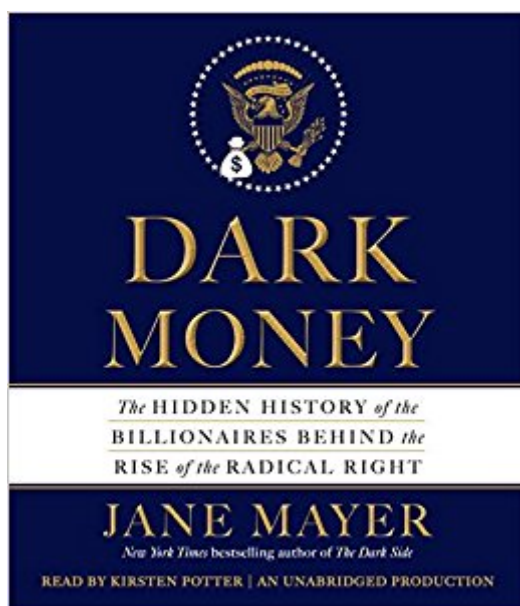


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# Dark Money: The Hidden History Of The Billionaires Behind The Rise Of The Radical Right



## Synopsis

Why is America living in an age of profound economic inequality? Why, despite the desperate need to address climate change, have even modest environmental efforts been defeated again and again? Why have protections for employees been decimated? Why do hedge-fund billionaires pay a far lower tax rate than middle-class workers? The conventional answer is that a popular uprising against “big government” led to the ascendancy of a broad-based conservative movement. But as Jane Mayer shows in this powerful, meticulously reported history, a network of exceedingly wealthy people with extreme libertarian views bankrolled a systematic, step-by-step plan to fundamentally alter the American political system. The network has brought together some of the richest people on the planet. Their core beliefs—that taxes are a form of tyranny; that government oversight of business is an assault on freedom—are sincerely held. But these beliefs also advance their personal and corporate interests: Many of their companies have run afoul of federal pollution, worker safety, securities, and tax laws. The chief figures in the network are Charles and David Koch, whose father made his fortune in part by building oil refineries in Stalin’s Russia and Hitler’s Germany. The patriarch later was a founding member of the John Birch Society, whose politics were so radical it believed Dwight Eisenhower was a communist. The brothers were schooled in a political philosophy that asserted the only role of government is to provide security and to enforce property rights. When libertarian ideas proved decidedly unpopular with voters, the Koch brothers and their allies chose another path. If they pooled their vast resources, they could fund an interlocking array of organizations that could work in tandem to influence and ultimately control academic institutions, think tanks, the courts, statehouses, Congress, and, they hoped, the presidency. Richard Mellon Scaife, the mercurial heir to banking and oil fortunes, had the brilliant insight that most of their political activities could be written off as tax-deductible “philanthropy.” These organizations were given innocuous names such as Americans for Prosperity. Funding sources were hidden whenever possible. This process reached its apotheosis with the allegedly populist Tea Party movement, abetted mightily by the Citizens United decision—a case conceived of by legal advocates funded by the network. The political operatives the network employs are disciplined, smart, and at times ruthless. Mayer documents instances in which people affiliated with these groups hired private detectives to impugn whistle-blowers, journalists, and even government investigators. And their efforts have been remarkably successful. Libertarian views on taxes and regulation, once far outside the mainstream and still rejected by most Americans, are ascendant in

the majority of state governments, the Supreme Court, and Congress. Meaningful environmental, labor, finance, and tax reforms have been stymied. Jane Mayer spent five years conducting hundreds of interviews-including with several sources within the network-and scoured public records, private papers, and court proceedings in reporting this book. In a taut and utterly convincing narrative, she traces the byzantine trail of the billions of dollars spent by the network and provides vivid portraits of the colorful figures behind the new American oligarchy. Dark Money is a book that must be read by anyone who cares about the future of American democracy.

## Book Information

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ONE OF A NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW'S TEN BEST BOOKS OF 2016A Washington Post Notable Book of 2016"Mayer is. . . a writer whose reporting can leave a reader breathless. . . I urge you to read Dark Money."Bill Moyers"Jane Mayer's Dark Money is utterly brilliant and chilling • no matter how much you think you already know. . . Read it!"Naomi Klein, bestselling author of The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism and This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate •"Jane Mayer's Dark Money. . . is absolutely necessary reading for anyone who wants to make sense of our politics. Lay aside the endless punditry about Donald's belligerence or Hillary's ambition; Mayer is telling the epic story of America in our time. It is a triumph of investigative reporting, perhaps not surprising for a journalist who has won most of the awards her profession has to offer.... She's a pro, and she's given the world a full accounting

of what had been a shadowy and largely unseen force. . . . Remarkable. . . . The New York Review of Books "The book is written in straightforward and largely unemotional prose, but it reads as if conceived in quiet anger. Mayer believes that the Koch brothers and a small number of allied plutocrats have essentially hijacked American democracy, using their money not just to compete with their political adversaries, but to drown them out. . . . Dark Money emerges as an impressively reported and well-documented work. . . . The importance of Dark Money [flows] from its scope and perspective. . . . It is not easy to uncover the inner workings of an essentially secretive political establishment. Mayer has come as close to doing it as anyone is likely to come anytime soon. . . . She makes a formidable argument. . . . From the cover of the New York Times Book Review "Revelatory. . . persuasive, timely and necessary. . . . Only the most thoroughly documented, compendious account could do justice to the Kochs' bizarre and Byzantine family history and the scale and scope of their influence. . . . The New York Times

Jane Mayer is a staff writer for The New Yorker and the author of three bestselling and critically acclaimed narrative nonfiction books. She co-authored *Landslide: The Unmaking of the President*, 1984-1988, with Doyle McManus, and *Strange Justice: The Selling of Clarence Thomas*, with Jill Abramson, which was a finalist for the National Book Award. Her book *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War on American Ideals*, for which she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, was named one of The New York Times's Top 10 Books of the Year and won the J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize, the Goldsmith Book Prize, the Edward Weintal Prize, the Ridenhour Prize, the New York Public Library's Helen Bernstein Book Award for Excellence in Journalism, and the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award. It was also a finalist for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. For her reporting at The New Yorker, Mayer has been awarded the John Chancellor Award, the George Polk Award, the Toner Prize for Excellence in Political Reporting, and the I. F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence presented by the Nieman Foundation at Harvard. Mayer lives in Washington, D.C.

This book is a hard read; not because of Lexile score interest, but because it raises a huge warning flag with regards to some of the funding that has been going into the recent elections. I got the Kindle edition of this book at 11 C.S.T. and stayed up all night reading it, it took about seven hours. I've made it a point for the last eight months to pick a book off of the new releases and just read it; it's been my own personal challenge to read whatever, regardless

of the topic or the political bent. This one was very fascinating and interesting with providing insight into how much money has been circulating in politics and for how long. I sense that this book will be a contentious one for many who read it, or even look at the title, but hear me out, I think it's just a middle or the road person reading it for the sake of reading it. It's certainly told with a liberal bias, but before it is declared unpalatable because of that, or all lies, there are some really worthwhile components to consider. The book is not anti-republican, rather it highlights the funding of anti-government movements and intentional divisions within the republican party as a result of libertarian ideas held by the Koch brothers. It moves past the republican party and focuses on the ultra-conservative anti-establishment ideas of a few of the 1% in creating a scenario that is wholly advantageous to them. It also highlights some who stood up against the Koch brothers in regards to some ideologies, such as John Kaisch, who ceased to be invited to the larger mover and shaker events hosted by the Koch brothers. Throughout the book, every time a major economic player is introduced, Mayer underscores that introduction with a reference to a specific court battle or lawsuit due to fraud that that particular individual is facing. I understand that it is used to underscore why specific persons being referenced may have a disdain against the government, but in some situations, knowing the pending lawsuits for fraud are not advantageous to moving the story forward. This would be my one major criticism with the work. There is also some Koch family background that serves to paint a high level of dysfunction within the Koch family; as brothers apparently bickered even over their mother's will that requested that they not sue one another, upon which they promptly sued. Yet, the family background does serve well to highlight where the wealth of the Koch brothers originated from and ideologies of anti-government that came from their father who was also a member of ultra conservative groups while alive. What the book does well is outline initial stamina in the 1970s and continues to the present day of the sheer amount of money that has been funneled into elections as a result of the Koch brothers and a few other billionaires into elections. The money is so vast that it can invest in its own equipment and maintain itself as its own political machine. The money is often couched in donations to non-profits, which Mayer does an excellent job of outing their purpose and efficiency. It chronicles the efforts of some to whittle away at local and national elections through seemingly unrelated think-tanks and book publications that seek to radicalize the right as much as possible. The mention of "dark money" is money that is untracked or goes into a donors' black hole, which later is utilized in whatever way the organization sees as useful. Having read some of the more recent political dialogue books lately, such as Glen Beck and Dick Cheney;

It's hard to say that Mayer does a much stronger job of identifying the origin of some of the comments and narrative in the book. However, she does note that she is unable to credit all of her sources and there are a few citations that simply cross reference to political blogs. Overall, it's an excellent read, albeit doing little to couch the authors bias and has a bit of a magazine sensationalist piece that is drawn out. It's a book that makes me feel physically ill; which, if emotion is the goal of the writer, it's been done. It is a vital, well cross-referenced read, that chronicles the long growing investment of big business into politics, which has reached the plateau of influence in the election game. Koch brother money, along with other billionaire investors, are certainly something all citizens should be aware of; and fearful of at the same time.

The Koch brothers, Charles and David, get a lot of attention from political observers and, increasingly, from the public. No wonder. The fortune they possess together is greater than those of Bill Gates, Carlos Slim, Warren Buffet, and other private individuals who are often characterized as the richest people in the world. But it's not the brothers' wealth that attracts the attention. It's their heavy-handed attempt to dominate American politics. That's the subject of Jane Mayer's explosive new book, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*. As Warren Buffet has said, "There's class warfare all right. But it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning." The brothers are at the very center of the war machine. The Koch brothers are not alone. Though the Koch brothers provide a convenient (and worthy) target, it's important to understand that they alone are not responsible for the wrenching changes that have taken place in American politics over the past several decades, and particularly since 2009. As Mayer reveals, the brothers • Charles, especially • preside over a network of billionaires and centimillionaires who operate in tandem in support of the most virulent, Right-Wing causes and candidates in the country's politics. A total of some 300 individuals constitute the network. As many as two hundred have attended recent annual gatherings hosted by the brothers. The brothers didn't invent the tactics that have been used to upend the political order. Mayer credits the late Richard Mellon Scaife, the Pittsburgh-based scion of the Mellon Bank and Gulf Oil fortune. In 1964, Scaife set out to change the terms of political debate by investing heavily in think tanks and academic centers to espouse a radical "free-market" ideology and imprint it on

a new generation of scholars, lawyers, and activists. Scaife's various family foundations were soon followed by the Bradley, Olin, and Coors Foundations in advancing the Right-Wing agenda. In addition to Scaife and the Koch Brothers, the "vast Right-Wing conspiracy" they set in motion includes the aging casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, an obsessively pro-Israel donor who has outpaced everyone else in the country in political spending in recent elections, and the De Vos family of Michigan, owners of Amway, as well as other members of the 0.01%, a majority of whose fortunes were built on oil, gas, coal, and finance. Also prominent within this network are ultra-wealthy individuals and families who have used similar tactics to bring about dramatic shifts in the politics of individual states — Wisconsin and North Carolina, for example. What do they want? The plutocrats in the Kochs' network profess similar political beliefs which they characterize as "conservatism" to promote "freedom" and the "free market" in America. However, it's highly misleading to refer to this ideology as conservative. Instead, it's radical and reactionary, having nothing to do with conserving anything whatsoever of the past. On the contrary, it's clear from Mayer's account that the common intellectual thread that runs throughout this group of supremely privileged individuals is a determination to turn back the clock to the nineteenth century, repealing every political reform instituted under Teddy Roosevelt and all his successors. Child labor laws? Check. Anti-trust legislation? Check. The progressive income tax? Check. Social Security? Check. The minimum wage? You get the point. What these people want is clearly nothing less than the "freedom" to pollute, exploit their employees, avoid taxes, dictate the terms of political debate, and pass their vast wealth on to their children and grandchildren in dynastic fashion. Who are these people, really? Though they tend to style themselves as "self-made," many of them — including the Kochs — inherited considerable fortunes. They live in multimillion-dollar homes (usually, several of them), preside over huge businesses, and donate millions of dollars to "charity" (usually, arts institutions and universities that will place their names on buildings). However, a disturbing number of them are, not to put too fine an edge on things, criminals. As Mayer puts it in her understated way, it is "striking how many members of the Koch network had serious past or ongoing legal problems." For example, "between 1980 and 2005, under Charles Koch's leadership, his company developed a stunning record of corporate malfeasance."

The Koch brothers and the De Vos family businesses have paid tens of millions of dollars in fines for violation of environmental laws, worker health and safety regulations, and tax laws, causing far more harm to society than even the worst violent offender. In a just society, many of these people would have gone to prison long ago. A multipronged strategy Mayer describes the Kochs and their allies strategy as multipronged. At the outset, their efforts went largely into intellectual enterprises, chiefly think tanks and universities. The purpose of these “investments” was to nurture a new generation of “free-market conservatives” who would (and did) change the dynamics of public discourse. A second prong of the strategy was to press state and federal legislators and the courts to shift economic policy to their (self-interested) way of thinking. At the same time, they consciously set out to foster the grassroots efforts that eventually produced the Tea Party, by creating phony populist organizations (“Astroturf”), providing funding and political expertise, and subsidizing sympathetic media. For example, they paid Glenn Beck \$1 million to hype the Tea Party on his show. To round out the picture, they mounted a lavishly funded effort to seize control of the Republican Party and gerrymander Congressional district lines in states across the country to guarantee a Republican majority in the House of Representatives. Have no doubt about the success of this strategy: witness the fear-mongering and Right-Wing platitudes consistently mouthed by the Republican candidates contending for the presidency in 2016. All this is possible now after the 2010 Citizens United decision and its sequels in the courts, which freed what Bernie Sanders calls “the billionaire class” to dominate federal elections to a greater extent than was feasible even under the Robber Barons in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Reportedly, a single session at a gathering hosted last year by the Koch Brothers generated pledges for this year’s election campaigns totaling \$889 million, an amount far greater than either the Republican or Democratic parties raised for the last presidential campaign. In all likelihood, this sum will prove to be only a portion of the funds they contribute collectively when the final figures are toted up. After all, they can afford it: together, the men (and a few women) in this network are “worth” considerably more than \$100 billion dollars. Where does all the money go? You might think it’s not easy to spend so much money, and you’d be right. To bring these massive funds to bear in the political area, the members of the Koch network have created literally hundreds of organizations • think tanks, academic institutes, SuperPACs, “public welfare” organizations, “charities,” and businesses to put their money to



work. Some of these entities evidence no more signs of activity than a post office box. Others, such as the Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, the Federalist Society, and the Kochs' most identifiable political venture, Americans for Prosperity (AFP), are well known and substantial. For example, AFP employed 550 people in the 2012 election cycle. Most of the organizations created by the members of the network exist merely to launder money from wealthy donors, funneling it through a series of obscurely named entities to avoid the few remaining campaign finance disclosure requirements. To operate this exceedingly complex array of organizations, both bogus and genuine, requires a huge number of political operatives, lobbyists, pollsters, and others. Though none of these people are likely to approach their benefactors in personal wealth, many of them are reaping millions of dollars for their efforts. Surprise! The most dramatic revelation in Mayer's book is her account of the way the Koch brothers' father built the fortune that was the foundation of their enormous wealth. Like his sons Charles and David after him, Fred Koch was an MIT-trained engineer. He developed advanced techniques to refine crude oil. Forced by the major players in the oil industry to operate outside the country, he built a thriving business overseas building oil refineries. Among the longest-standing and most lucrative business partnerships he undertook were with Stalin and Hitler's governments. A scholar who studied Koch's work for Nazi Germany concluded that "the American venture became a key component of the Nazi war machine." Historians expert in German industrial history concur. Some readers may also find surprises in Mayer's accounts of the central role of the Koch Brothers and their allies in launching and funding the Tea Party and the protracted (and successful) effort to undermine the public consensus about the serious threat that climate change poses to human life in the near future. Mayer reports that "from 2005 to 2008, a single source, the Kochs, poured almost \$25 million into dozens of different organizations fighting climate reform . . . Charles and David had outspent what was then the world's largest public oil company, ExxonMobil, by a factor of three." About the author Jane Mayer is an investigative journalist who has been a staff writer at The New Yorker for twenty years. She is a former war correspondent. She has won many of the top awards the journalistic profession has to offer. Dark Money is her fourth book.

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