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The Conservative Interest in American Higher Education: From Vietnam to Palestine

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The Conservative Interest in American Higher Education:
From Vietnam to Palestine

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Alexandra Mulvey

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2024

Dedication

For my grandmother, June Ansorge
Who was deeply engaged in politics and valued education above all else
Thank you

Acknowledgements

To My intellectual advisor, Michael Mulvey
& My dedicated, patient, and resilient editor, Sally Mulvey
Thank you both so much.

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Introduction

Today is April 22, 2024, and social media platforms are filled with livestreams to NYU's pro-Palestine campus protests and the Columbia mass faculty walkout after more than 100 were arrested at the campus encampment last week.¹ Pennsylvania state Senator John Fetterman publicly endorsed Mitt Romney for the next president of Harvard University.² Sixty people were arrested at Yale University today, 47 of whom were students. They were demanding that Yale "disclose investments in military weapons manufacturers and divest from them."³ Huge protests and encampments have taken place at the University of Southern California, University of Michigan, Berkeley, Tufts, Emerson, MIT, The New School, and University of Maryland. These are merely the schools popping up on my feed this afternoon.

If we think of university campuses as sites for the gathering of minds and sharing of controversial ideas, we can also understand why those who defend the status quo might have seen them as a threat to domestic political stability. In this senior project, I examine how American campuses have become sites of conservative political interest and manipulation in the latter half of the 20th century. I argue that this conservative interest was ignited by the historical forces which propelled the antiwar and Civil Rights Movements during the 1960s. Nonviolent, radical campus activism across the country during that era helped mark college campuses as pivotal to socio-political change. It is my assertion that conservative interests solidified their

¹ Gloria Oladipo, "Columbia Faculty Members Walk out after Pro-Palestinian Protesters Arrested," *The Guardian*, April 22, 2024, sec. US news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/apr/22/columbia-university-protests-shutdown>.

² Sarah Fortinsky, "Fetterman Backs Call for Romney to Be Harvard's next President," Text, *The Hill* (blog), April 22, 2024, <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/4612871-fetterman-backs-call-for-romney-to-be-harvards-next-president/>.

³ Eliza Fawcett et al., "Dozens of Yale Students Arrested During Campus Protests," *The New York Times*, April 22, 2024, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/22/us/yale-students-arrests-protests.html>.

recognition of university campuses as sites of untapped power ready to be harnessed by them and identified the 1960s as a decade of missed opportunities for their alternative agendas.

I begin my analysis with an overview of the 1960s student activism for civil rights and antiwar politics. In the second chapter, I analyze the conservative infiltration of the college campus, which coincided with the neoliberal turn in American politics. The third chapter traces the aftermath of these transformations, taking a closer look at the current events surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The current confrontation over campus politics signals to us that the same progressive energy continues to brew on college campuses, and the same conservative interests continue to try to stifle it.

I assert that conservative interests, having identified the campus as the central point in the battle of ideas in American discourse, attempted to co-opt and replace the natural process of idea generation and mobilization in the academy, with one of their own design, and by using it in tandem with their media and legislative machine, reframe free speech on campuses and beyond in service of that conservative interest. I endeavor to prove this through articulation of the 1960s successful antiwar and Civil Rights Movements, the 1980s turn toward neoliberalism, and emergence of the Koch Donor Network to situate the present state of affairs within this broader history as a cause and effect.

Historically we have seen the benefits of higher education and how increased exposure to uncensored historical, political, and sociological education can produce citizens who are critical and suspicious of the systems in place. Passionate student involvement in human rights issues have not been isolated to the 1960's. It is important to pay attention to the ongoing outspoken critical voices of the student movements of today. These act as a reminder that radicalism exists

across different historical periods, through different struggles, all of which are bound together and propelled forward by their shared student endorsement. Universities are the free spaces where the tension between conservative and progressive polls, which have existed since our country's founding, can best be played out in service of democracy.

Chapter One

The Rebellious Sixties: Vietnam & Black Liberation

The evolution of social movements reverberated across the country within the turbulent landscape of the 20th century reshaping how communities and institutions were structured. The Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement stand as beacons of resistance and societal change. They influenced the way communities functioned and how institutions such as governments, schools, and businesses operated, and these movements were spearheaded by student organizations and protestors. This impact was not isolated, rather it spread across many different parts of society, leading to fundamental changes in how people lived and interacted with one another.

The 1960s are marked as a time of radical change characterized by attentive engagement of the American people. The Civil Rights Movement, anti-draft protests, and antiwar protests are examples of the passion and energy harnessed by the people at this time in order to enact social and political change. This decade is marked by the progressive and outspoken younger generation. Their evolution was not confined to public squares or legislative chambers, they permeated the campuses of educational institutions, where the ideals of activism found fertile ground.

Universities should not merely be educational pipelines to the labor market, but sites of free speech and free thinking. They are, ideally, a place where young adults are exposed to many new ideas and theorists and taught to think critically. Working within the university, where freedom of thought and academic integrity is encouraged, offers students the opportunity to organize and explore the possibilities of the ideas, arts, and issues they are passionate about.

Qualified professors dedicated to the academy's implied freedom and integrity can give practical insight into how students may succeed in the goals they have identified for themselves.

This chapter is relevant to my project because it is going to show us how universities became a priority in the agenda of the conservative movement. They turned into spaces of organizing, left wing mobilization, and dissent during the 1960s. I trace how the civil rights and antiwar movements evolved on university campuses turning them into sites of radical leftist activism. I argue it was this example that would later inspire the conservative project of trying to convert university campuses into hotbeds of right-wing radicalism. By observing the student radicalism in that era, conservatives would see what university influence could do if appropriated for their own purposes.

The Civil Rights Movement

The American Civil Rights Movement was a social movement that spanned from 1954-1968 and was spearheaded by leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Bayard Rustin, and Thurgood Marshall among so many others. The movement aimed to abolish segregation, racism, and White supremacy, in pursuit of racial justice and equality through nonviolent civil disobedience.

Martin Luther King Jr. is a name closely associated with the Black struggle for equality and the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King's success was underpinned by his faith and church community. Prior to 1958, this is where his mobilization to end segregation had been based, but

it was clear to him that the sort of grassroots organizing needed to garner nationwide attention required something more and different.⁴

That year everything changed. Two student activists from Wichita State University, Kansas, Carol Parks-Hahn and Ron Walters, initiated and helped organize the nation's first youth-led sit-in protests. The students challenged lunch-counter segregation by consistently showing up at the Dockum Drug Store, ordering sodas, and getting refused service due to their race. After a month of persistence, the drug store owner gave in and served them.⁵ Students at the Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina did something similar in 1960 at a Woolworth's in Greensboro. Four students attempted to do the same thing and were refused service on the first day. The following day, those students were accompanied by 20 more students who caught wind of the demonstration. From this point forward, sit-ins such as these were staged across the state, stretching beyond its borders to South Carolina, Virginia, Florida, and Tennessee.⁶

The sit-in movement was monumental in representing the power of student-led grassroots organizing using nonviolent confrontation. An Alabama State University sit-in was met by police who stormed the campus armed with “shotguns, rifles, and tear gas, threatening to arrest the entire student body.”⁷ It was the armed and violent police reactions that truly indicated how powerful student-led movements could be. The police reaction revealed the state's recognition of the imminent threat of our own mobilized youth.

⁴ Jonathan Eig, *King: A Life*, First edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023), 219.

⁵ “How a Student-Led Protest Sparked Change in the Heart of Wichita,” Wichita State Foundation, February 8, 2023, <https://foundation.wichita.edu/how-a-student-led-protest-sparked-change-in-the-heart-of-wichita/>.

⁶ Eig, *King*. 220.

⁷ Eig, 225.

In April of 1960, a former high-ranking NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) executive and organizer named Ella Baker⁸ worked with King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to organize a gathering of approximately 200 students at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. At that gathering was a pacifist academic named Howard Zinn.⁹ Zinn was a White history professor at Spelman College, a traditionally all Black women's College in Atlanta, GA, where he offered guidance to his students participating in the local sit-in campaign. At that meeting, students voted to form an organization of their own: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), where Zinn would later become a key strategic advisor.¹⁰ SNCC would be recognized as the first instance of young people entering the ranks of Civil Rights Movement leadership. This was made possible with the guidance of activist Reverend James Lawson and Dr. King with his belief in nonviolent civil disobedience.¹¹ These students from Shaw, in cooperation with students from other schools, organized a canvassing effort to register Black people to vote across the southern states.¹²

Bayard Rustin was an American political activist and a pacifist during the Civil Rights Movements who worked heavily with student groups and movements.¹³ He organized protests spanning three decades (1940s-60s), served as a close advisor to Dr. King, and co-founded the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE).¹⁴ He is also largely responsible for introducing America to

⁸ Eig, 168.

⁹ sncclegacy, "In Memoriam: Howard Zinn - SNCC Legacy Project," SNCC Legacy Project - The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Legacy Project, October 2, 2022, <https://sncclegacyproject.org/in-memoriam-howard-zinn/>.

¹⁰ "Atlanta Student Movement," *SNCC Digital Gateway* (blog), accessed April 23, 2024, <https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/establishing-sncc/campus-affiliates/atlanta-student-movement/>.

¹¹ Eig, *King*, 226.

¹² Eig, 227.

¹³ John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁴ "Rustin, Bayard | The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute," accessed February 23, 2024, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/rustin-bayard>.

Gandhi's teachings,¹⁵ believing "that violence could never bring justice and war could never bring peace."¹⁶ These principles, while central to the teachings of many civil rights leaders and organizers, were part of a diverse field of thinkers who informed the activism of this time.

One of those people was Malcolm X, a human rights activist, former minister with the Nation of Islam, and leader of the Black nationalist movement. He was an activist who recognized the potential influence and power of Black students at their universities.¹⁷ In a 1964 interview, X is quoted saying,

Since the political structure is what has been used to exploit the so-called Negroes, we intend to gather together all of the brilliant minds of students, not the adult politicians who are part of the corruption but the students of political science, we intend to gather all of them together and get their findings, get their analyses, get their suggestions, and, out of these suggestions we will devise an approach that will enable us to attack the politicians and the political structure where it hurts the most, in order to get a change.¹⁸

He called on students to mobilize and "launch their own independent studies of the race problem"¹⁹ so a plan of action could be "geared to their thinking."²⁰ Malcolm X was invited to speak on many college campuses, most notably at Howard University in 1961, where he debated

¹⁵ D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 1.

¹⁶ D'Emilio, 1.

¹⁷ Peniel E. Joseph, *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.*, First trade paperback edition (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

¹⁸ A. B. Spellman and Malcolm X Topics: Movements Political Economy, "Monthly Review | Interview with Malcolm X," *Monthly Review* (blog), February 1, 2005, <https://monthlyreview.org/2005/02/01/interview-with-malcolm-x/>.

¹⁹ Spellman and Economy.

²⁰ Spellman and Economy.

civil rights with Rustin. In attendance was Kwame Ture, a Howard student who would go on to be chairman of SNCC several years later and become the face of Black student activism.²¹

These civil rights actors were active and at the frontlines of the movements themselves. They were heavily involved in uplifting the student population because they recognized the power the younger generation could continue to harness. While we look at these civil rights leaders as individuals, it is essential to examine their collective role. We traditionally see them as the leaders of this movement; however, as academics and intellectuals they were the organic component whose ideas seeded the student movements they helped empower.

Part of that movement was CORE, founded in Chicago in 1942 by students and prominent civil rights activists based on the principles of nonviolent resistance. According to Rustin, this direct action was not “just a policy,” but rather “a way of life.”²² Student involvement was a crucial aspect of CORE’s notoriety and success particularly in the 1960s, when they experienced a major growth in numbers attributed to a huge influx of young leadership. They recognized the energy and power young activists were able to bring to the movement and actively encouraged student participation in its campaigns. This was most notably seen in the 1961 Freedom Rides aimed at desegregating interstate bus travel. Young participants including CORE activists and students from universities across the country faced brutal violence and incarceration as they challenged Southern segregation laws - garnering national attention to racial injustice in the American South. This event sparked the first response from the Kennedy administration regarding the civil rights crisis in America.²³

²¹ Kimberly Monroe, “Student Activism and the Rise of Black Studies,” *Picturing Black History*, October 31, 2022, <https://picturingblackhistory.org/student-activism-and-the-rise-of-black-studies/>.

²² D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 54.

²³ D’Emilio, 324.

The Freedom Summer (1964) was organized by SNCC and CORE, among other civil rights groups. The campaign aimed to bring national attention to the violent oppression of Black people in Mississippi, where systemic racism and segregation were deeply entrenched. The student-launched effort was not limited to registering Mississippi voters, it also aimed at building “a grassroots freedom movement”²⁴ that would be maintained even after the student activists had moved on. This movement was in direct response to the Ku Klux Klan’s fear and intimidation campaign.²⁵ Over 1,000 volunteers, predominantly White college students from the northeast, joined forces with local activists to conduct voter education programs, establish Freedom Schools²⁶, and challenge discriminatory practices. They faced violent opposition by White supremacists which resulted in the murder of three student civil rights workers: James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner.

Schwerner was on the Philadelphia, MS, chapter of the Ku Klux Klan’s radar for “organizing local boycotts of biased businesses and helping with voter registration.”²⁷ Chaney was a Black man traveling in a car with two White men in a place where racial tensions were at an all-time high. This undoubtedly drew attention to them. On June 21, 1964, the three young men were arrested, taken into police custody, and later abducted by Klan members. The next

²⁴ “Freedom Summer | The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute,” accessed March 2, 2024, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/freedom-summer>.

²⁵ “Mississippi Burning,” Page, Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed March 2, 2024, <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/mississippi-burning>.

²⁶ To prepare undereducated Black Mississippians for Freedom Summer, “in the spring of 1964, SNCC created the Freedom School curriculum, which was rooted in the lives of young Black Mississippians. It had been designed by a committee of educators from around the country. Broken up into two parts—the “Citizenship Curriculum” and the “Guide to Negro History”—the curriculum was designed to help students examine their personal experiences with racial discrimination and understand their broader context in Mississippi’s closed society. The curriculum was taught by SNCC volunteers in free temporary schools in an attempt to organize, educate, and empower African Americans to register and exercise their right to vote.

(“Freedom Schools,” *SNCC Digital Gateway* (blog), accessed April 26, 2024, <https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/culture-education/freedom-schools/>.)

²⁷ “Mississippi Burning.”

time these men were seen, they had been murdered and their bodies hidden beneath an earthen dam. The work and tragic murders of civil rights and student leaders created a mass eruption of Black consciousness at colleges and universities across the country. The Freedom Summer significantly increased Black voter registration in Mississippi and brought national attention to the ongoing civil rights struggle despite the violence and intimidation tactics of Klan members.

In the following spring, on March 7, 1965, members of SNCC were scheduled to participate in the march from Selma to Montgomery. On the eve of the march, members voted not to participate and wrote to Dr. King stating, “We strongly believe that the objectives of the march do not justify the danger and the resources involved.”²⁸ But SNCC chairman, John Lewis, decided to proceed with his plans to go. The protesters were violently attacked on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, met with tear gas, and trampled by Alabama state police on horseback “carrying bullwhips and batons wrapped in barbed wire.”²⁹ SNCC worker Lafayette Sturney stood at a nearby payphone giving live updates to SNCC headquarters in Atlanta. He was quoted saying, “Police are beating people in the streets. . . .they are just picking them up and putting them in ambulances. People are hurt bad.”³⁰ He was not the only bystander, however. Many reporters watched in horror from the sidelines, and among them were two Justice Department attorneys. This incident served as a turning point. In the days following what would go down in history as “Bloody Sunday,” there were “sympathy marches in eighty American cities, sit-ins at the Justice Department, twenty-four-hour pickets outside the White House, and all-night vigils at Brown Chapel.”³¹ Through the efforts of student activists during this time, political momentum was

²⁸ Ari Berman, *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, First edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 18.

²⁹ Berman, 19.

³⁰ Berman, 19.

³¹ Berman, 19.

cultivated for the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and attention was drawn to the need for federal voting rights legislation.³²

The Anti-Vietnam War Movement

Alongside the growing civil rights struggle, another force was brewing on American campuses. The Vietnam war spanned from 1955 to 1975, but antiwar activism increased after the expansion of the draft in 1964. Widespread opposition and protest against what was largely believed to be an immoral, illegal, and unjust war began the following year with demonstrations against America's escalating role in Vietnam. This grew into a nationwide social movement. The timing coincided with the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968), where both social and political issues hit their climax simultaneously. "Draft resisters were the antiwar movement's equivalent to the Civil Rights Movement's Freedom Riders and lunch-counter sit-in participants."³³

Once the Vietnam war entered center stage of the American political psyche, the increasing overlap between the civil rights struggle and the Vietnam war struggle became abundantly clear. This point between the Civil Rights Movement and antiwar protest was crucial. The public was seeing the increase in American debt, the draft was expanded to build a stronger military force for a war the American people were broadly against, and the inequalities of the draft system were made clearer.

The intersection between the two movements appears to have been facilitated by the teach-ins, which swept across US college campuses in 1965. Initiated by professors at the University of Michigan on March 24, 1965, teach-ins grew to a nationwide phenomenon with

³² "Freedom Summer | The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute."

³³ Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance during the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 9.

over 100 held on US campuses leading up to Washington DC's May 15 National Teach-In on the Vietnam War. It was attended by over 5,000 people and broadcast to over 100 college campuses. The teach-ins were embraced by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a national leftist student organization, which grew out of early 20th century socialist educational movements. Founded at UMichigan in 1960, the same year as SNCC, SDS had been working primarily on civil rights issues.

Both SNCC and SDS were hugely influential in the antiwar effort. SDS advocated for participatory democracy and opposed militarism and imperialism and organized various protests, marches, and sit-ins. SNCC was initially established in response to civil rights matters, and later expanded their focus to include opposition to the Vietnam war. They operated under the ideal of nonviolent direct action and played a crucial role in organizing protests and demonstrations against the war. Many of their members fought for both causes, seeing the struggle for racial equality as interconnected with opposition to militarism and imperialism. Both groups were instrumental in mobilizing young people across the United States to actively oppose the Vietnam War, heavily contributing to the antiwar movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. After Johnson's escalation of the draft in 1964, SDS expanded its focus in service to the antiwar movement through the 300 plus chapters it had on US campuses by 1969.

During this period, it had become evident that the Vietnam draft differed from the draft during World War II. Prominent and wealthy White men, celebrities, and college and graduate students were no longer being summoned for service, while those unable to attend college were still subject to the draft. This meant more Black and Brown people were shipped off to war and were dying in droves, while educated White men were able to get exemptions and stay home.

While the effects of the bolstered antiwar movement may not have been the sole cause of the war's conclusion, Jeffery Kimball asserts that Secretary of State Kissinger and President Nixon knew public support for the war was tenuous. They were constantly concerned that antiwar demonstrations were further undermining support in the US, while encouraging the North Vietnamese government to continue prosecuting the war.³⁴ Kimball posits that the "antiwar movement's critique of the government's explanation of the war provided an alternative view of the morality, wisdom, and basis of American policy, helped undermine the public and elite consensus supporting intervention, and made it possible for some mainstream elites to challenge the imperial presidency,"³⁵ which created conditions favorable for a cease fire.

This point of overlap between the Civil Rights Movement and antiwar protests was informative and beneficial to both. The racial and class inequalities in conscription helped bring some White students to racial justice, the teach-ins were an effective adaptation of civil rights lunch counter sit-ins by war protestors. In the last several years of Dr. King's life, his politics began to shift, too. Previously, he had kept his opinion about the war in Vietnam mostly to himself for fear of contaminating public perception of his civil rights work. He worried they would lose their civil rights gains and the favor of the Johnson administration. After more than a decade of active confrontation with racism and inequality in the United States, King publicly immersed himself in this other contentious issue at the Riverside Church in New York City with his speech "Beyond Vietnam: A Time To Break Silence," on April 4, 1967. In this speech he drew important connections between the vast sums of money being spent in Vietnam and our inability to protect people at home. This war was making it extremely clear that we were forcing

³⁴ Jeffery Kimball, "HOW WARS END: The Vietnam War," *Peace & Change* 20, no. 2 (April 1995): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0130.1995.tb00633.x>.

³⁵ Kimball, 21.

disadvantaged Black and Brown Americans to travel across the world to kill other disadvantaged people of color being caught in the crosshairs of their government's actions. In King's words: "we are on the side of the wealthy, and the secure, while we create hell for the poor."³⁶ This link was instrumental in mobilizing civil rights activists in the antiwar effort.

Eleven days later, at the April 15, 1967, Spring Mobilization, Dr. King led the largest antiwar demonstration to date with 400,000 protestors in tow. They marched from Central Park to the United Nations, demanding an end to U.S. involvement in Vietnam.³⁷ This demonstration was important because it was a huge public display of the alliance between longtime civil rights pacifists and the new generation of radical youth determined to end the war and change the world.

The intersection of these two movements was illustrated by Muhammed Ali's draft refusal based on his opposition to the obvious parallels between the race issue and the war. When his draft card was called in 1966, Ali was denied appeal based on his conscientious objector status as a minister of the Nation of Islam.³⁸ He questioned, "Why should they ask me to put on a uniform and go 10,000 miles from home and drop bombs and bullets on Brown people in Vietnam while so-called Negro people in Louisville are treated like dogs?"³⁹ As a result of his resistance, Ali's passport was revoked as well as his New York State Athletic Commission boxing license.

³⁶ "American Rhetoric: Martin Luther King, Jr: A Time to Break Silence (Declaration Against the Vietnam War)," accessed April 23, 2024, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm>.

³⁷ Staughton Lynd, Luke Stewart, and Alice Lynd, *My Country Is the World: Staughton Lynd's Writings, Speeches, and Statements against the Vietnam War* (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2023), 253.

³⁸ Foley, *Confronting the War Machine*, 10.

³⁹ "June 20, 1967: Muhammad Ali Convicted for Refusing the Vietnam Draft," Zinn Education Project, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/-muhammad-ali-convicted-refusing-vietnam-draft/>.

From here, Ali went on a series of college tours across the country where he would give speeches and get into heated debates with students who challenged his views.⁴⁰ Ali chose university campuses for a variety of reasons, most importantly, because campuses are hubs of youthful energy and resistance against injustice. This is where these themes were discussed and put into action. As an activist known for his eloquence and outspokenness, he was able to participate in deeper discussions and debates about these topics with students and faculty members. Colleges offered Ali a platform to advocate for the causes he believed in, such as racial equality, religious freedom, and war opposition - these were issues directly affecting students and their peers. By refusing his military induction, Ali sacrificed the height of his boxing career to use his platform to advocate for those who were not being widely heard.

As the war intensified and draft quotas rose, students with 2-S deferments began to realize the privilege they held. This led to mounting pressure on campuses nationwide, urging students to reject their deferments and declare “We Won’t Go” post-graduation as a protest against the war.⁴¹ The We Won’t Go Conference, organized by SDS, was held at the University of Chicago in December of 1966. Students, intellectuals, and activists gathered to discuss “conscientious objection, draft dodgers, draft resisters, draft-card burning, fleeing the United States, those who had already refused induction, and those jailed for noncooperation.”⁴² These students used their privilege as a platform to stand up for those not granted the same.

⁴⁰ Les Carpenter and Oliver Laughland, “Shunned by White America, How Muhammad Ali Found His Voice on Campus Tour,” *The Guardian*, June 5, 2016, sec. Sport, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/jun/05/shunned-by-white-america-how-muhammad-ali-found-his-voice-on-campus-tour>.

⁴¹ Lynd, Stewart, and Lynd, *My Country Is the World*, 249.

⁴² Lynd, Stewart, and Lynd, 240.

Summation Chapter One

In this chapter, I have covered some of the political and social movements of the 1960s and how college students, professors, and university campuses were instrumental in raising awareness, and initiating political change, by making their voices heard. Campuses were centers of the intellectual machine that churned out theories and strategies for change. They were the centers of mobilization and organization for building national movements, and they were the megaphone from the academy to the rest of the country.

I argue in this project that they accordingly became the model that would both panic and inspire the conservative movement later on. As we have seen, these civil rights and antiwar movements came together and played out their tensions on campuses across the country throughout the 1960s. This illustrated how influential students could be when banded together, and how threatening that strength would be to the opposition.

In the next chapter, I turn to the 1980s and discuss the precipitating factors of the Reagan revolution and the building of the Koch Donor Network that partly arose as a response to these movements of the 1960s. These factors include the emergence of a restructured, reinvigorated, neoliberal power and conservative movement, converging to create what I refer to as the neoliberal conservative coalition. Here we will see an intentional turn toward college campuses as venues of struggle, recruitment, and transformation and a deliberate push for a corporate ideological agenda imposed on campuses.

Chapter Two

Reagan, Koch, & the Rise of the Neoliberal Conservative Coalition

When we look back at the political landscape of the 1960s, we are reminded of a set of complex and at times contradictory socio-political forces at play. The history that does not immediately sit front and center in the minds of those looking back on that decade, is the origin of the new American right that was in many ways born as a response to the events of the very same era. In this chapter I argue that the American conservative movement understands the student radicalism of the 1960s as a pivotal moment in history resulting in considerable setbacks for their objectives. Moving forward, we see an increasingly more intense effort on the part of the American right to harness the boundless student energy on college campuses for their own agendas. I see the political climate that gave way to Reagan's rise in 1980s American politics and the subsequent neoliberalization as deeply connected to the lessons American conservatives learned from the legacy of the 1960s. I contend their subsequent attacks on American higher education can best be understood when set against this historic background and how the libertarian movement responded to it.

This chapter traces how the Koch brothers mobilized higher education as a tool for the emergent broader libertarian political project and how this process intersected with Reagan's coalition of supporters. I ultimately advance the argument that the Koch brothers, while libertarian-identifying, are actors within the broader neoliberal movement whose influence has worked to change the U.S. political sphere by co-opting the organic processes of the academy. They have done this by weaponizing their monetary influence in higher education with the broader intention of cultivating a new neoliberal libertarian society. The chapter concludes with

an analysis of the intellectual and structural grounds of this broader political project, and its implications.

Roadmap to Reagan & The New Right

The mid to late 1970s were challenging years for the Koch family, whose primary business was oil refining. Volatile political conditions in the Middle East and the rise of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Companies (OAPEC) converged during the 1973 Arab Israeli War when OAPEC “instituted an oil embargo on the United States.”⁴³ The embargo was an immediate response to President Nixon’s request for a \$2.2 billion emergency aid package from the U.S. Congress for Israel during that war.⁴⁴ Severe gasoline shortages, skyrocketing prices in the U.S., and the devaluation of the U.S. dollar resulted. Things would get worse.

With Jimmy Carter’s presidency in 1977 came public discussion that fossil fuels should be phased out. Carter advocated diversifying our energy sources away from petroleum almost immediately. His draft of a national energy plan submitted to Congress in 1977 contained “more than 100 independent proposals aimed at reducing consumption of petroleum.”⁴⁵ Evidence of possible catastrophic climate change linked to fossil fuel consumption was reaching the White House and the public. This energized the primarily student-led environmental movement that grew out of the 1960s. Students began organizing to compel their colleges and other public institutions to divest from fossil fuels. This movement was taking shape at the same time the

⁴³ “Oil Shock of 1973–74 | Federal Reserve History,” accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/oil-shock-of-1973-74>.

⁴⁴ “Oil Shock of 1973–74 | Federal Reserve History.”

⁴⁵ “President Carter’s Energy Proposals: A Perspective,” n.d.

antiwar and Civil Right Movements were in full swing. Then, a second major oil crisis occurred in 1978-1979 due to production interruptions and uncertainty in the Middle East during Iran's Islamic Revolution. According to Federal Reserve History, oil prices more than doubled in the U.S. between April 1979 and April 1980, once again wreaking havoc on the U.S. economy.⁴⁶

A further consequence of Iran's revolution was the U.S.-Iranian Hostage Crisis, which lasted from February 14, 1979, until President Reagan's inauguration on January 20, 1981. These combined factors encouraged public and political awareness that oil extractive industries might not be worth the diplomatic, economic, and environmental costs. A possible divestment from these industries would have presented an existential crisis for Koch Industries.

The above-mentioned events of the 1970s heralded bad things coming for the Koch's, while in Southern California, Reagan's star was rising.⁴⁷ By 1975, he had just finished his two terms as the governor of California and was positioning himself for a run at the presidency. After almost a decade of increasing government intrusion on business practices, Nixon's political demise, and Carter's belt-tightening and foreign policy failures, Reagan represented a return to American nationalistic pride and exceptionalism. These are the conditions that set the stage for the right's own revolution: a nationwide shift toward neoliberal conservatism. The obvious place to start was on college campuses, where mobilization had previously been so successful in enacting change. A concentrated, gradually increasing effort on the American right by actors like the Kochs, John M. Olin, and others to transform the academy through a talent pipeline was already underway.

⁴⁶ "Oil Shock of 1978–79 | Federal Reserve History," accessed April 4, 2024, <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/oil-shock-of-1978-79>.

⁴⁷ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

Koch Brothers: Family History

In 1925, Fred Koch joined an engineering firm with a former classmate that would go on to be called Winkler-Koch Engineering Company. In the early years of their work, the two developed an oil refining technique that maximized gasoline yield in the refining process.⁴⁸ This innovation proved extremely lucrative, and in 1940 Fred went on to found what would become one of the world's most profitable private companies in history: Koch Industries.⁴⁹ According to a 2023 report by Forbes, Koch Industries is the second largest private company, by revenue, in the U.S.⁵⁰ Fred's son, Charles Koch, has been chairman and CEO of the family company since the late 1960s. Charles' brother David Koch, who passed away in 2019, ran Koch Industries alongside Charles until 2018.⁵¹ The Kochs have long been advocates of libertarian and conservative political beliefs. By investing in universities, academic programs, and student groups, they aim to promote their values and worldview, which emphasize individual liberties, limited government, and Milton Friedman's free market neoliberal economic theory.⁵²

As a previous member of the right-wing extremist group, the John Birch Society, C. Koch was able to use the group's successes (and failures) as a blueprint for his own agenda.⁵³ The John Birch Society (JBS) is a right-wing political advocacy group that was founded in 1958 and inspired by the American anti-communist ideal. Fred Koch was one of the founding members.

⁴⁸ Brian Doherty, *Radicals For Capitalism* (Public Affairs, 2007), 406.

⁴⁹ Originally the company was called Wood River Oil & Refining out of Illinois, but after purchasing the Rock Island refinery in Oklahoma, Fred combined the companies and referred to it as Rock Island Oil & Refining. The company's name was not changed to Koch Industries until the death of Fred's father in 1967.

(“Charles Koch & Family,” Forbes, accessed November 19, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/charles-koch/>.)

⁵⁰ “Charles Koch & Family.”

⁵¹ “David Koch,” Forbes, accessed November 19, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/profile/david-koch/>.

⁵² “privatization of the public sphere, deregulation of the corporate sector, and the lowering of income and corporate taxes, paid for with cuts to public spending.” (Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*, First Simon&Schuster trade paperback edition (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2015), 72–73.)

⁵³ Jane Mayer, “The Secrets of Charles Koch's Political Ascent,” POLITICO Magazine, January 18, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/01/charles-koch-political-ascent-jane-mayer-213541>.

The JBS also came to be known for its main founder, Robert Welch's, "reliance on conspiracy theories for political mobilization."⁵⁴ C. Koch was critical of this behavior and parted ways with the JBS shortly after.

In 1976, the Center for Libertarian Studies, which C. Koch donated \$65,000 to at its inception, held its inaugural Social Change Conference in New York.⁵⁵ There, C. Koch presented a paper where he acknowledged the John Birch Society's 90,000 members and \$7 billion budget as admirable, but suggested the Center for Libertarian Studies diverge in strategy. He said, "A major portion of a movement's efforts needs to be directed toward attracting youth since this is the only group that is largely open to a radically different social philosophy."⁵⁶ The Koch network's strategy would go on to utilize college students for the next several decades.

The Koch brothers have donated significant amounts of money to universities to fund research in areas aligned with their interests, such as economics, political science, and public policy. This support enables academic institutions to conduct studies that may further their ideological goals. C. Koch, in particular, has been a proponent of free market principles. Through funding academic programs that teach and research free market economics, he can help shape future generations of leaders and thinkers who will advocate for policies aligned with his beliefs.

Charles Koch, with the assistance of his "ideological lieutenant,"⁵⁷ George Pearson, began utilizing Koch money to influence education with libertarian ideals. In the 1970s and 1980s, C. Koch funded several centers of Austrian economics at notable universities, including NYU and Rutgers. The Center for Study of Market Processes has since been relocated from

⁵⁴ Ralph Wilson and Isaac Kamola, *Free Speech And Koch Money* (Pluto Press, 2021), 17.

⁵⁵ "Stealth 2003 Excerpt.Pdf," accessed November 8, 2023, <https://ia800705.us.archive.org/3/items/Stealth2003Excerpt/Stealth%202003%20Excerpt.pdf>.

⁵⁶ "Stealth 2003 Excerpt.Pdf."

⁵⁷ Doherty, *Radicals For Capitalism*, 408.

Rutgers to George Mason University (GMU) and is now referred to as the Mercatus Center. Since its inception, the Koch brothers and their affiliated organizations have built strategic partnerships with key individuals and departments at GMU. These partnerships have facilitated ongoing collaboration, funding opportunities, and joint initiatives between the university and the Koch-funded Mercatus Center.⁵⁸

Koch Intent & Campus Funding

Charles Koch quickly realized he could affect more change by combining the financial force of big business, various foundations, and society's elite to finance his network, than by personal investment alone. C. Koch holds secret donor meetings twice a year, inviting elites in a variety of fields including right-wing media personalities, politicians, and activists requiring a "minimum pledge of \$100,000."⁵⁹ Recordings leaked from a Koch donor summit in 2014 caught officials bragging about their stifling success with youth recruitment and how it would influence policy and federal government in the future.⁶⁰ Additional recordings from the summit revealed a plan that "'students that graduate out of these higher education programs also populate the state-based think tanks and the national think tanks' as well as the 'major staffing for the state chapters' of their 'grassroots' organizations."⁶¹

According to a 2014 recording obtained by the Center for Public Integrity from the Koch brother's annual mega-donor conference, the vice president of the Charles Koch Foundation (CKF), Kevin Gentry, addressed their initiatives' pointed interest in college students. He stated,

⁵⁸ Doherty, 408.

⁵⁹ Wilson and Kamola, *Free Speech And Koch Money*, 13.

⁶⁰ Wilson and Kamola, 29.

⁶¹ Wilson and Kamola, 29.

“The [Koch] network is fully integrated, so it’s not just work at the universities with the students, but it’s also building state-based capabilities and election capabilities and integrating this talent pipeline.”⁶² It was also reported Gentry asserted that political success “begins with reaching young minds in college lecture halls, thereby preparing bright, libertarian-leaning students to one day occupy the halls of political power.”⁶³

An article released by The Atlantic in 2015 stated that a Center for Public Integrity analysis of C. Koch’s 2013 IRS filings shows he spent “\$19.3 million across 210 college campuses in 46 states and the District of Columbia”⁶⁴ through two different private charitable foundations he funds. This indicates a notable increase in spending since the previous year of \$6.6 million, a spread to five additional states, and 47 additional campuses.⁶⁵ Of the nearly \$20 million spent in 2013, the C. Koch Foundation gave \$14.4 million, nearly 75 percent of the total annual spending, to George Mason University.⁶⁶ Alternatively, “Between 1998 and 2019, GMU received \$246,955,443 from Koch family foundations, the Bradley Foundation, DonorsTrust, and Donors Capital Fund.”⁶⁷ DonorsTrust and its affiliate, Donors Capital Fund, are “the twin donor-advised funds used by the Koch network.”⁶⁸ The Bradley Foundation pioneered the field of modern conservative philanthropy.⁶⁹ All three are major players in the conservative movement.

⁶² Dave Levinthal, “Spreading the Free-Market Gospel,” *The Atlantic* (blog), October 30, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/10/spreading-the-free-market-gospel/413239/>.

⁶³ Levinthal.

⁶⁴ Levinthal.

⁶⁵ Levinthal.

⁶⁶ Dave Levinthal, “Koch Brothers’ Higher-Ed Investments Advance Political Goals,” Center for Public Integrity, October 30, 2015, <http://publicintegrity.org/politics/koch-brothers-higher-ed-investments-advance-political-goals/>.

⁶⁷ Wilson and Kamola, *Free Speech And Koch Money*, 118.

⁶⁸ Wilson and Kamola, 165–67.

⁶⁹ Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right*, First Edition (New York: Doubleday, 2016), 113.

Why is GMU the recipient of the largest sum of donations? It seems to be due to a combination of factors including location, ideological alignment, existing connections, and strategic opportunities. GMU has been historically receptive to free market and libertarian ideas. The Mercatus Center acted as the institution's initial connection with C. Koch. GMU has a longstanding reputation for academic programs in economics, law, and public policy in the conservative libertarian vein that has proved so appealing to the Kochs. As a public research institution, GMU presents plenty of opportunities for them to influence academic programs. Their investment has positioned the Kochs with the ability to leverage their financial support to shape the university's direction and impact the broader discourse on economic and policy issues. In exerting their power and influence in educational institutions, they have the ability to skew research agendas and curriculums in ways that prioritize their interests over scholarly integrity, which is where the real problem lies.

Geography could also play a role in GMU's appeal for Koch investment. Fairfax, Virginia, where the campus is located, is close to Washington, D.C., meaning it is positioned well for policy research and engagement. The geographic proximity could provide a platform for influencing policy makers and shaping public discourse. All of these factors likely influenced the Koch brothers' decision to prioritize their philanthropic efforts on George Mason University as a means to advance their agenda in higher education and public policy. The Mercatus Center is

acting as a talent pipeline directly to the levers of government.⁷⁰ They have graduates at the Cato Institute, ALEC, and international organizations including the IMF and World Bank.⁷¹

However, GMU is not the only recipient of these endowments. The stipulations that come along with Koch money are what make their contributions unique. In 2005, Brian Doherty, Senior Editor at Reason Magazine, interviewed David Koch where he disclosed, “If we’re going to give a lot of money, we’ll make darn sure they spend it in a way that goes along with our intent. And if they make a wrong turn and start doing things we don’t agree with, we withdraw funding. We do exert that kind of control.”⁷² This could be a signaling of the Koch’s intent to affect change by using their financial influence with a mind toward their specific goals. This influence at a cost was seen across many campuses.

In 2007, the CKF attempted to foster relations with Florida State University’s Economics Department. In exchange for “\$7 million,”⁷³ CKF requested partial control over faculty employment within the department, courses that supported C. Koch’s libertarian philosophy of deregulatory economics, and an additional three-year commitment from FSU chairman of the economics department, Bruce Benson.⁷⁴ Benson is a self-proclaimed “libertarian anarchist”⁷⁵ who asserts that all governmental functions can and are better executed through the private

⁷⁰ Their alumni from 2009 through 2023 include those whose initial posts were in governmental positions like: David Bieler, Senior Analyst in the Government Accountability Office; Jaime Narbon, economist at the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Andrew Baxter, economist at the IRS; and KellyJune Stout, Performance Auditor for the Office of the Inspector General U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

(“Featured Alumni | Mercatus Center,” accessed April 25, 2024, <https://www.mercatus.org/featured-alumni>.)

⁷¹ “100 Notable Alumni of George Mason University [Sorted List],” EduRank.org - Discover university rankings by location, August 11, 2021, <https://edurank.org/uni/george-mason-university/alumni/>.

⁷² Doherty, *Radicals For Capitalism*, 409.

⁷³ Dave Levinthal, “Inside the Koch Brothers’ Campus Crusade,” Center for Public Integrity, March 27, 2014, <http://publicintegrity.org/politics/inside-the-koch-brothers-campus-crusade/>.

⁷⁴ Dave Levinthal, “Koch Foundation Proposal to College: Teach Our Curriculum, Get Millions,” Center for Public Integrity, September 12, 2014, <http://publicintegrity.org/politics/koch-foundation-proposal-to-college-teach-our-curriculum-get-millions/>.

⁷⁵ “Dr Bruce L. Benson,” May 26, 2014,

<http://web.archive.org/web/20140526034656/http://mailer.fsu.edu/~bbenson/>.

sector.⁷⁶ According to the Koch Foundation's proposal, published by the Center for Public Integrity, Benson's commitment would represent \$105,000 of the total proposed donation.⁷⁷

In 2011, controversy arose at FSU regarding the nature of the relationship between the FSU and CKF. This sparked a reevaluation and ultimate drafting of a new deal that was signed in 2013. According to Jerry Funt, an economics and philosophy major scheduled to graduate that year, the new deal reflects the same problematic characteristics of the previous agreement. The changes appear to be nominal, especially regarding the hiring process for professors in the economics department. Under the new agreement, the Kochs would no longer be directly involved in the hiring process, however they reserved the right to revoke funding at any time. Moving forward, "standard Koch Foundation contracts...include severance clauses which allow funding to be cut off with as little as 30 days notice."⁷⁸ One wrong move, and an institution had 30 days to attempt to repair the relationship with their financiers, or risk losing funding mid-semester. Funt and his classmates were very concerned that any financial influence by Koch at all would jeopardize the academic integrity of the department.⁷⁹

Email correspondence between representatives from CKF and the College of Charleston titled, "2010-11 Grant Reporting Requirements"⁸⁰ clearly points out the strings attached to a grant given to the college by the Foundation. The email requests data containing "names and permanent email addresses (preferably not ending in '.edu')" indicating the foundation intended

⁷⁶ "Dr Bruce L. Benson."

⁷⁷ "KochCostsBenefits - DocumentCloud," accessed November 17, 2023, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/1292464-kochcostsbenefits.html>.

⁷⁸ Wilson and Kamola, *Free Speech And Koch Money*, 118.

⁷⁹ Greg Allen, "Koch Foundation Criticized Again For Influencing Florida State," *NPR*, May 23, 2014, sec. National, <https://www.npr.org/2014/05/23/315080575/koch-foundation-criticized-again-for-influencing-florida-state>.

⁸⁰ Center For Public Integrity, "Collegeofcharleston1," accessed November 19, 2023, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2488626-collegeofcharleston1>.

to maintain contact with students beyond their education at the college. The email gives deadlines for information submission according to the “reporting requirements associated with [their] grant.”⁸¹ Additionally, photographs of students and student events were requested, stating they would be helpful when presenting to potential donors. Contact information was requested from any activities with a roster of students in that program. Their intentions for communication were fairly vague, to tell students about opportunities through CKF and the Institute for Humane Studies. It was, however, made clear that the quality of the submitted report would dictate the future of financial relations between the two parties. Also included in these documents is strict instruction to consult CKF before engaging with the media about their relationship. Similar demands were made of FSU regarding their financial relationship.⁸²

The Koch’s are not alone when it comes to offering large endowments to universities. Other wealthy investors such as Gordon and Betty Moore of Intel have donated large amounts of money to CalTech, for example, without constraint. When interviewed, Gordon stated they would “rather turn the job of deciding where to use resources over to Caltech than try to dictate it from outside.”⁸³ Donations of this nature show monetary support for the furthering of education without an agenda. According to CalTech’s president Thomas F. Rosenbaum, the endowment will offer freedom to graduate students to pursue fellowships that further their areas of interest - wherever that may lead them.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Center For Public Integrity.

⁸² “2013MOU FULLY SIGNED - DocumentCloud,” accessed December 10, 2023, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2483173-2013mou-fully-signed.html>.

⁸³ “\$100 Million Gift from Gordon and Betty Moore Will Bolster Graduate Fellowships,” California Institute of Technology, July 27, 2015, <https://www.caltech.edu/about/news/100-million-gift-gordon-and-betty-moore-will-bolster-graduate-fellowships-47392>.

⁸⁴ “\$100 Million Gift from Gordon and Betty Moore Will Bolster Graduate Fellowships.”

Just this year, a \$1 billion dollar donation was made to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx by a woman named Dr. Ruth Gottesman, widow of a Wall Street financier who left behind his fortune. Dr. Gottesman is a former professor at the school, and the only instructions she gave were that “the gift be used to cover tuition for all students going forward.”⁸⁵ It is her aim that the donation “would enable new doctors to begin their careers without medical school debt”⁸⁶ and “hoped it would broaden the student body to include people who could not otherwise afford...medical school.” Endowments of this nature, without constraints, are inherently more ethical and transparent than those of the Koch Donor Network. The Koch Donor Network is a phrase used by Ralph Wilson and Isaac Kamola in their book “Free Speech and Koch Money Manufacturing a Campus Culture War” to describe a vast group of libertarian and conservative donors who make up the financial power behind the Koch agenda.⁸⁷ Koch donations in higher education come with strings attached, which can compromise academic freedom and objectivity.

At the Koch funded 1976 inaugural Social Change Conference, the director of public affairs for Koch Industries, George Pearson, argued the need to distinguish between academic donations and endowments. Pearson pointed out that donors have very limited control over their endowments, whereas “creating stand-alone programs”⁸⁸ would be a far more effective method

⁸⁵ Joseph Goldstein, “\$1 Billion Donation Will Provide Free Tuition at a Bronx Medical School,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2024, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/26/nyregion/albert-einstein-college-medicine-bronx-donation.html>.

⁸⁶ Goldstein.

⁸⁷ Wilson and Kamola, *Free Speech And Koch Money*, 13.

⁸⁸ Wilson and Kamola, 30.

for direct access and influence. By funding academic programs directly, donors can “influence the hiring decisions of the department”⁸⁹ and continue “leveraging...state funds.”⁹⁰

The Paper Trail

Now we turn to a paper trail of Koch funding in order to show how this broader political transformative goal was pursued on the ground. The EDvantage, an offshoot of the Institute for Humane Studies (IHS) located at GMU, identified as a free online curriculum hub for college professors and high school teachers. The website offered supplemental educational content in the form of videos, articles, and podcasts on topics like economics, history, and philosophy with a decidedly anti-government and pro-free market tone.⁹¹ Some of their videos were produced by another project of IHS called Learn Liberty, which boasts itself as a “resource for exploring the ideas of a free society.”⁹² One video discusses the alleged dysfunction of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) claiming its existence interferes with an individuals’ ability to pursue common law proceedings.⁹³ Another video argues sweatshops are crucial to the welfare of workers in third-world countries, claiming the alternatives are “scavenging, begging or even prostitution.”⁹⁴ These two examples present evidence of how these Koch funded organizations reframe educational issues in service of personal or political gain.

⁸⁹ Wilson and Kamola, 116.

⁹⁰ Wilson and Kamola, 116.

⁹¹ Chris Young, “Koch-Funded Think Tank Offers Schools Course in Libertarianism,” Center for Public Integrity, August 26, 2014, <http://publicintegrity.org/politics/koch-funded-think-tank-offers-schools-course-in-libertarianism/>.

⁹² “Home | Learn Liberty,” accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.learnliberty.org/>.

⁹³ *How Dirty Laws Trash The Environment* | Learn Liberty, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fxhk4FuU0YQ>.

⁹⁴ *The Unbelievable Truth about Sweatshops*, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2sW2wt3nLU>.

Climate denial has been a notoriously contentious political issue between environmental scientists and large corporations who are responsible for the majority of the greenhouse gas emissions in our country. There is an obvious conflict of interest between big oil (an industry the Koch family are at the center of) and the EPA. An attempt to sway public opinion by slandering the EPA leaves big oil in a position to derive personal gain from a change in public opinion, regardless of the scientific facts that are presented from professionals. Similarly, any claim in favor of sweatshops are indicative of a deeper issue at play.

The Charles Koch Foundation donated \$12.4 million to The EDvantage between 2008 and 2012.⁹⁵ Between 1998 and 2019 the Institute for Humane Studies has received \$52,150,543 from the Koch Donor Network, split up between Koch family foundations, the Bradley Foundation, DonorsTrust, and Donors Capital Fund.⁹⁶ This paper trail indicates financial participation and influence from the top down at GMU, IHS, and the Mercatus Center as well as directly funding the Edvantage itself. Funding this sort of academic adjacent content, or student groups, etc., are all outside the scope of money spent on the institutions themselves. This shows an investment, not only in the institution, but the educational content the institution relies on as well.

In a 2006 interview, C. Koch articulated the stakes of this project where he argued that libertarians “need an integrated strategy, vertically and horizontally integrated, to bring about social change, from idea creation to policy development to education to grassroots organizations to lobbying to litigation to political action.”⁹⁷ Here he identifies the process to produce change, from individual influence all the way to policy or legislation. This points to a larger issue that

⁹⁵ Young, “Koch-Funded Think Tank Offers Schools Course in Libertarianism.”

⁹⁶ Wilson and Kamola, *Free Speech And Koch Money*, 165–67.

⁹⁷ Doherty, *Radicals For Capitalism*, 410.

investigative journalist Jane Mayer analyzes in her book, “Dark Money The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right.” Mayer showed how higher education became a site for cultivating human resources to advance conservative policy.

Mayer further looked into the shift in the Koch agenda after David Koch’s run for vice president on the libertarian ticket in 1980. Koch ran against Reagan because he believed Reagan was too liberal, and in doing so, could force him further to the right.⁹⁸ After that loss, which was both costly and yielded practically no support, the brothers abandoned the conventional method of attaining political influence. Instead, they began funding an assembly line for political change, which Mayer calls a “counter intelligentsia.”⁹⁹ Their strategy was to fund think tanks, intellectuals, and pressure groups, and to coerce people in office to adopt their positions.¹⁰⁰ This was the turning point for the Koch brothers, whereby they abandoned their strictly libertarian views for a more outspoken and clear political agenda.

Koch’s Plan: The Theory of Social Change

The intellectual grounds of C. Koch’s project could be found in the works of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek: the most widely known proponents of Austrian economic theory. Austrian economic theory is the root of neoliberal ideology and libertarian ethos. Von Mises and Hayek believed in individualism, “private property rights and unfettered individual economic freedom while disparaging government regulation and public goods.”¹⁰¹ Richard Fink, founder of the Mercatus Center, was also an adherent of Austrian economic theory. He received his

⁹⁸ Mayer, *Dark Money*, 57.

⁹⁹ Jane Mayer | *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&si=9IV7tfOISHGayXPJ&v=L8XcLHdejHQ&feature=youtu.be>.

¹⁰⁰ Jane Mayer | *Dark Money*.

¹⁰¹ Wilson and Kamola, *Free Speech And Koch Money*, 18.

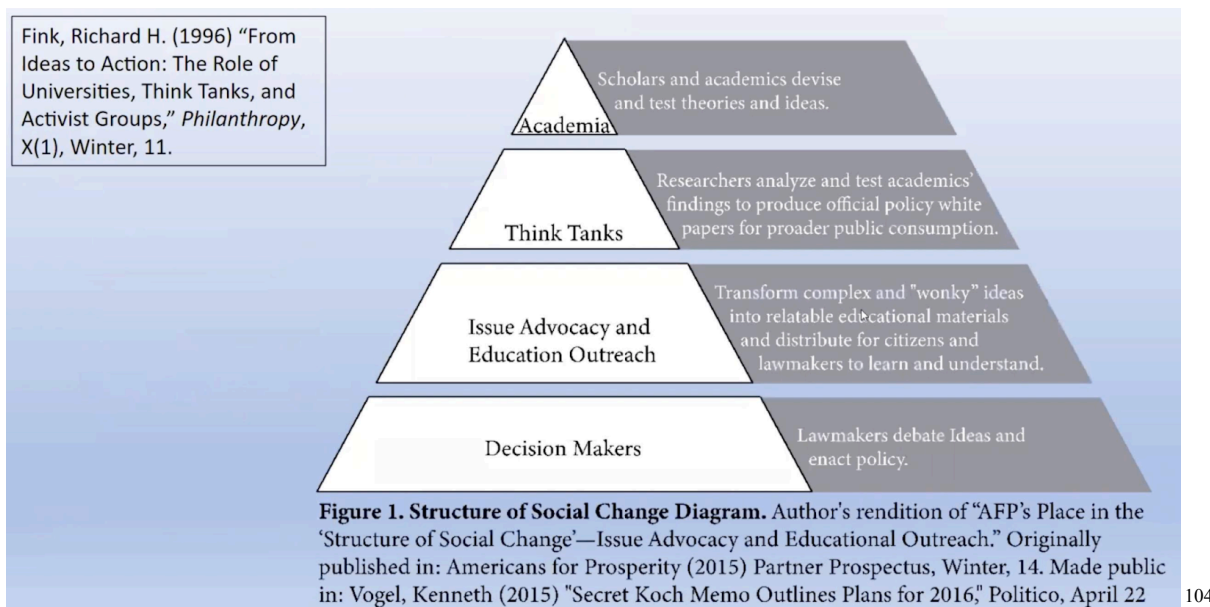
undergraduate degree from Rutgers University, and his PHD from NYU. He was an economics professor at GMU and went on to become vice-president of Koch Industries and president of the CKF.¹⁰²

By the time Fink published his paper “The Structure of Social Change,” (building on C. Koch's own paper from 1976) he and C. Koch had already been working together for nearly two decades. Together they had developed a theoretical model that laid out a three-phase takeover of American politics. According to Mayer, Fink described this project at length in the following terms:

The first phase required an ‘investment’ in intellectuals whose ideas would serve as the ‘raw products.’ The second required an investment in think tanks that would turn the ideas into marketable policies. And the third phase required the subsidization of ‘citizens’ groups that would, along with ‘special interests,’ pressure elected officials to implement the policies. It was in essence a libertarian production line, waiting only to be bought, assembled, and switched on.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Wilson and Kamola, 21.

¹⁰³ Mayer, *Dark Money*, 142.



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While president of CKF, "Fink retooled Hayek's model of industrial production to explain how organizations can produce not commodities but social transformation."¹⁰⁵ Fink's Structure of Social Change diagram,¹⁰⁶ shown above, demonstrates the three-tiered integrated strategy that he and C. Koch believed would produce policies and legislation geared towards a more pro-business libertarian society. In this model, raw ideas are generated by academics (top) and fed to think tanks who refine them to produce policy papers for public consumption (tier two). These policy papers are then turned over to political advocacy groups (tier three) who design educational materials. They then use these materials to engage in public relations campaigns attempting to create the impression of mass citizen support while lobbying legislators and decision makers who pass them into law.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Free Speech And Koch Money: Webinar and Q & A with Authors Ralph Wilson and Isaac Kamola*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfQPP0qvDr8>.

¹⁰⁵ Wilson and Kamola, *Free Speech And Koch Money*, 21.

¹⁰⁶ Wilson and Kamola, 22.

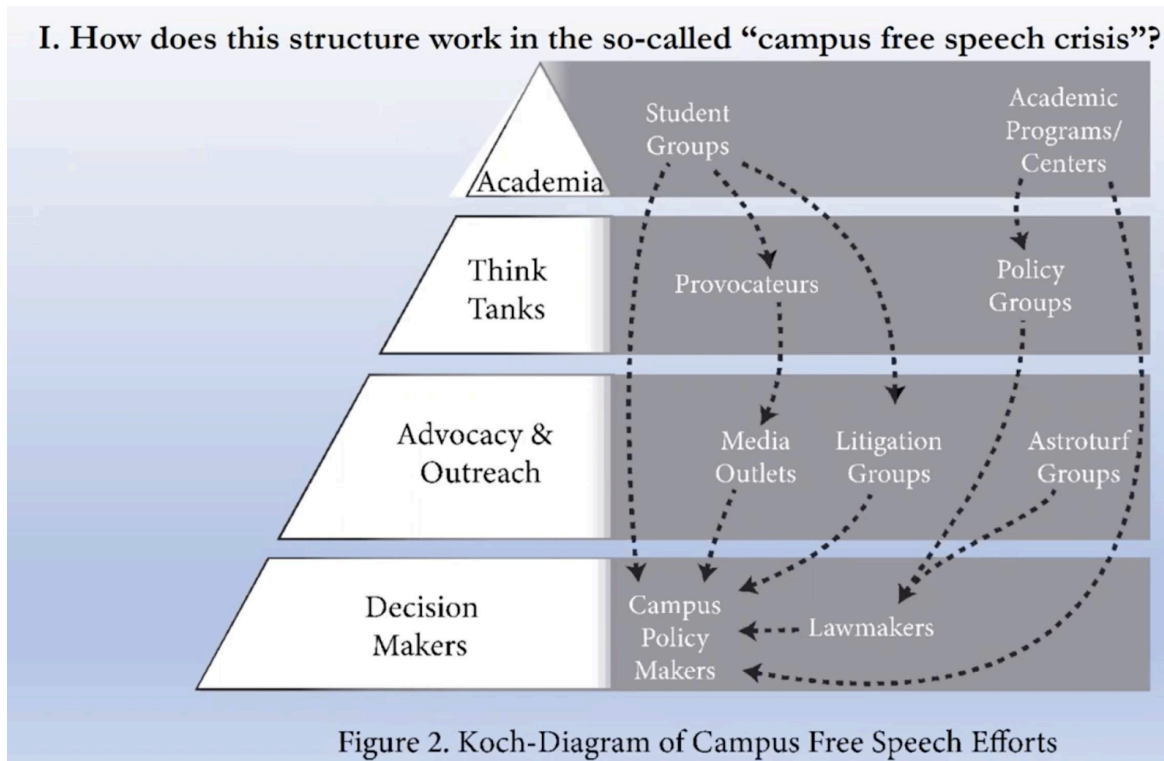
¹⁰⁷ *Free Speech And Koch Money*.

According to Wilson and Kamola, the campus free speech crisis is part of a politically orchestrated attempt to transform higher education in support of the agenda of the corporate donors.¹⁰⁸ The donor pipeline funnels money to campus student groups. In return, student groups recruit and indoctrinate student talent for the talent pipeline and organize political action on campus. Some groups, like Young Americans for Liberty, engage in provocative demonstrations or invite speaker provocateurs to their campus in the hopes of creating a highly publicized campus crisis. Student groups like Campus Reform and The College Fix produce campus outrage stories that are fed to corporate right-wing media who are often funded by the same donor networks that fund the student groups. Campus Reform grooms and recruits student talent for placement with Fox News, Breitbart, and others who then produce “campus outrage”¹⁰⁹ stories for their networks. These stories are designed to create the impression of mass citizen support for institutional, state, or federal policy changes drafted by the Koch donors. The publicized crisis is also designed to legitimize lawsuits against colleges and public institutions who, they claim, limit their speech. These lawsuits, intended to change policy at the institutional, state, and even the federal level, are brought by another set of political action campus groups funded by the Koch Donor Network. They include FIRE (Foundation for Individual Rights in Education) and Speech First. Others, like Turning Point USA create professor watchlists and pour money and energy into student government races.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ *Free Speech And Koch Money.*

¹⁰⁹ *Free Speech And Koch Money.*

¹¹⁰ *Free Speech And Koch Money.*



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Summation Chapter Two

The academy’s relationship to student activism in the age of donor revolt and its deleterious effects on free speech will evolve to become central to the story of the neoliberal conservative coalition that I have traced in this chapter. Conservative money, in conjunction with a distinct theory of social change, has co-opted and redirected student free speech to suit a pro-corporate ideological agenda. The consequences of this project will grow to be felt ever more intensely as a new generation of college students begin to radicalize around the cause of Free Palestine. I now turn to this story.

¹¹¹ *Free Speech And Koch Money.*

Chapter Three

Present Day: American Campuses, Israel, & Palestine

In the previous chapters, I have argued the neoliberal conservative coalition attempted to harness and redirect the student energy of the 1960s, toward their own agenda. Then, I examined how staunch libertarians realized they had a shared interest with business-friendly factions of the Republican party. By coming together under the Reagan administration, the Koch brothers were able to assemble their Koch Donor Network and sponsor implementation of their production process geared toward co-opting the academy. In this chapter, I examine the ongoing revival of conservative interest in disciplining college campuses in response to rising student activism to protest Israeli occupation of Palestine and the war on Gaza during the contemporary post-9/11 era keeping in mind the election of America's first Black president and the Citizens United SCOTUS decision.¹¹² In this context, I address in particular the developments of the post-Citizens United era including the prosecution of student activism, anti-BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) legislation, and a continuation of financial control over university and college campuses under threat of donor divestment.

The latest attack on higher education focused on student activism for Palestine has in fact been brewing for over a decade. I am going to address the current controversy with the understanding that tensions have snowballed over a longer period of time than is made apparent by corporate media platforms. I situate the recent controversies surrounding Students for Justice

¹¹² The January 2010 Citizens United SCOTUS 5-4 decision reversed 100 years of campaign finance restrictions thereby allowing corporations, wealthy donors and special interest groups to raise and spend unlimited amounts of money on elections. The net effect when combined with the 2007 Wisconsin Right to Life, and 2010 SpeechNow.org decisions has been to allow unlimited funds from undisclosed sources to drastically diminish the voice of the majority of U.S. citizens in their political process. (179, "Citizens United Explained | Brennan Center for Justice," April 21, 2022, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/citizens-united-explained>.)

in Palestine (SJP)¹¹³, a pro-Palestinian college student activism organization with chapters all over the country, and the BDS movement¹¹⁴ against Israeli occupation of Palestinian land within this broader historical context in this chapter. As I argue below, their movements have clashed with the conservative agenda that has long been contributing to disruptions in the educational institutions that heavily rely on donations.

Today, the Koch Donor Network has a much lower media profile. Yet, evidence of their influence may be found in various institutional responses to grassroots student activism. The notion that academic discourse can be manipulated through funding echoes the research laid out in the previous chapter. This is evidenced by the recent college and university responses to students and faculty speaking out about the war in Palestine.

The Quiet Crusade: Attacks on Campus Free Speech

As tensions escalated domestically following Hamas' October 7th attack on Israel, students at Barnard College began posting political messages on their dormitory doors with statements critical of Israel such as, "Zionism is terrorism."¹¹⁵ The college administration responded by banning any posts aside from "official items placed by the college."¹¹⁶ Vice President and Dean, Leslie Grinage, sent an email to the students addressing the issue stating, "while many decorations and fixtures on doors serve as a means of helpful communication among peers, we are also aware that some may have the unintended effect of isolating those who

¹¹³ SJP is a student organization that supports Palestinians' right to self determination.

¹¹⁴ The BDS movement was started in 2005 by Palestinians. It is a non-violent movement that promotes boycotts, divestments, and economic sanctions against Israel.

¹¹⁵ Sharon Otterman, "College Dorm Decorations Become a Front in the Campus Free Speech Wars," *The New York Times*, March 1, 2024, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/01/nyregion/campus-free-speech-barnard-columbia.html>.

¹¹⁶ Otterman.

have different views and beliefs.”¹¹⁷ Additionally, restrictions have been issued by both Barnard and Columbia regarding times, locations, and volume levels appropriate for protests to occur.¹¹⁸

In November 2023, the department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Barnard released a statement in solidarity with Palestine, offering a selection of academic works supporting their decision. It was removed from the school’s website two days later without warning.¹¹⁹ When confronted, administrators said the statement and corresponding links were “impermissible political speech.”¹²⁰ The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) responded with a letter to Barnard’s president stating the school’s political speech policies are, in effect, “‘prior restraint,’ the most restrictive kind of censorship because it curtails speech before it is uttered.”¹²¹ Also noted in the letter, the NYCLU stated, “If private campuses decide that they can stifle political discourse they don’t approve of, then schools are no longer a haven for debate, discussion, and learning.”¹²² The faculty have objected strongly to free speech limitations.¹²³ Barnard has a reputation as a progressive school that values student activism based on its history confronting gender equality, pacifism, and antiwar voices. Over 1,000 Barnard and Columbia

¹¹⁷ Otterman.

¹¹⁸ “New Policy for Safe Campus Demonstrations,” Barnard College, accessed April 12, 2024, <https://barnard.edu/news/new-policy-safe-campus-demonstrations>.

¹¹⁹ Sharon Otterman, “Barnard College’s Restrictions on Political Speech Prompt Outcry,” *The New York Times*, January 24, 2024, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/24/nyregion/barnard-college-free-speech-restrictions-israel-hamas-war.html>.

¹²⁰ “About,” *In This Moment* (blog), November 13, 2023, <https://in-this-moment.org/about-2/>.

¹²¹ “NYCLU Warns Barnard College New Faculty Speech Policy Violates Academic Freedom | New York Civil Liberties Union | ACLU of New York,” December 21, 2023, <https://www.nyclu.org/en/press-releases/nyclu-warns-barnard-college-new-faculty-speech-policy-violates-academic-freedom>.

¹²² “NYCLU Warns Barnard College New Faculty Speech Policy Violates Academic Freedom | New York Civil Liberties Union | ACLU of New York.”

¹²³ Otterman, “Barnard College’s Restrictions on Political Speech Prompt Outcry.”

faculty and students have signed and submitted a letter saying their “academic freedom [is] under attack”¹²⁴ following these incidents.

This comes in conjunction with similar responses from schools across the country who are facing legal advances targeting pro-Palestinian speech that is deemed by some as antisemitic. In late April of 2023, for example, a group of Jewish students filed a federal lawsuit against both Barnard and Columbia claiming the schools have tolerated antisemitic and anti-Zionist behavior that has facilitated “a severely hostile environment for its Jewish and Israeli students.”¹²⁵

Congressional investigations of Barnard and Columbia University requested they provide documents showing the school’s response to alleged antisemitic incidents on campus. Like Barnard and Columbia, MIT, Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) faced congressional investigations and subsequent congressional hearings. At the hearings, the presidents of these three institutions were heavily scrutinized by conservative members of congress when asked about their schools’ student conduct policy regarding hate speech.

Republican Representative Stefanik¹²⁶ accused the presidents of qualifying the acceptability of a call for the genocide of Jews. The presidents’ responses were all very similar, saying if speech becomes conduct, it can be considered harassment, which is actionable. Liz Magill, of UPenn, later commented on her testimony saying, “in that moment, I was focused on our university’s

¹²⁴ “Letter: Academic Freedom Under Attack at Barnard College,” accessed April 12, 2024, <https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vTbJMGDcdKoMGI4PDtvkhkUz9YVnwhAetGNweexSR2rpy7hFSWIrO8Z0GdaLii43TUyehN8xssGkrlt/pub>.

¹²⁵ “Columbia-Complaint.Pdf,” accessed April 12, 2024, <https://www.kasowitz.com/media/fr2peeuw/columbia-complaint.pdf>.

¹²⁶ Republican Representative Elise Stefanik is an extreme conservative representing New York's 21st Congressional District. She is a strong supporter of Donald Trump and defended his actions regarding the January 6 insurrection. (Margaret Sullivan, “Elise Stefanik Wants to Be Trump’s Running Mate. That’s Unfortunate,” *The Guardian*, January 11, 2024, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/11/elise-stefanik-wants-to-be-trumps-running-mate-thats-unfortunate>.)

longstanding policies aligned with the U.S. Constitution, which say that speech alone is not punishable.”¹²⁷ Note, the question did not ask if the university is tolerant or supportive of antisemitism or genocide. The questions posed to the presidents by Representative Stefanik asked whether specific speech violated their codes of conduct and were actionable. An answer stating that it depended in which way and to whom the information was communicated is an accurate one. Attempts to misrepresent or skew these witnesses' testimonies as being sympathetic to a terrorist organization echoes the red-baiting¹²⁸ of dissenters persecuted for speaking against the war in Vietnam or for the Vietnamese people caught in the crossfire. Following this hearing, the presidents of UPenn, Liz Magill, and Harvard, Dr. Claudine Gay, were both forced to resign from their positions.¹²⁹

On Wednesday, April 17, 2024, the president of Columbia University, Minouche Shafik, went before congress regarding the accusations of antisemitism on campus. Shafik was questioned for four hours by the Republican-led House Committee on Education and the Workforce. She testified to having taken serious action including removing faculty members, suspending both students and two student groups: SJP and Jewish Voice for Peace.¹³⁰

In the days leading up to this congressional hearing, Jewish faculty at Barnard and Columbia submitted an open letter to Shafik titled, “Jewish Faculty Reject the Weaponization of

¹²⁷Stephanie Saul and Anemona Hartocollis, “College Presidents Under Fire After Dodging Questions About Antisemitism,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 2023, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/06/us/harvard-mit-penn-presidents-antisemitism.html>.

¹²⁸ Red-baiting was a vicious form of anti-communist rhetoric used during the cold war to discredit, castigate, blacklist, and even criminalize US citizens. It was employed against labor organizers, Civil Rights activists, and antiwar protestors.

(“Red-Baiting,” *SNCC Digital Gateway* (blog), accessed April 28, 2024, <https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/international-connections/red-baiting/>.)

¹²⁹ Otterman, “College Dorm Decorations Become a Front in the Campus Free Speech Wars.”

¹³⁰ “The New McCarthyism: Free Speech Under Attack at Columbia U. & Capitol Hill,” *Democracy Now!*, accessed April 19, 2024, https://www.democracynow.org/2024/4/18/columbia_university_israel_palestine.

Antisemitism.” The letter expressed their concerns about the committee’s hearings late last year against UPenn, Harvard, and MIT and the “false narratives that frame these proceedings to entrap witnesses.”¹³¹ Their letter stated:

To argue that taking a stand against Israel’s war on Gaza is antisemitic is to pervert the meaning of the term. Labeling pro-Palestinian expression as anti-Jewish hate speech requires a dangerous and false conflation of Zionism with Jewishness, of political ideology with identity.¹³²

It is a dangerous conflation to condemn criticism of the Israeli state with antisemitism. This constructs a global dynamic where no checks can be made on Israel’s actions without pushback in the name of racial and religious discrimination. While these two issues are frequently paired together, they are not synonymous, and using them interchangeably is an arguable danger to global democracy.

On April 18, 2024, Columbia President Shafik reported a peaceful student protest encampment to the NYPD as a “clear and present danger.”¹³³ Students and faculty held a news conference where Palestinian-American Columbia graduate student, Layla Saliba, pointed to the nearby riot officers saying, “they’re treating us like a national security threat simply for holding a press conference.”¹³⁴ Reportedly, 108 people were arrested at the protest, making it the biggest arrest on campus in 56 years.

¹³¹ Debbie Becher, “Jewish Faculty Reject the Weaponization of Antisemitism,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, accessed April 19, 2024, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/opinion/2024/04/10/jewish-faculty-reject-the-weaponization-of-antisemitism/>.

¹³²Becher.

¹³³ “Over 100 Arrested at Columbia After Univ. President Orders NYPD to Clear Pro-Palestine Student Protest,” *Democracy Now!*, 100, accessed April 27, 2024, <https://www.democracynow.org/2024/4/19/columbia>.

¹³⁴ “Democracy Now!,” *Democracy Now!*, accessed April 19, 2024, <https://www.democracynow.org/>.

The similarities to that earlier moment of student activism examined in the first chapter of this project were clear. In 1968, the NYPD arrested more than 700 students who were protesting Columbia's ties to the war in Vietnam and the expansion of the campus to Harlem. The students were victorious in their endeavor: the expansion of the campus to a lower income Black neighborhood was stopped, the school cut ties with a Pentagon institute doing research for the Vietnam War and gained amnesty for the demonstrators.¹³⁵ This intersection between antiracist and antiwar movements, as discussed in the first chapter's analysis of the 1960s, speaks to events with implications for both domestic and foreign policy being played out on campuses today. It is also noteworthy that the red-baiting of antiwar and Civil Rights activists/movements in earlier decades has been replaced by narratives painting the students of today as supporters of, or misled by, Hamas and other terrorist organizations. In the post-Cold War, post-9/11 era these are the existential threats used to villainize and criminalize dissent.

In an April 18, 2024, Democracy Now interview, Barnard Professor Rebecca Jordan Young said the committee prosecuting antisemitism on campuses has less to do with the safety and wellbeing of Jewish students and is part of a larger attack being waged on liberal education.¹³⁶ Professor Young's colleague, Professor Nara Milanich, built off this statement suggesting that antisemitism on campus is being used like a "Trojan horse" to further politicize and restrict inquiry, teaching, and undermine academic freedom, which in the academy, could be applied to other topics like, "voting rights... or climate change."¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Vimal Patel, "A Protest 56 Years Ago Became an Important Part of Columbia's Culture.," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2024, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/18/nyregion/columbia-protest-1968-vietnam.html>.

¹³⁶ "The New McCarthyism."

¹³⁷ "The New McCarthyism."

Donor Revolt

Concern is mounting within the student body as well. A third-year student at Barnard, Anagha Ram, said it seemed as if the school cared “more about financial support and donations and money and all that than their students.”¹³⁸ This is a legitimate concern that parallels David Koch’s admission regarding the “kind of control”¹³⁹ they do exert, as noted in the previous chapter.

Donor revolt is the financial divestment by major funders of the academy due to dissatisfaction with the school’s direction or leadership. Conservative donors are threatening to revoke funding as a consequence of the free speech issue on campuses surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the case of both Barnard and UPenn there is pressure from their respective school administrations, donors, and alumni to ban pro-Palestinian activism. The financial and potential legal implications for the institutions have led administrations to suppress free speech. This reveals the ways in which philanthropic power can be weaponized, something that has become normalized by the neoliberal conservative coalition.

UPenn and Harvard are perfect examples of the dangers of looming donor revolt.¹⁴⁰ Mark Rowan, co-founder of Apollo Global Management, has donated roughly \$50 million to UPenn making him their most generous donor. Following Liz Magill’s refusal to cancel a Palestinian literary conference in defense of the school’s free speech principles, Rowan “called for donors to cut their gifts to \$1 as an unmistakable symbolic protest — and demanded the resignation of Ms.

¹³⁸Otterman, “College Dorm Decorations Become a Front in the Campus Free Speech Wars.”

¹³⁹ “If we’re going to give a lot of money, we’ll make darn sure they spend it in a way that goes along with our intent. And if they make a wrong turn and start doing things we don’t agree with, we withdraw funding. We do exert that kind of control.” (Doherty, *Radicals For Capitalism*, 409.)

¹⁴⁰ David W. Chen and Michael Corkery, “A New Playbook for College Donors: Power Politics,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 2023, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/13/us/universities-donors-penn-harvard.html>.

Magill.”¹⁴¹ Following Rowan’s demand, several wealthy benefactors and alumni joined him in withdrawing their financial support from the University.

A 2022 study by the Center for Advancement & Support of Education showed that private donations to U.S. colleges and universities had reached \$59.5 billion in 2022.¹⁴² The threat of defunding is a weapon itself when targeted against free speech in academia. An obvious, but unlikely, option for educational institutions to survive donor revolt, while maintaining their autonomy, would be to lessen their reliance on megadonors. This suggestion is mostly unattainable under the present model of funding for our privatized education system. Strings-attached philanthropy brings ethical challenges. There is no reliable way to prevent abrupt divestment without compromising an institution's ethics. Universities are being forced to choose between economic survival and shutting down academic discourse on campus to please their donors.

Corporate Lobbying and Legislation

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) describes themselves as "America’s largest nonpartisan, voluntary membership organization of state legislators dedicated to the principles of limited government, free markets and federalism."¹⁴³ According to their critics they “connect corporations, lobbyists, and think tanks...to draft pro-corporate legislation that is then handed over to a network of receptive state lawmakers...to implement across the

¹⁴¹ Stephanie Saul, “Who Decides Penn’s Future: Donors or the University?,” *The New York Times*, October 26, 2023, sec. U.S.,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/26/us/university-of-pennsylvania-donors-israel-hamas.html>.

¹⁴² “Homepage | CASE,” March 1, 2024, <https://www.case.org/>.

¹⁴³ “About ALEC,” American Legislative Exchange Council, accessed April 28, 2024, <https://alec.org/about/>.

country.”¹⁴⁴ In essence, they are a corporate lobbying platform. ALEC hosts an annual event where business-friendly legislation is drafted that can be used interchangeably in any of the fifty United States. ALEC is funded by corporations and industry groups such as Koch Industries, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, the American Petroleum Institute, and DonorsTrust.¹⁴⁵

From the 1960s to today, there exists a tremendous archive tracing the radicalism of university campuses, some of which I have previously covered. The 2021 documentary, “Boycott,” examines the ways in which the neoliberal conservative coalition has used blanket legislation to crush said radicalism, reaching beyond the borders of academia. The anti-BDS legislation requires any entity accepting state funding not to speak out against Israel. These bills have been passed in 37 states, mostly unbeknownst to the people who live there, and in some cases even the Assembly people who have voted for it.¹⁴⁶

In many of these 37 anti-BDS-law states, the free speech rights of citizens, investors, and businesses are pitted against a states’ fiduciary responsibility to its citizens, to the pension, and other funds under their control. These arguments are being expanded to include Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) laws that interfere with citizens and businesses’ free speech rights to BDS fossil fuel companies. According to the Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance, as of March 9, 2023, at least 7 U.S. states have enacted laws or adopted policies prohibiting public entities from considering ESG factors. Thirteen more have pending anti-ESG

¹⁴⁴ Wilson and Kamola, *Free Speech And Koch Money*, 106.

¹⁴⁵ Karen Olsson, “Ghostwriting the Law,” *Mother Jones* (blog), accessed April 19, 2024, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2002/09/ghostwriting-law/>.

¹⁴⁶ “Just Vision,” accessed April 17, 2024, <https://justvision.org/boycott/watch>.

legislation or have announced an intent to enact such laws.¹⁴⁷ These ESG laws are also being promoted by ALEC, whose template for these state laws may be found on their website.¹⁴⁸

In 2021, Texas used the state's functioning anti-BDS legislation as a template to keep businesses who rely on state contracts from boycotting fossil fuels¹⁴⁹ and firearms.¹⁵⁰ This template legislation can just as easily be adapted for prohibiting the support of Greenpeace, Black Lives Matter, or any other social or civil rights movement¹⁵¹ whose mission risks interfering with the corporate agenda. These sentiments might be summed up by this statement from Lara Friedman, President of the Foundation for Middle East Peace: “You may not care about Israel-Palestine, but you should care if it’s being used as a hook to legislate in your state and at the federal level against free speech.”¹⁵² ALEC supported Citizens United which codified corporate money as speech protected under the US Constitution, while they continue to oppose boycott as free speech for individuals and businesses participating in BDS and ESG social movements. The Civil Rights, Anti-Vietnam War, Stop Apartheid in South Africa, Organized Labor, and Environmental movements have all relied on the rights curtailed by anti-BDS and anti-ESG legislation being enacted today.

¹⁴⁷ Carolyn Houston, Emily B. Holland, and Leah Malone, “ESG Battlegrounds: How the States Are Shaping the Regulatory Landscape in the U.S.,” *The Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance* (blog), March 11, 2023, <https://corpgov.law.harvard.edu/2023/03/11/esg-battlegrounds-how-the-states-are-shaping-the-regulatory-landscape-in-the-u-s/>.

¹⁴⁸ “Resolution Opposing Securities and Exchange Commission and White House Mandates and Other Forms of Coercion on Climate-Related Financial Matters,” American Legislative Exchange Council, accessed April 27, 2024, <https://alec.org/model-policy/resolution-opposing-securities-and-exchange-commission-and-white-house-mandates-on-climate-related-financial-matters/>.

¹⁴⁹ “Texas Is Standing up to Wall Street’s Anti-Energy Agenda,” Texas Public Policy Foundation, accessed April 27, 2024, <https://www.texaspolicy.com/texas-is-standing-up-to-wall-streets-anti-energy-agenda/>.

¹⁵⁰ Jeremy Kitchen, “House Passes Bill to Stop Corporate Gun Boycotts,” Texas Scorecard, May 13, 2021, <https://texasscorecard.com/state/house-passes-bill-to-stop-corporate-gun-boycotts/>.

¹⁵¹ Alice Speri, “Anti-BDS Laws Could Upend the Constitutional Right to Engage in Boycott,” *The Intercept*, November 29, 2021, <https://theintercept.com/2021/11/29/boycott-film-bds-israel-palestine/>.

¹⁵² “Just Vision.”

The South African Question

In late December 2023, South Africa brought a case against Israel, accusing them of genocidal intent in their war against Hamas. South Africa filed these charges on the grounds that Israel's actions beginning in October 2023, are in violation of the Genocide Convention – an international treaty both countries are signatories of.¹⁵³ Based on South Africa's own history of apartheid, this accusation speaks volumes to the severity and implications of this war. Similarly, an analogy could be drawn between South African apartheid, the Israeli war on Palestinian self-determination and the United States' settler colonial origins and history.

Vince Warren is Executive Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, a non-profit legal and educational organization, that has been investigating the role of ALEC in passing anti-BDS laws across the country. In an interview for the documentary, "Boycott," Warren makes connections between the BDS movement and the boycott movement for divestment from apartheid South Africa. He discusses the dangers of anti-BDS legislation:

If we look back at that period of time, some of the most active places where that was happening were on college campuses, including my own. And the idea there was that it was up to the students to put pressure on the administration of the school to not have investments in companies that were essentially furthering and enabling the horrible racist apartheid regime in South Africa...Looking back on that period from a number of years, most people would say it was not only the right thing to do, it was one of the high points

¹⁵³ Rob Schmitz, "3 Things to Know about the Genocide Case against Israel in The Hague," *NPR*, January 12, 2024, sec. Middle East crisis – explained, <https://www.npr.org/2024/01/12/1224363666/israel-hamas-war-palestinians-south-africa-genocide-case-court>.

of American engagement in the question of justice...and so what becomes really deeply important is for people to be able to say I am going to be active in the political discussion by withdrawing my time and my labor and my money until things change. And to have proliferation bills that are criminalizing or penalizing that is really really troubling and problematic.¹⁵⁴

When we step back from today's controversy and look at the evolution of our democracy, we see that dissent is the mechanism that has kept us on the correct side of history. Dissent has helped stop war; codify People of Color as 5/5 of a person; and is the cornerstone of the fight against the destruction of our biosphere. The free speech that protects dissent is cultivated in classrooms on college campuses where the difficult and uncomfortable topics are free to be discussed without restriction or threat of sanction. "The remedy for speech with which one disagrees is more speech, not enforced silence."¹⁵⁵

Summation Chapter Three

In this chapter, I examined the current political climate, student protests, and their financial and legal ramifications. I unveiled the implications of individual and corporate money being weaponized against academic integrity and freedom of speech, unveiling the role played by corporate lobbying groups such as ALEC, as creators of pro-corporate, business-friendly template legislation. As a result of nearly three-quarters of the U.S. signing anti-BDS legislation into law, ESG laws are following in rapid succession.¹⁵⁶ The parallels between the earlier

¹⁵⁴ "Just Vision."

¹⁵⁵ "The Palestine Exception to Free Speech: A Movement Under Attack in the US," Center for Constitutional Rights, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://ccrjustice.org/node/5281>.

¹⁵⁶ Houston, Holland, and Malone, "ESG Battlegrounds."

red-baiting tactics of the 20th century and today's discrediting of any critique of Israel are clear in the face of current postures of Representative Stefanik and the university presidents. I argue on this basis that this conservative donor network and the system of privatized education seeks to restructure the academy from an organic free-thinking body of dissent to one threatened with defunding, in legal jeopardy for impinging or allowing free speech, and whose administrators, academic groups, and students face dismissal or sanction. The attacks on campus free speech today is, in this sense, hauntingly reminiscent of the 1960s. As I have shown in this project, it was the donor network created by the neoliberal conservative coalition that led to the stamping out of cookie cutter legislation as mapped out in chapter three. Through this, we can see that those businesses which have already benefited from the legalization of corporate personhood, have put forward laws which do not allow citizens or social groups to exercise their organic free speech right to dissent. This creates a positive feedback loop, amplifying the dominant control of private institutions over our public political discourse. All of this appears to be evidence that the Koch plan has at least been partially successful.

Conclusion

In this senior project, I have traced the origins of activist dissent and effective student movements of the 1960s; how those movements inspired a conservative backlash on higher education; and showed how this curtails free speech on college campuses today. The memory and impact of the 1960s shows the historical success of the organic grassroots movements emerging out of college campuses with the participation of students and professors in raising awareness and initiating political change.

I then analyzed how this rebellious era helped inspire an ideologically opposite consolidation on the right, with the post-1980s neoliberal conservative coalition similarly turning to college campuses as venues to influence and initiate socio-political change. A central concern of this coalition has been the suppression of academic freedom through the deliberate corporate ideological agenda, as shown in the Structure of Social Change Diagram analyzed in the second chapter. We see that they intended to control the outcome, based on statements from David Koch, about withdrawing funding from an institution if they “make a wrong turn,”¹⁵⁷ also referenced in chapter two. The merging of libertarian, neoliberal, Christian, conservative, and other right-wing forces came together during the 1980s, creating a unique opportunity for the Koch Donor Network to assemble. These conditions, coupled with the unrestricted dark money in politics granted through the Citizens United & related court decisions between 2007 and 2011, set the stage for what followed: template legislation from ALEC, weaponization of donor money, suppression of free speech on campus, and the forced resignations of Harvard and UPenn’s Presidents.

¹⁵⁷ Doherty, *Radicals For Capitalism*, 409.

I conclude the analysis by turning to the contemporary repercussions of this process. I focus especially on the continuing pro-Palestine student mobilizations across elite campuses, which once again, brought the influence of donor money on campus politics to the foreground. As I analyze how the pro-Palestinian student movement has come to be attacked by the conservative movement of today, and threatened with funding cuts, I also address the role played by post-9/11 era conservative causes, including Islamophobia, in shaping this moment.

I prove the ways in which the neoliberal conservative coalition, having identified college and university campuses as the centers of intellectual development, utilized their resources to seed the academy with professors, programs, and their own constructed corporate-friendly ideological narratives; created a “counter intelligentsia”¹⁵⁸ in order to lend credibility to their radical right-wing agenda; created a student body that provokes conflict and crises in order to create a context to limit speech critical of their corporate-friendly ideology; and through their talent pipeline seed the think tanks, policy advocate institutions, government policy-making bodies, and policy-enforcement agencies with people indoctrinated and dedicated to reshaping government, public opinion, and the law to reflect the desires of their corporate-friendly neoliberal conservative coalition. By molding the available nascent energy on campus to implement their own agenda by means of their donor network and talent pipeline, they have succeeded in suppressing free speech on campuses and manipulating the law to undermine the boycott and even criticism of products, corporations, policies, political actors, and nations they ally with or profit from.

¹⁵⁸ *Jane Mayer | Dark Money.*

In a way we are having another Vietnam moment in the U.S. with students and college campuses pushing the establishment and the government to give an account of its foreign policy, domestic militarization, and militarization of its police. It is as if America is once again being haunted by its liberal education, as conservatives have consistently claimed. The racial and red-baiting fearmongering used against antiwar and civil rights activists in the 1960s mirrors the racism and islamophobia aimed at the dissenters of today. They are variations of the same narrative/feedback loop, rooted in racism, othering, American exceptionalism and paternalism, in service of the neocolonial objectives that serve the few at the expense of the many. As the wars continue outside in the wider world, campus dissenters cry out, conservatives cry foul, and so continues the war on liberal education at home.

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