trying since the 1970's to get his Libertarian Revolution going!" (368). The Libertarian agenda revolves around the concept of limited government. According to Mayer, the party advocated for the abolition of health-care programs and Social Security, an end to the prosecution of tax evaders, abolition of income taxes, the repeal of all campaign-finance laws, and abolition of the EPA, CIA, and other

government agencies. In sum, Libertarians and the Kochs alike believed "government should be reduced to a skeletal function: the protection of individual and property rights" (58).

At the beginning of Mayer's timeline in the 1970's, libertarian ideas are seen as fringe ideas that only benefited wealthy corporate special interests. As if noticing this image problem, libertarians began to invest more heavily in branding their ideas as grassroots ideas that benefited the masses instead. At the head and the checkbook of this re-branding were the Koch brothers, who employed the use of "Astroturf" groups to build "a fake populist movement secretly manufactured by corporate sponsors" (159). According to Mayer, these Astroturf groups were instrumental in creating a false sense of grassroots support for libertarian ideas. What made these groups so synthetic, according to one critic, were their donors- whose "political theory [was] nothing more than a rationalization for self-interest" (161).

Americans for Prosperity

Built from the remaining shards of one of the Kochs' infant think tanks in 2003, Americans for Prosperity (AFP) became one of the most recognizable factions of the Kochs' extensive political machine. Throughout Mayer's entire book, Americans for Prosperity is as constant yet as covert as the Koch brothers themselves, making it the organizational equivalent of the brothers. In many instances, the term Koch brothers can be used interchangeably with AFP; the organization was funded and heavily influenced by the Kochs, but more importantly, Americans for Prosperity hid the brothers' political agenda under the guise of a social welfare group.

Upon its founding, one of AFP's first initiatives was called the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, which Mayer claims "placed drastic restrictions on state legislators, requiring all tax increases to first be approved by public referenda" (178). While Mayer only cites one instance of this initiative in action, it represents the anti-taxation ideology of Americans for Prosperity as a whole as well as its main contributors, the Kochs. AFP also created a character called "Carlton," aimed at convincing the public that the government's fight against climate change was harmful to the average citizen (215). Carlton claimed to be a well-off, ignorant citizen who championed protecting the environment even though Carlton, himself, lived a life of excess with multiple houses and cars. Again, Mayer only references Carlton once, but he too represents the underlying motivations of AFP and the Kochs; by tapping into the middle class' fear of losing more than they already had in the recession, Americans for Prosperity helped shift the playing field of climate science in favor of the conservative movement.

The Cato Institute

Founded in 1977, the Cato Institute, according to Mayer, was "the nation's first libertarian think tank," and received a staggering "\$10 to \$20 million of tax-deductible donations" from Charles Koch (87). With the help of former libertarian presidential

candidate Ed Crane, Koch built an incubator for his free-market economic principles that he could keep a safe distance from his own sphere of liability. By the height of the conservative movement, Cato was an instrumental part of the Kochs' political strategy, which stressed the need for "institutions that could hatch scholarly ideas in line with their own thinking" (153).

According to early employees of the think tank, Koch exerted "absolute iron control" over goings-on at Cato (88). This tight grasp of control allows Mayer to reference the Cato Institute's actions throughout the book as if they are solely the ideas of Charles Koch. For example, the Cato Institute paid for an ad in *The Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* openly criticizing Obama's call for government intervention in the economic crisis. While the advertisement, on paper, was Cato's, Mayer is sure to mention that the idea stems back, both financially and ideologically, to the Kochs and their wealthy donor network.

John Birch Society

Co-founded by Koch family patriarch Fred Koch, the John Birch Society was an extremist conservative group dedicated to free-market economics and big-government conspiracy theories. The group effectively re-packaged extreme political views with common tropes such as "less government, more responsibility" in an effort to shift public opinion rightward (40). While smaller and less well-known, the John Birch Society served as a model for far-right groups to come such as the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute. Charles and David Koch would go on to join the group, but chose not to indulge in their father's fervor for conspiracy theories. One colleague recalls browsing a John Birch Society library in Kansas with Charles Koch, claiming that Koch steered him away from the Communist conspiracy literature and toward "the collection of anti-government economic writers whose work he found especially exciting" (41). At a conference centered around perpetuating libertarian ideas in 1976, Charles offered the John Birch Society as a model for the conservative movement's future endeavors. Though he criticized the group's affinity for conspiracy theories, he applauded its secrecy and its businesslike approach to politics that capitalized on the latest marketing and sales techniques. With the Koch brothers' seal of approval, the methods of the John Birch Society were used and honed throughout the timeline of the conservative movement.

Tea Party Movement

The Tea Party is an anomaly in Mayer's investigation in the sense that it represents a movement that was, on paper, separate from the Koch brothers and their donor network. Instead of investing in candidates or potential candidates, the Kochs believed that the most effective way to create widespread political change was to invest in ideas. The Kochs used many avenues to invest in the spread of their libertarian ideas; these avenues are what Mayer calls the Kochtopus. The Tea Party Movement can be seen as

a direct result of the aggressive mobilization of the Kochtopus after the fear Obama's election instilled in conservative circles.

Charles and David Koch vehemently denied any personal involvement in the Tea Party Movement. A long-time Americans for Prosperity operative named Peggy Venable, however, professed openly in an interview with Mayer that AFP was active in training those throwing the Tea Party rallies. They would "'educate' the activists on policy details" and provide "next-step training" to continue Tea Party efforts after the rally (181). Though the Koch brothers were ardent supporters and financiers of Americans for Prosperity, their strategy of using think tanks and front groups as money laundering operations allowed them to erase their names from the paper trail. While the level of control the Kochs exerted at AFP is unknown, it is also irrelevant to the larger idea of the Tea Party. Even if the Kochs genuinely had no part in the Tea Party Movement, it represents exactly what the brothers hoped to gain from their massive investments into the war of ideas. Investing in broad ideas such as limited government or free-market economics allowed operatives like Peggy Venable and her superiors at Americans for Prosperity to fight the Kochs' battles for them.

George Mason University

The conservative movement as a whole placed a large significance on education, especially at the college level. A fear of the increased liberalization of higher education prompted wealthy conservatives as far back as John M. Olin in the late 1970's to adopt what they called the "beachhead theory" (103). The conservative movement hinged on beachheads, as they were a surefire way to spread free-market ideas to the next generation of scholars. George Mason University became the pinnacle of a conservative beachhead; despite the more than three hundred academic institutions funded by the Kochs by 2015, Mayer claims it was "the Kochs' largest libertarian academic project" (155).

A little known university on the outskirts of D.C., George Mason University's location and perceived obscurities made it an easy target for the Kochs. The brothers' political adviser Richard Fink brought his free-market economics program named the Mercatus Center to George Mason's campus. A fellow professor at the university claimed that the center was "a lobbying group disguised as a disinterested academic program," while the Kochs saw it as a "practical organization that could hatch scholarly ideas in line with their own thinking" (150, 153). Mercatus scholars would go on to be some of the most prominent figures in the conservative movement and Mayer's investigation, proving the effectiveness of the beachhead theory.

DonorsTrust

Described by one critic as "the dark-money ATM of the conservative movement," DonorsTrust allowed wealthy corporate interests to invest in a "bland-sounding 'donor-advised fund,'" which would then pass the donations to far-right conservative groups

(206). The goal of the fund was to erase donors' names from the money-trail. In a testament to the fund's effectiveness, Mayer claims that "between 1999 and 2015, DonorsTrust redistributed some \$750 million from the pooled contributions to myriad conservative causes under its own name" (206). While she only goes into detail on DonorsTrust once, Mayer credits the organization throughout the book for the various groups it supported while managing to keep its donors' names in the dark.

American Legislative Exchange Council

Founded in the 1970s by Richard Mellon Scaife, the American Legislative Exchange Council's purpose was "waging conservative fights in every state legislature in the country," according to Mayer (90). While the details of ALEC's work is not disclosed by Mayer at first, its funding is; she claims that in the first ten years of its origin, Scaife and his family's foundations provided over half a million dollars to ALEC while exercising control over its actions. Mayer does not mention the American Legislative Exchange Council again until the end of her book, after the council had incubated far-right ideas at the state level for almost thirty years. According to Mayer, critics in the early 2000s dubbed ALEC a "conservative corporate 'bill mill,'" credited with producing almost one thousand bills per year tailored to corporate interests (346). As with most of the largest contributing front groups for the political movement, the Kochs' fingerprints were all over the American Legislative Exchange Council. Mayer points out that not only did the Kochs' have a member on ALEC's corporate board for two decades, but they were also one of the group's "early financial angels" (346). In exchange, ALEC helped draft legislation "aimed at impending government support for alternative, renewable energy programs" that would benefit those in the fossil fuel industry such as the Kochs (346).

Environmental Protection Agency

Because the conservative movement was largely bankrolled by millionaire fossil fuel tycoons, the Environmental Protection Agency was one of the most aggressive and most persistent obstacles to the movement throughout Mayer's timeline. Founded to protect "public health," the standards it placed on pollutants were terrifying to industrialists invested in fossil fuels (74). Every possible extension of the Kochs' political arm was engaged in the fight against the EPA, from advocacy groups like Americans for Prosperity, to paid-for members of Congress like Mitch McConnell. Mayer credits McConnell, for instance, for beginning "a stunning all-out war on the Environmental Protection Agency," using his position as the Senate majority leader to persuade governors nationwide to "refuse to comply with [the EPA's] new restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions" (371).

Themes

Corporatization of Politics

The timeline of the far-right conservative movement, to which Mayer has dedicated this book, can also be seen as the timeline of the corporatization of American politics, a process for which the Kochs can both take credit and be thankful. A political takeover by an ideology that was seen as a fringe ideology thirty years prior could not have taken place in a traditional democratic political system, but instead required the electorate, academia, and political analysts alike to regard running a government with the efficiency of a business as a beneficial thing.

At its core, a representative democracy is supposed to be run by officials elected by the constituency who vow to truly represent the constituency's concerns on the national stage. By this standard, it is nearly impossible for a group of wealthy special interests to rise too far, because their interests simply do not match with those of the general population. Knowing this from the beginning, the Kochs set out to change not their ideology, but their delivery and their image. This process began with small ideological investments, such as teaching the benefits of free-market ideology, teaching that FDR's New Deal was more damaging to the economy than helpful, and spreading the notion that the 2008 financial crisis was the fault of the government and not greedy bankers. Eventually, this "talent pipeline" would be trained so proficiently in conservative ideology that they

would perpetuate the ideas and initiatives of the Kochs without even knowing (365).

The Kochs and their donor network invested heavily in the spread of ideas and information only after realizing donating excessive amounts to solitary elections was wasteful. One candidate could not change the existing political structure, but an overall rightward shift in political discourse could. Thus, candidates were used as puppets, or people who could passionately deliver the message drafted by the extensive Koch-backed network. They drafted their messages with the preciseness of engineers and the foresight of successful businessmen; ultimately, the Kochs and their donor network packaged and sold a fringe ideology as a legitimate grassroots movement.

This pseudo-grassroots movement was intertwined with the idea that the government, as it existed, over-extended its reach far too often and spent too much on redundant bureaucratic programs. Government programs were inefficient and thus, wasteful; savvy political operatives on the right successfully played into the public's fear of wasteful spending by suggesting a more businesslike approach to policy-making. Cutting taxes for the wealthy and decreasing corporate regulations were re-packaged as measures that would boost the economy and send extraneous cash trickling down to the middle and lower classes. The reality, as Mayer never forgets to remind the reader, is that the policies proposed and perpetuated by the conservative movement proved to benefit only the wealthy donor class, not the general public.



The result of this skillfully calculated and well financed re-branding of self-interest into a populist movement made Americans from the top-down shift unknowingly to the right. In doing so, more and more Americans subscribed to free-market economic theories stemming from far-right gurus like Hayek, and thus embraced a business-like approach to politics. Proving their business finesse, the Kochs mobilized a sales force to perpetuate the lessons that would allow them to exercise their bought power with as little resistance as possible. Free-market economics flooded ivy leagues and small private universities alike, where scholars would go on to work at think tanks, teach the next generation of conservatives, or infiltrate local and state level elections with their learned philosophies. Such philosophies included the abolition of income taxes and labor unions, opposition to any social welfare program like Social Security, Medicaid, or health care, and the abolition of all environmental regulations. Koch-sponsored think tanks produced essays and op-ed pieces touting these same beliefs. Those backing these philosophies on the legislative level were financed almost entirely by the Koch brothers and their donor network. At the end of her investigation, Mayer claims that the Kochs approached politics with the aggressiveness of “venture capitalists, leveraging their fortunes for maximum strategic impact” (376). Essentially, the Kochs created a political machine that was run as effectively and meticulously as Koch Industries while simultaneously morphing the government into a corporatized machine that allowed special interests to buy power.

Oligarchy

While only mentioning the word three times in her vast investigation, Mayer uses this book to warn that American democracy is beginning to take the form of an oligarchy. Mayer loosely defines an oligarchy in her introduction as when “a handful of extraordinarily powerful businessmen bent the government into catering to them at the expense of everyone else” (10). She goes on to dedicate almost four-hundred pages to exactly how that process started in America, and how it continues today. While the Koch brothers were far from alone in their antigovernment crusade, they act as the glue that bound together an extensive network of wealthy businessmen who shared the same political interests.

The oligarchy Mayer warns of did not appear spontaneously, but rather it is the result of the systematic, step-by-step corporatization of politics the Kochs and their allies launched in the 1970s discussed above. In order for a small group of wealthy individuals to gain control of political power without using force, they needed to keep their intentions masked under a veil of secrecy and sell self-interest as morality. At one of the first political conferences subsidized by Charles Koch, he confessed his affinity for the way the John Birch Society kept both its donors and many of its actions out of the public eye; in his opinion, this was the way the conservative movement had to model their political activism. Like many wealthy conservatives, Koch claimed to genuinely believe that free market economics and antitaxation policies were good for the country; yet, Mayer claims that he was more dedicated to self-interest than to public service. Herein lies the problem with oligarchy; condensed power in the hands of a few wealthy individuals is not dangerous if those with the power have good intentions. Unlike profits,



however, intentions cannot be measured in finite numbers. Mayer contends Koch is hypocritical and ill-intentioned throughout her entire investigation, directly opposing Koch's claims that he is self-made and good-natured. In a democracy, debates about the legitimacy of intentions matter because the power lies in the hands of the electorate. By contrast, in an oligarchy, regardless of intentions or public perception, power remains in the hands of the individuals invested in it. By the scale of wealth accumulated by the Kochs and their donor network, their hands will be in government for a long time to come.

While Mayer dedicates almost four hundred pages to the rise of the far right, their motivations, and the absolute power they unabashedly seek to control, she offers no solutions or glimpses of hope for the future of progressivism or even democracy. This is part of the reason why, as will be discussed below, she is able to maintain a non-partisan tone throughout her investigation- because it is just that, an investigation. She offers no way to curb the rise of the far right, and goes as far as admitting that in the current political landscape, any level of campaign finance reform seemed "hopeless" (374). Thus, she is able to put her political inclinations aside and form an informative warning to the American electorate that they are steering straight toward oligarchy.

Solution

At every turn, Mayer paints the subjects of her investigation – the Kochs, the DeVos', the Popes, among others – as threats to democracy and threats to the American people. Her entire investigation details the rise of a problem without once referencing any hope for a solution. This is due to two elements: the book's unique genre as a modern historical study and the extent of Mayer's investigative work. Many of the main characters in the story of the rise of the far-right remain active on today's political stage and, as Mayer contends, are still flooding the government with dark money. As Mayer has uncovered in this book, the reason dark money is so powerful lies in its namesake; it's dark, therefore cannot be seen or traced. Without an obvious concrete paper trail, the rightward shift in political discourse, to the untrained eye, appears organic. With this book, Mayer provides no solutions to quell the impact of wealthy special interests, but she does offer the reader with a clear analysis of largely hidden or convoluted information about some of the most common names on today's political stage.

Among some of the most recognizable names in Mayer's study are Mitt Romney, Paul Ryan, John Boehner, Mark Meadows, Dick Armey, Donald Trump, Betsy DeVos, and George Soros. These names flow as dynamically throughout her investigation as they do in modern political discourse. She references one of Trump's tweets while he was running for the presidency to prove even his distrust of the Kochs and their network; since Trump has taken office, his tweets seem to make headlines daily. Mayer also brings the reader's attention to Betsy DeVos' wealthy background and public opposition to campaign finance restrictions; DeVos' recent appointment as Secretary of Education caused public backlash across the country. With examples such as these, Mayer's investigation ties together an intricate and admittedly difficult-to-trace web of wealthy donors who continue to dominate the political arena to this day. While Mayer is able to

draw conclusions about the implications of past political initiatives such as the Tea Party Movement and the 2014 midterm elections, many of the initiatives put in place by covert far-right operatives are still underway and still largely in the dark. Thus, a solution in the traditional sense cannot yet be determined.

Mayer's investigative work is one of this book's most impressive elements, but it also speaks to why she does not include a resolution to the growing influence of dark money in politics anywhere in her investigation. Her investigation spans almost fifty years, and focuses exclusively on the connections, investments, patterns, and front groups missed by the general public and political analysts. The map of conservative spending she draws reads fluently like an age-old story, often drawing away from the extent and effort of Mayer's investigation because of the style of her writing. Many times, statements must be read and re-read to make sure such an egregious fact was written with such casual factuality. Mayer has left no stone unturned, as evident by her detailed notes and index sections at the end of the book. These tools allow the reader to see not only the extensive list of sources Mayer tapped to research for this book, but also the dizzying web of connections between names and organizations guilty of propelling the country to the right. This wealth of information Mayer has painstakingly compiled will presumably be one of the main motivators for political change. The time to strategize a solution to the rise of the self-interested far-right, according to this book, is now; Mayer's first step, however, must be to lay the ideological basis to inform as many people as possible, as she did with this book. Ironically, this plan is not a far cry from the Kochs' plan of investing in the spread of ideas.

Fear

The donors behind the conservative movement, according to Mayer, were universally equipped with an irrational fear of losing their money to the government, despite the million-dollar fortunes on which many of them sat. Whether this fear was genuine or it served the rhetorical purpose of masking the conservative movement as a defensive movement against an intrusive government, Mayer identifies fear as one of the biggest motivators behind the far-right conservative movement. The examples she provides of this fear are riddled with hypocrisies, leaving the reader to assume that fear is more of a tool of rhetoric for the conservative movement than a genuine concern.

One of the most daunting fears of the founders of the conservative movement such as Fred Koch and others in the John Birch Society was the fear of communism. Throughout Mayer's investigation, this has transformed into a fear of socialism rooted in the same fears that arose from the fear of communists; a distrust in government and a greedy desire to retain as much of their wealth as possible converged to form a tight-knit resistance to any form of government intervention in the free market. The trope of defending corporate America goes hand-in-hand with defending against socialism, a fear skillfully projected onto the American people after Obama was elected under the promise of sweeping progressive reform.

Alongside their persistent fear of losing their money, those in the far-right movement could be universally characterized by their contempt for the poor. One of the Kochs' main political operatives, Richard Fink, exclaimed to a room of likeminded conservatives that when he sees someone "on the street," his first thought is "get off your ass and work hard, like we did" (358). What he failed to mention to his audience, however, was how many of the leaders of the conservative movement received more in the form of inheritance than most people ever receive from government welfare programs. Mayer quotes a speech given by David Koch where he credits his good fortune to a modest gift from his father's estate of "three hundred million dollars" (49). Without focusing too hard on polarizing political issues, as will be discussed more below, Mayer gently points out the hypocrisies that exist within the fear-based justification conservatives had built for themselves.

Mayer claims that most of the investors in the conservative movement were not politically radical, but rather, "most were simply concerned with protecting their continued accumulation of wealth" (255). A scathing example of this was the fight led by CEO of a massive private equity firm Stephen Schwarzman against a tax-loophole that Mayer claims lost the government \$6 billion a year in potential tax revenue. Obama's administration successfully pushed a bill closing the tax loophole through the House, but it had virtually no chance in the Senate. However, Schwarzman and other wealthy corporate big wigs in the finance sector saw Obama's antibusiness stance as "a new level of affront and flocked to the June Koch summit with their checkbooks in hand" (254). While Mayer notes there is no harm in donating to causes one believes in, the money donated by millionaires who were merely interested in protecting their own assets unknowingly went to causes that hurt the middle and lower classes by championing to cut government services like Medicaid and Social Security.

The Author Is Liberal; The Book Is Not

Using Mayer's reference to extremist Republicans funded by outside groups as "The Party of No," this book can be seen as *A Book of No* about The Party of No (172). While Mayer's personal inclinations are obviously liberal, she does not present her book as a piece of anti-conservative or anti-Republican propaganda. Rather, she condemns the overreaching power dark, outside money plays in the current political system. She acknowledges that the presence of dark money in politics is inevitable, but she also draws the conclusion that greedy corporate interests have rigged the political system to ensure their continued control of power at the expense of anyone below them.

Mayer's liberal inclinations are obvious, but equally as obvious is her dedication to providing a non-partisan, fact-based investigation. For example, Mayer references President Obama frequently throughout her investigation as a symbol of the types of progressive social reforms the far-right conservative movement detested. When discussing Obama, Mayer employs a more sympathetic tone than the rest of her writing, a sign that her own political inclinations are liberal. She claims that it is "hard to think of another president who had to face the kind of guerrilla warfare waged against him almost as soon as he took office" (165). The warfare she references is the wave of dark

money propelling the conservative movement; vague variations in her language like this imply both her sympathies for Obama and her criticisms of wealthy conservative donors. These sympathies are present, but not overbearing, allowing the majority of Mayer's book to read like a fact-based investigation.

Because Mayer actively tries to suppress her personal political inclinations, the purpose of her book cannot be to affect the political inclinations of the reader. Rather, Mayer presents this lengthy investigation as an analysis of a dangerous shift taking place in the Republican party that has gone largely unnoticed. The goal of her investigation is ultimately to inform and warn the reader of covert developments that have real, lasting implications on the American population. It is also important to note that Mayer is not critical of conservatives or Republicans as a whole, but rather of extremists. The purpose of the final chapters of her book is to identify the implications of the conservative movement. The fact that these implications are far-reaching means this issue is not a partisan issue; the influence of wealthy outside donors hurts both of the main political parties, Republicans included, as well as the middle and lower classes. Thus, Mayer's book attempts to relate to the reader on a solidified, human level as opposed to a partisan level.

Styles

Structure

An investigative and informative study, the structure of Mayer's book is straightforward and designed to keep the reader's thoughts organized. Because of the length and complexity of her investigation, Mayer includes a detailed notes and index section at the end of the book, allowing the reader to refer to these tools to track the progression of ideas, important players, and themes. These tools prove to be helpful, as many of the people Mayer references float in and out of the political realm with ease. She includes an introduction as well, titled "The Investors," which provides a broad summary of the detailed investigation to follow (1).

Between the introduction and the index, Mayer's analysis is broken into three sections, each detailing separate blocks in the timeline of the conservative movement. Page-wise, the lengths of the chapter are relatively similar, but the amount of time covered differs immensely. The first section covers almost forty years, while the second section covers one. The first section details the families and fortunes that laid the groundwork for the conservative movement. The second section brings the progression of the conservative movement to a climax when far-right ideas, fueled by the billionaire class and seemingly grassroots movements like the Tea Party, gained a foothold in the federal government with sweeping midterm congressional wins. Mayer's third and final section addresses the implications of the (still progressing) conservative movement, and how the government's largest contributors continue to use their wealth to protect their political interests at the expense of anyone in their path.

Perspective

Employing the tone of a fact-based investigation, Mayer attempts to remain non-partisan throughout the book. However, in a book dedicated solely to the rise of the right, her liberal inclinations are obvious. Equally as obvious is Mayer's background as a political reporter. In this book, she takes a tangled web of political spending and ultimately provides a pattern for the root of that spending which has largely gone unnoticed by the general public and political insiders alike. The success of dark money's influence on politics relies largely on remaining just that- dark. Thus, Mayer's perspective aims to shed light on dark money.

Tone

While this book invokes a dry tone as a source of entertainment, it maintains an informative, journalistic tone as a piece of political opinion or investigatory work. The constantly intertwining names and organizations flowing throughout her investigation can get confusing, but she gently pushes the reader forward; covering so much information at such a fast pace makes the reader feel as if he or she is sifting through

research alongside the author and her team. Mayer seems to possess the foresight that the wealth of information she provides may overwhelm readers. Thus, the index she provides is crucial for maintaining a fluent imprinting of the timeline onto the reader.

A politically-based book with a left-leaning slant may be expected to have an angry tone, but Mayer's experience as a reporter shines through, giving her work a more centrist, rational tone. Although this tone is conveying partisan ideas, Mayer seems careful to leave emotion out of her book. Instead, Mayer draws attention to numbers, figures, and quotes from insiders or experts. In a separate tribute to maintaining a factual tone rather than an emotional one, she includes a lengthy notes section at the end of her book, which reveals the depths of her research efforts. Hundreds of articles, essays, personal interviews, and archived interviews fill these pages, where Mayer connects the ideas of past historians and analysts to show the reader the underlying patterns at play.

Quotes

Although nobody agrees with me, I am of the opinion that the only sound countries in the world are Germany, Italy, and Japan, simply because they are all working and working hard. The laboring people in these countries are proportionately much better off than they are any place else in the world. When you contrast the state of mind of Germany today with what it was in 1925 you begin to think that perhaps this course of idleness, feeding at the public trough, dependence on government, etc., with which we are afflicted is not permanent and can be overcome.

-- Fred Koch (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote defines Koch family patriarch Fred Koch's early inclinations on his disapproval of public welfare programs.

Philanthropy, with its guarantees of anonymity, because their chosen instrument.

-- Jane Mayer (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote describes what Mayer refers to throughout the first section of her book as the weaponization of philanthropy.

The rich are inevitably going to organize their wealth to avoid government confiscation. They'll do whatever the law allows to use their money as they see fit, out of reach of the tax collector.

-- Richard Mellon Scaife (chapter 2 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote, from the mouth of one of America's most powerful billionaires at the time, admits the cruel truth that the wealthy will always be motivated by evading taxes and maximizing their bottom line.

A small handful of foundations have essentially provided the conservative movement with its venture capital

-- John J. Miller (chapter 3 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote provides a business analogy for how private foundations established by a few billionaires have funded an entire political movement.

They were just mis-measuring crude oil from the Indian reservations as they did all over the U.S. If you brought crude, you'd shorten the gauge. They'd show you how... It all involved weights and measurements, and they had their thumb on the scale. That was the Koch Method.

-- Phil Dubose (chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote explains the namesake of the chapter dedicated to "the Koch Method" through the words of a former employee of Koch Industries.

I've always believed when people give big money, they - maybe silently - expect something in return.

-- Bob Dole (chapter 5 paragraph 3)

Importance: Bob Dole was quoted as saying this long after his retirement from politics; this quote exemplifies the blatant understanding between politicians and big donors that a business exchange was being made, and the donors expected favors in return for their money.

[The Kochs] made political contributions to party committees and candidates, such as Dole. Their business made contributions through its political action committee and exerted influence by lobbying. And they founded numerous nonprofit groups, which they filled with tax-deductible contributions from their private foundations.

-- Jane Mayer (chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote summarizes and gives examples for each of Richard Fink's three strategies for achieving conservative change.

Charles wanted to be more in control, but he also wanted to be more behind the scenes. I don't get it.

-- Dick Arme (chapter 6 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote summarizes the way Charles Koch exerted control over his political endeavors, yet went through painstaking measures to ensure he stayed out of the public eye.

It was very much a put-up job...All the usual suspects were there, like FreedomWorks, 'Joe the Plumber,' and The American Spectator magazine. There were also some people who had Revolutionary War costumes and 'Don't Tread on Me' flags, actual activists, and a few ordinary people...But it was very well organized by the conservative groups. Back then, it was really obvious that it was put on, and they'd set it up. But then it caught on...It's a major accomplishment for sponsors like the Kochs that they've turned corporate self-interest into a movement among people on the streets.

-- Thomas Frank (chapter 7 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote summarizes what anti-Koch author Thomas Frank believed of the Tea Party Movement's origin. His skeptical line of thinking coincides with Mayer's as well.

Soft money [was just] hard-earned American dollars that Big Brother has yet to find a way to control. That is all it is, nothing more...I know a little something about soft money, as my family is the largest single contributor of soft money to the national Republican Party...I have decided, however, to stop taking offense at the suggestion that we are buying influence. Now I simply concede the point. They are right. We do expect some things in return. We expect to foster a conservative governing philosophy consisting of limited government and respect for traditional American virtues.

-- Betsy DeVos (chapter 9 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote explains how billionaire conservative donor (and present Secretary of the Treasury) Betsy DeVos feels about her political investments.

A political minority, responding to the interests of its extreme sponsors, had succeeded in rendering the most powerful democracy in the world dysfunctional.

-- Jane Mayer (chapter 11 paragraph 2)

Importance: Referencing the 2011 government sequestration, in this quote Mayer summarizes the goal of the conservative movement and the process used to achieve this goal.

The current campaign finance environment has led to a handful of friends and allied groups dominating our side's efforts. This is not healthy. A lot of centralized authority in the hands of a few people at these outside organizations is dangerous for our Party"

-- Republican National Committee (chapter 14 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote, released as an analysis of mistakes made in Republican's 2012 presidential attempt by the RNC itself, signifies that even those entrenched in the conservative establishment were beginning to notice and acknowledge the damaging impact of dark money.

Topics for Discussion

Describe Mayer's overall tone toward the Koch brothers throughout the text.

While the book is obviously critical of the Koch brothers and their political involvement, Mayer's tone is not bitter, angry, or judgmental. Rather, she employs an informational, historic tone seemingly free of personal interjections. There are points of her writing that stand out as a manifestation of her own beliefs, but overall it seems that she is careful to maintain a factitious tone.

Are Mayer's references to George Soros and other well-known liberal financiers enough to balance the scale of her argument?

As noted above, Mayer attempts to remain non-partisan throughout her book. While this is admittedly difficult in a book dedicated to the far-right, she attempts this by both employing a neutral tone and including instances of dark, outside money on the left as well. For example, Mayer highlights that in 2007, George Soros and his allies helped funnel more than \$27 million aimed at defeating President Bush (236).

Explain your current knowledge of Betsy DeVos compared to Mayer's analysis of her in chapter nine. How might Mayer's analysis expand with knowledge of DeVos' current position as Secretary of Education?

Betsy DeVos received some of the most publicity of any of President Trump's cabinet nominations because of her alleged inexperience in the field of education and her privileged, seemingly disconnected background. Mayer references DeVos and her husband in the context of campaign finance reform, a similarly highly contested issue, where her far-right ideology is evident. With knowledge that DeVos was in line for Secretary of Education, Mayer's focus on DeVos may have been more thorough and more diverse.

Do you think the Kochs' attitudes toward government spending would change if they were the beneficiaries of more social welfare programs?

On page 286, Mayer suggests that Paul Ryan's proposed radical budget was popular among wealthy conservatives because they were not reliant on government services. Though the billionaire class frequently preaches the value of free-market economics and the dangers of big government, one can presume these ideas would change alongside a change in their financial situation.

One mutual fund manager in the Koch network claimed that the wealthy self-tax by giving to charities, and that "the rich could do more good with their money than the government" (290). Do you agree?

Wealthy individuals in the public eye have historically given to charities, either as a moral obligation, to support a cause they are passionate about, or to curb criticism about their enormous fortunes. Throughout the entire book, Mayer claims that Charles and David Koch have used tax deductions and undisclosed donations to weaponize their philanthropic giving. They, like other wealthy conservatives, were taught early that philanthropic endeavors come with enticing tax breaks. They were among the first, however, to funnel charitable donations through organizations that claimed to act on behalf of public welfare, but actually advanced political special interests. One can assume that if philanthropy did not come with a tax break, billionaires would be less likely to give as generously as they do.

Compare the 2012 presidential election, discussed in chapter twelve, with the 2016 presidential election.

Though Republican candidates in 2012 had their wallets padded by a plethora of special interests who opposed Obama's progressive initiatives, the 2012 presidential election proved to be an embarrassing loss for the right. Mayer contributes this loss to a severe lack of unity among the Republican Party stemming from the influence of outside dark-money groups, which do not respond to checks and balances or traditional party rules. Republicans presented several candidates and had a difficult time agreeing on Mitt Romney, the eventual nominee. Similarly, in 2016, a lack of unity and organization plagued the Republican nomination process in 2016. While the presidential race proved successful for the right, Republicans had to again sift through seemingly endless candidates, most of whom were backed by wealthy special interests.

Identify the influence of the media in Mayer's investigation.

While less-documented by Mayer, one avenue heavily pursued by the conservative movement was investments in media outlets like Fox News, Premiere Networks, and The Daily Caller. Similar to the way op-eds, essays, and books were published to convey fringe ideas in a more socially appealing light, news outlets were able to add a measure of credibility to the far-rights' ideas.

Discuss the implication of Mayer's interaction with Koch-associates as described on pages 280-285.

Earlier in the book, Mayer references several instances where those facing legal battles against the Kochs were intimidated, spied on, or had their reputations tarnished. Later, she claims far-right news outlets, at the request of the Kochs, were building a story accusing Mayer of plagiarism. Fighting the claims head-on, nothing resulted from the threat. However, a Google search of Mayer's name leads to a slew of articles accusing her of twisting claims, misinformation, and plagiarism. While the claims could be unrelated, they could also hark back to Mayer's previous run-in with Koch operatives.

Where did the strategy to invest in ideas rather than individual candidates stem from?

From the beginning of her investigation, Mayer claims that the Kochs detested the traditional political system. As early as David's failed vice presidential bid in 1980, the Kochs realized that money could not directly buy elections. Thus, they began looking for new ways to invest their fortunes to further their bottom line and evade paying as much to the government in taxes as possible. According to Mayer, the brothers were also disheartened by their inability to eliminate all campaign finance restrictions. These factors forced the brothers to invest in ideas rather than candidates, in hopes that the generations of conservatives they are able to influence will fight their legislative battles on their behalf.



One of the Koch's main political advisers claimed: "Government programs caused dependency, which in turn caused psychological depression. Historically, this led to totalitarianism" (360). Do you agree with this blanket statement about government programs?

The conservative movement relied on a black and white view of society. For example, they believed in the moral principle that everyone has the same opportunity in life, but what differs from the rich and the poor is drive and motivation. This rhetoric served the purpose of justifying cutting initiatives that were proven to help the less fortunate.