done better had I been on the front lines of defending reproductive rights.

Meanwhile, abortion-rights advocates can hardly be blamed for their failure to bring together pro- and anti-abortion rights people. Since no one thinks abortions are the best means of birth control, we can understand why compromise seemed appealing. Perhaps joint recommendations for reducing the abortion rate could occur when contraception is easily accessible to everyone, and when our population is no longer so vulnerable to the right-wing charges that feminism and sexual freedom will destroy our society.

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Who Owns the GOP?

Theda Skocpol

Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right
by Jane Mayer
Doubleday, 2016, 449 pp.

Dark Money by investigative journalist Jane Mayer appears just as America heads toward yet another high-stakes, ideologically polarized election. The book expands on Mayer's famous article, "Covert Operations," published by the *New Yorker* in August 2010. Drawing on public records, newly unearthed documents, and hundreds of interviews, it recounts decades of far-right efforts to reshape U.S. politics, culminating in the recent construction by the multibillionaire Koch brothers, Charles and David, of an "integrated political network" fueled by donations from hundreds of wealthy conservatives. Aspiring to save the country from liberals by electing ultra-free-market Republicans, the Koch-led plutocrats "got their money's worth" in 2014, according to Mayer, when Republicans moved further right and won the U.S. Senate while expanding their House majority and control in dozens of states. But the ultimate prize still beckons. To take the presidency, too, the Koch network is on course to spend close to $900 million on public education, advertisements, and both acquiring data about voters and contacting them. According to Mayer (and other journalists, such as Kenneth Vogel at *Politico*), the financial and staff resources of the Koch network now exceed those of the Republican Party apparatus itself.

The timing of Mayer's book is slightly awkward, because the 2016 presidential campaign has not unfolded as intended by either the Kochs or the GOP establishment (whoever that may now be). Sure, a billionaire is leading in GOP primaries, but Donald Trump is hardly a Koch acolyte—in fact, he is the only one of the GOP contenders who has *not* auditioned at some Koch donor summit or activist gathering. Trump calls for building a wall on the Mexican border, deporting millions of currently undocumented residents, and preventing Muslims from entering the United States. But is he an anti-government conservative? He advocates tax increases for top investors and hints he would protect Social Security and Medicare from the cuts or privatization favored by many right-wingers, including the Kochs. A second 2016 GOP presidential frontrunner, hardline Texas Senator Ted Cruz, holds to more orthodox free-market positions, but he is loathed by other GOP officeholders and many conservative elites. He, too, is hardly the candidate GOP leaders or Koch honchos hoped would move to the fore. Of those still in the running, Marco Rubio would surely be their top choice, because he puts a youthful, Hispanic face on the most extreme free-market and pro-billionaire policies.

With the caveat that no one knows what may happen before the Republican National Convention in July, the early 2016 state of play illustrates both the strengths and limits of Jane Mayer's magisterial analysis. Mayer's book reveals a lot about the ways in which right-wing fat cats have been able to challenge the Republican Party and pull its candidates and

officeholders toward extreme right-wing agendas that are often out of step with the preferences of the majority of the American public (and, at times, also at odds with those of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce). Yet Mayer fails to put the efforts of the right-wing billionaires into a larger political and social context. By focusing on elite idea production and election messaging, Mayer overlooks divisions within the right and offers no insights that could help us understand the unruly Trump surge. *Dark Money* portrays an unstoppable, unified far-right juggernaut led by plutocrats. It correctly alerts us to many aspects of their secretive, unaccountable machinations. But the full story of what is happening on the right is more complex and volatile.

"Weaponizing" Conservative Philanthropy

Dark Money's newest revelations appear in the first, historical part of the book. Mayer tracks the Koch family history, showing how father Fred launched a petrochemical company that would later become the core of the huge financial and multi-industrial conglomerate directed by son Charles and the source of the vast fortune he and his brother David deploy in politics. Fred was also a founding member of the radical right John Birch Society who urged hatred of government and fear of American "communism" upon his sons. The family history illuminates why Charles and David grew up to be, in effect, libertarian leninists (small "l"), determined to use centralized managerial authority to push their take on "freedom." They jettisoned their father's proclivity for conspiracy theories but retained his unmitigated hatred of liberals and active government.

Mayer's early chapters also focus on other wealthy right-wing families, especially the Mellon Scaifes, Olins, and Bradleys, who pioneered conservative manipulations of U.S. tax laws applicable to charitable nonprofit organizations. As long as family foundations and nonprofits claim to devote 51 percent of their activities to education and other non-electoral activities, they can legally and secretly fund political advocacy. Mayer writes about such tactics with quiet outrage and no sense of irony. But this is an ironic tale, because liberal nonprofits and foundations like Ford were at the forefront of many U.S. social movements and policy innovations from the 1960s to the 1980s. Gains in civil rights, environmental protection, and workplace regulation alarmed conservatives, who soon devised their own ways to use such vehicles in more nakedly ideological and strategic ways. More than in any other advanced nation, U.S. tax laws make it easy for very wealthy people to use taxpayer subsidies to push their values. As Mayer convincingly details, "weaponized" conservative philanthropy is at the heart of our secretive, democratically unaccountable, plutocratic politics in an era of burgeoning economic inequalities.

The Full Koch Monty

The last two-thirds of *Dark Money* vaults from the 1970s and 1980s into the Obama era. After making early and sustained investments in generating conservative ideas through the Cato Institute, the Mercatus Center, and grants to academics, the Kochs moved on to offer funding for organizations to sell free-market policies and help elect cooperative politicians. In 2003, the Kochs started to host twice-yearly "seminars," that is, donor summits to educate wealthy conservatives about free-market politics. According to Mayer, the seminars were originally meant to raise additional money for Koch Industries' lobbying efforts. That is hard to believe, because the early seminars were boring talk-fests with very few participants—not the best way to raise lobbying money. Spreading ideas and building moral solidarity among wealthy conservatives have always been important to the Kochs. As Mayer aptly puts it, "the Kochs . . . succeeded in persuading hundreds of the other richest conservatives in the country to give them control over their millions of dollars in contributions." They are collective goods providers for the wealthy right, which depends on everyone, including the Kochs themselves, believing that their cause is a moral crusade.

Saying little about Koch efforts from 2003 through 2008, Mayer resumes the

David Koch speaking at the 2015 Defending the American Dream Summit, August 2015. Photo by Gage Skidmore.

story in 2009. "Obama's election," she writes, "stirred such deep and widespread fear among the conservative business elite that the conference was swarmed, becoming a hub of political resistance." Every six months Koch strategies have been updated—to fight Obamacare, win midterm elections in 2010, wage the "mother of all wars" for the presidency in 2012, and learn from defeat to prepare for renewed victories in 2014 and 2016. At each conclave donors compete with one another to pledge big money that the Kochs and their political associates can deploy without public footprints. Pledges have skyrocketed from tens of millions into hundreds of millions. In addition to Obama's presidency, Mayer portrays the 2010 *Citizens United* decision by the Supreme Court as an important spur to Koch fundraising, although she acknowledges that the super-wealthy had long before discovered ways to get around any legal roadblocks to political giving. Mayer may not realize it, but her book offers evidence against the notion that *Citizens United* has been a game changer.

What is all the Koch-raised money used for? I was especially interested to see what Mayer would say about that, because along with colleagues I am currently conducting a research project on "The Shifting U.S. Political Terrain" that tracks reorganizations on the left and right in U.S. politics since the 1990s. Like Mayer, my colleagues and I find that the post–2000 Koch network of political organizations has shifted resources and clout on the right away from the formal Republican Party apparatus. But we have a somewhat different take on the network's goals and methods. Mayer portrays the Koch operation as a vast scattering of donations to dozens of organizations, including longstanding business groups, think tanks, and Christian-right and gun-owners' groups. Above all, she emphasizes direct and indirect Koch funding for election ads and public messaging. For example, many pages in *Dark Money* are spent describing the Center to Protect Patient Rights, an advocacy entity used by longtime professional consultant Sean Noble to channel funding for political advertisements. In Mayer's telling, the Koch political operation seems mostly focused on polling and messaging to help

elect Republicans or attack Democratic legislation such as healthcare reform or cap and trade. But our research suggests that these efforts are less important to the overall Koch political strategy than something they began doing years ago—making sustained investments in a huge, nationwide, multipurpose political federation called Americans for Prosperity (AFP).

Launched as a nonprofit in 2004, AFP is centrally directed like a privately held corporation or authoritarian party, but it is also a multilevel political organization with paid staff members who deploy resources and mobilize volunteer conservative activists both nationally and within most U.S. states. Between 2005, when former Christian-right organizer Tim Phillips took the helm at AFP, and early 2009, when President Obama moved into the White House, AFP spread permanent paid directors (and often additional staffers) to seventeen states in all regions. Before Obama, AFP sank roots in fully half of the thirty-four states in which it would have paid directors by 2015, and the first AFP states encompassed about three-fifths of the U.S. population (as well as most GOP Senators and members of the House of Representatives). North Carolina and Wisconsin, two states for which Mayer provides vivid evidence of radical-right shifts, were among the first organized by AFP (in 2004 and 2005).

Run by dozens of national, regional, and state-level managers, AFP has long worked during and between elections to pull Republicans toward the far right on core Koch issues such as taxes and the scope of government. In addition, countering and disabling public-sector unions in many states was always a top goal, not only because these unions provide funds and mobilize votes for Democrats, but also because they support public programs and have cooperated at times with moderate Republican legislators and governors. Our research shows that AFP-organized states have effectively pushed GOPers to pass unpopular bills curbing union rights. Mayer's book says little about the centrality of the Koch crusade to destroy unions. Battles over legislation are not her central focus, except for an excellent account in chapter eight of the right's unremitting efforts to block government action on climate change.

Mayer calls AFP the "flagship" Koch group, but she offers little analysis of this massive federation and instead largely focuses on minor Koch-connected operations. Why? For the most part, she portrays the Koch network as primarily devoted to countering Democrats and funding GOP candidates. We have found mounting evidence to suggest, however, that the Koch network, starting under President George W. Bush, has been primarily focused on pulling the GOP policy agenda to the right by manipulating careers as well as money. My research group has collected detailed career data showing that AFP not only engages in electioneering and lobbying, but also offers very attractive career opportunities to Republicans. AFP is virtually a parallel political party set up to the right of the GOP, especially in the states below the level of the self-enclosed Koch directorate. AFP state directors very often come from GOP staff positions and, after working for the Kochs, go on to hold even more important posts directing Republican campaigns or running legislative or executive staffs that set policy agendas. Because we see AFP as the most important Koch organization and stress the circulation of people, not just money, our findings differ subtly but importantly from Mayer's.

Toward the end of *Dark Money*, Mayer highlights recent Koch efforts to set up sophisticated operations to mine voter data. This is an excellent example of a Koch-network effort to provide resources Republicans need—and thus help Koch operatives penetrate campaigns and party committees. But Koch resources create a dilemma. GOPers may need many resources the Koch network has to offer: voter data, money for advertisements, citizen activists, and so forth. To get access to these resources, we are likely to see more and more GOP candidates hire Koch operatives and audition for Koch donor support. But the price for getting Koch resources is accepting their ultra-free-market policy agenda, which in many respects is not popular with voters who the GOP also needs to win competitive national and statewide elections.

Missing Right Populists

Most of my reservations about Mayer's fine book are matters of emphasis. But I have crucial disagreements with her chapter on the Tea Party, which misses the totality of forces buffeting U.S. conservatism and the Republican Party. It looks as if Mayer interviewed professional advocates who oversold her on their contributions to Tea Party protests. She repeatedly points to blog posts and talking points issued by operatives working for AFP, FreedomWorks, and other well-funded advocacy groups to support her portrayal of the Tea Party upsurge as little more than a professionally orchestrated media melodrama ginned up to offer an illusion of popular reaction against the early Obama administration. This approach mistakes bragging by operatives for reality and overlooks widespread popular anger and autonomous grassroots activity on the right.

Especially concerning to me is that Mayer mistakenly quotes a sentence from my 2011 book with Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism,* where she presents us as agreeing with her top-down argument, when that sentence actually appeared in a paragraph summarizing an argument with which we *disagreed*. Our book about the Tea Party from 2009 into 2011 showed that it was never a single organization or movement, but instead the product of the interplay of top-down and bottom-up political forces. From the top, Fox News and other right-wing media outlets hyped the "Tea Party" label as a way for conservative voters to express anger at newly installed President Obama and Democratic congressional majorities; and many professional advocacy organizations jumped on the bandwagon, offering buses to carry people to rallies where their own operatives gave speeches. But these top-down maneuvers were not the driving force of the movement. Ordinary conservative citizens and community activists, almost all white and mostly older, provided angry passion and volunteered their energies to make the early Tea Party more than just occasional televised rallies. Grassroots Tea Partiers accomplished an utterly remarkable feat: starting in 2009, they organized at least 900 local groups, individually named Tea Party units that met regularly. Vanessa and I worked with student researchers to document those groups as of early 2011. In addition, we attended local meetings in New England, Arizona, and Virginia and did face-to-face interviews with leaders and members of local Tea Party groups. Such evidence was carefully calibrated with national surveys of the roughly 15–25 percent of all Americans who said they sympathized with the Tea Party, half of whom identify as Republicans, including a smaller subset that reported actively contributing money to the Tea Party.

We learned that grassroots Tea Partiers were far from disciplined libertarian followers of ultra-free-market advocacy groups. Local Tea Party groups met in churches, libraries, and restaurants, and collected small contributions or sold books, pins, bumper stickers, and other Tea Party paraphernalia on commission to cover their modest costs. They did not get by on checks from the Koch brothers or any other wealthy advocacy organizations. Furthermore, the views of both grassroots Tea Party activists and of many other Republican-leaning voters who have sympathized with this label do not align with free-market dogmas. Research by political scientist Christopher Parker at the University of Washington reinforces our conclusion that ordinary Tea Party activists and sympathizers are worried about sociocultural changes in the United States, angry and fearful about immigration, freaked out by the presence in the White House of a black liberal with a Muslim middle name, and fiercely opposed to what they view as out of control "welfare spending" on the poor, minorities, and young people. Many Tea Partiers benefit from Social Security, Medicare, and military veterans' programs, and do not want them to be cut or privatized. About half of Tea Party activists or sympathizers are also Christian conservatives intensely concerned with banning abortion and repealing gay marriage.

I went back to our data on local Tea Party websites to further test Mayer's argument that AFP orchestrated this upsurge. Did states with AFP directors and staff in place by 2011 have more Tea Party groups

Dark Money does not explain the Trump surge. Photo by Jamelle Bouie.

in relation to their adult or white adult populations? The answer is no; there is no statistically significant relationship. When Vanessa and I interviewed Tea Partiers in early 2011, we found many who knew nothing about professional advocacy groups claiming to speak for them on television and still others who mightily distrusted such top-down efforts. Mayer refers to email lists from a few professional organizations to claim that the Tea Party gained less support, proportional to the U.S. population, than the tiny proportion of Americans involved in the American Liberty League of the 1930s or the estimated 5 percent who approved of the John Birch Society in the 1960s. This is just plain wrong. Ideas and passions may be similar across time, but, according to our research, angry, culturally fearful conservative populists not controlled from above are a major force in the early twenty-first-century United States. Tens of millions of GOP-leaning citizens, roughly a fifth of the population and about half of Republican voters, feel this way.

During the early Obama years, grassroots Tea Partiers and their many sympathizers were notoriously ornery. Of course, they voted for Republicans running against the hated Democrats—contributing to the high turnouts of older white voters that propelled the wave of GOP victories in 2010. But these citizens did not trust or accept cues from GOP regulars. In the 2010 and 2012 election cycles, ordinary Tea Party voters (and many Christian-right voters, too) ended up supporting Senate candidates in Delaware, Missouri, Alaska, and Indiana that GOP leaders and the Koch network would have preferred not be nominated, because they were not positioned to do well in the general election. In the 2012 presidential primaries, conservative voters searched desperately for an alternative to Mitt Romney, and the assorted candidates they tried to push forward were not Koch favorites. By now, the "Tea Party" label has faded from public view, is rarely mentioned on Fox News, and is not very popular in national surveys either. But the angry conservative citizens who fueled the rise of the grassroots Tea Party in the early Obama years are still with

us—and now many of them are supporting the likes of Ted Cruz, known for offending Washington, or Donald Trump, who gives blustery voice to their strong passions and fears about immigration. These are people who overwhelmingly vote Republican, but most are not Koch followers.

Today's Republican Party is being revamped and torn asunder from contradictory directions. Almost all GOP candidates and legislators, even most presidential aspirants, espouse free-market, anti-government ideas like those pushed by the Koch network. But these honchos are not necessarily carrying voters with them. Many centrist voters do not want to cut education or gut the Environmental Protection Agency, while many right-wing voters care most about stopping immigration, outlawing abortions, and cutting back on what they view as government largesse for the poor. The core Koch agenda of bashing unions, slashing taxes for the rich, blocking environmental protection measures, and dismantling Social Security is not the top priority for many conservative voters.

When the dust settles, maybe dark money will still determine the 2016 Republican presidential nomination. Certainly, such big spenders will fund unrelenting attacks against the Democratic nominee. But all signs indicate that whoever moves into the White House in January 2017 is going to have to maneuver on a fundamentally reorganized U.S. political terrain, where the Republican Party has been colonized and redirected by the Koch network. The Kochs don't just write checks for elections and think tanks. Nor are they "rivals" of the Republican Party as many observers suggest, because they are more like parasites who depend upon the continued life of their host. With AFP at the center, the Koch network of carefully coordinated organizations has made great progress at redirecting the GOP, leaving its label and institutional shell in place, but propelling its governing choices in radical new directions.

If the next U.S. president is a joint GOP-Koch favorite of some sort, he will eagerly sign into law radical budgets shrinking federal domestic programs that the Koch-supported Speaker of the House, Representative Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, has already drafted into congressional bills. If the new president is a loose cannon like Donald Trump, he may go off script but is likely to accept much of this far-right agenda. Trump lacks his own policy cadre, and his national campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, was previously the highly successful director of AFP-New Hampshire and will be able to draw appointees and ideas from the Koch network. Finally, if the new president is Democrat Hillary Clinton, she will have a guerrilla war on her hands. Democrats are in the minority in Congress and in most state governments, and Koch leaders and their well-organized allies are working through a radicalized GOP to enact policy changes that will be hard to reverse. The Koch brothers and other dark-money oligarchs may have to put up, now and again, with unruly grassroots populists and occasional Democratic victories. But they have the entire Republican Party in their grasp. They are patient and determined—and in it for the long haul.

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