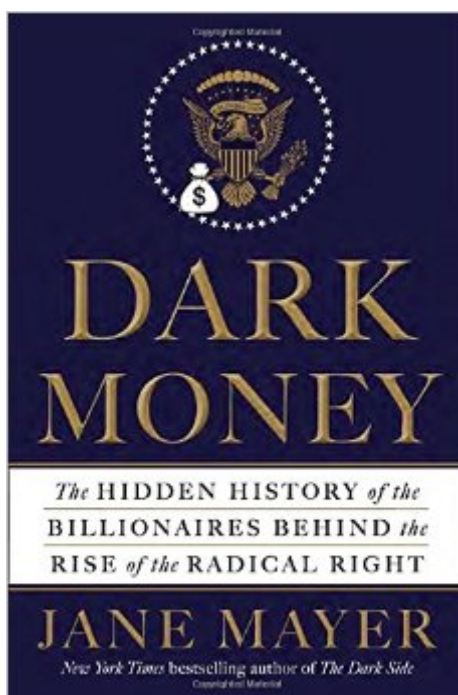


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Dark Money: The Hidden History Of The Billionaires Behind The Rise Of The Radical Right



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.

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Customer Reviews

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'm 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 Kochs 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; I'd 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.

This book is rapidly making waves, after the New York Times and Washington Post worked with author Jane Mayer to reveal Koch Industries' history building a major refinery for none other than Adolph Hitler, just after he became Chancellor of Germany. But the sensational Nazi connection was just the easy part, and Koch is among several old-money fortunes that were pivotal in establishing today's complicated web of innocuous-sounding corporate front groups. Such journalism is imperative at a time when Americans are constantly being duped by advertising and public relations executives, selling political ideas that are not actually designed to benefit the audience listening. Putting my opinions aside, here's why the book stands out:

1. THE ACCESS. Through interviews with current and ex-Koch Industries staff & executives, and members of Koch's sprawling "nonprofit" political network, Ms. Mayer has reminded the political community of her talent as an investigator. Her ability to find both new and historic details that are previously unreported--and immediately relevant--are what set this author apart from the day's other pre-eminent experts on plutocrats & oligarchs (such as Kim Phillips-Fein, Lee Fang, Lewis Lapham, Lisa Graves, Ken Vogel, Mark Ames, and Greg Palast, to name a few).
2. THE NARRATIVE. With secretive people like Charles Koch and the late Richard Mellon Scaife as an author's subject, the sheer lack of honest information can make it hard to write anything other than a political white paper. But Ms. Mayer's experience and reputation as a reporter at the New Yorker have opened many doors that were previously closed, painting a more crisp, rich portrait of this private history.
3. THE CONTEXT. Reading *Dark Money* reminds me of the pains that author & lawyer Vincent Bugliosi took to convince jurors of Charles Manson's motives in directing his cult's seemingly-senseless murders. No, I'm not comparing Koch with Manson. Koch's history is a black box in many ways, making it difficult even for seasoned investigators to discover truths buried in the Koch history book. Years of reporting also indicate that Koch's own narrative should never be taken for granted, in terms of how they frame issues, what they talk most prominently about, and which details they seem to forget. But Mayer hit the jackpot on such details, and contextualizes the information in ways that offer newer, clearer perspectives on why and how America's most notorious billionaires go about their business. For the political news nerd to the primetime political strategist, this book represents the most contemporary look at the billionaires whose political investments are now usurping entire parties (à la Koch and the Republicans). Beyond informing politicians, it is genuinely fascinating to learn how people like Charles Koch have smashed down the walls between business, politics and culture, integrating each of these realms into a single stage where we are watching a massive

privatized experiment taking place. Back to my own opinion. It's imperative for voters to monitor the billionaires' political experiment. The preferences of private families like Koch, Scaife, Bradley and Olin do not necessarily reflect the needs of American voters. Anyone who feels that the 'system is rigged against us' ought read this book and find out exactly how, for that is the only way to counter such discouraging unfolding history.

An enthralling and comprehensive story of the Koch dynasty, those that came before it, and those that fall in line with the anarchist agenda of Charles Koch. The account of the far right network is extremely informative and also a bit mind-blowing. Also, being a native of Pittsburgh, I couldn't put down the chapter on the Mellon Scaife story. Not only can this book serve as a road map for getting out of the political muck we are in as a nation, its a telling account of anti-social and narcissistic behavior that ties many of these billionaires together. Charles Koch and cohorts seem to feel they are above the law, and will undermine or change the law to maintain their position. Of course, I am not sure what kind of person I'd be if a Nazi nanny changed my diapers....you gotta read this.

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