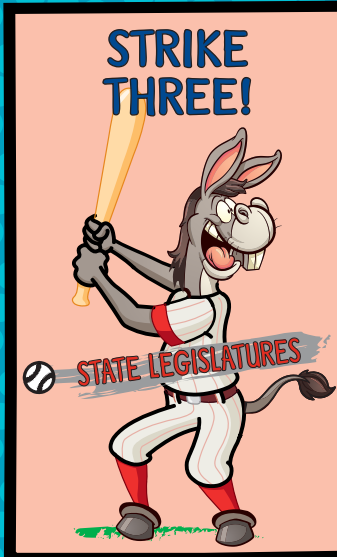




THE LEFT'S HOLLOW VICTORY

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**INFLUENCE
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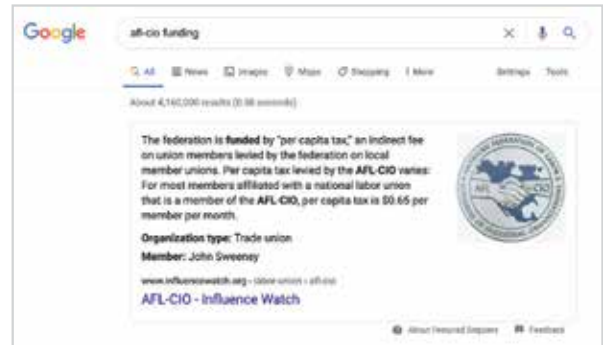
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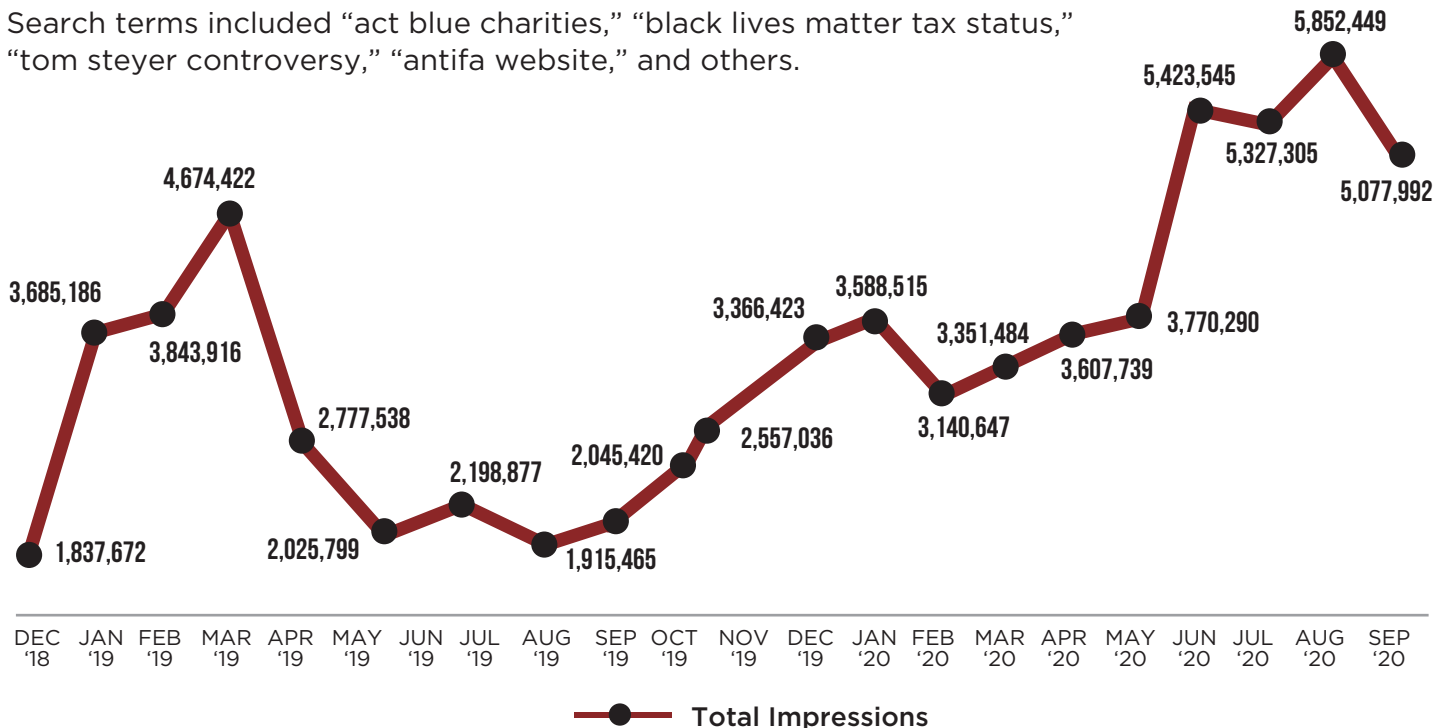
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CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER
AMERICA'S INVESTIGATIVE THINK TANK

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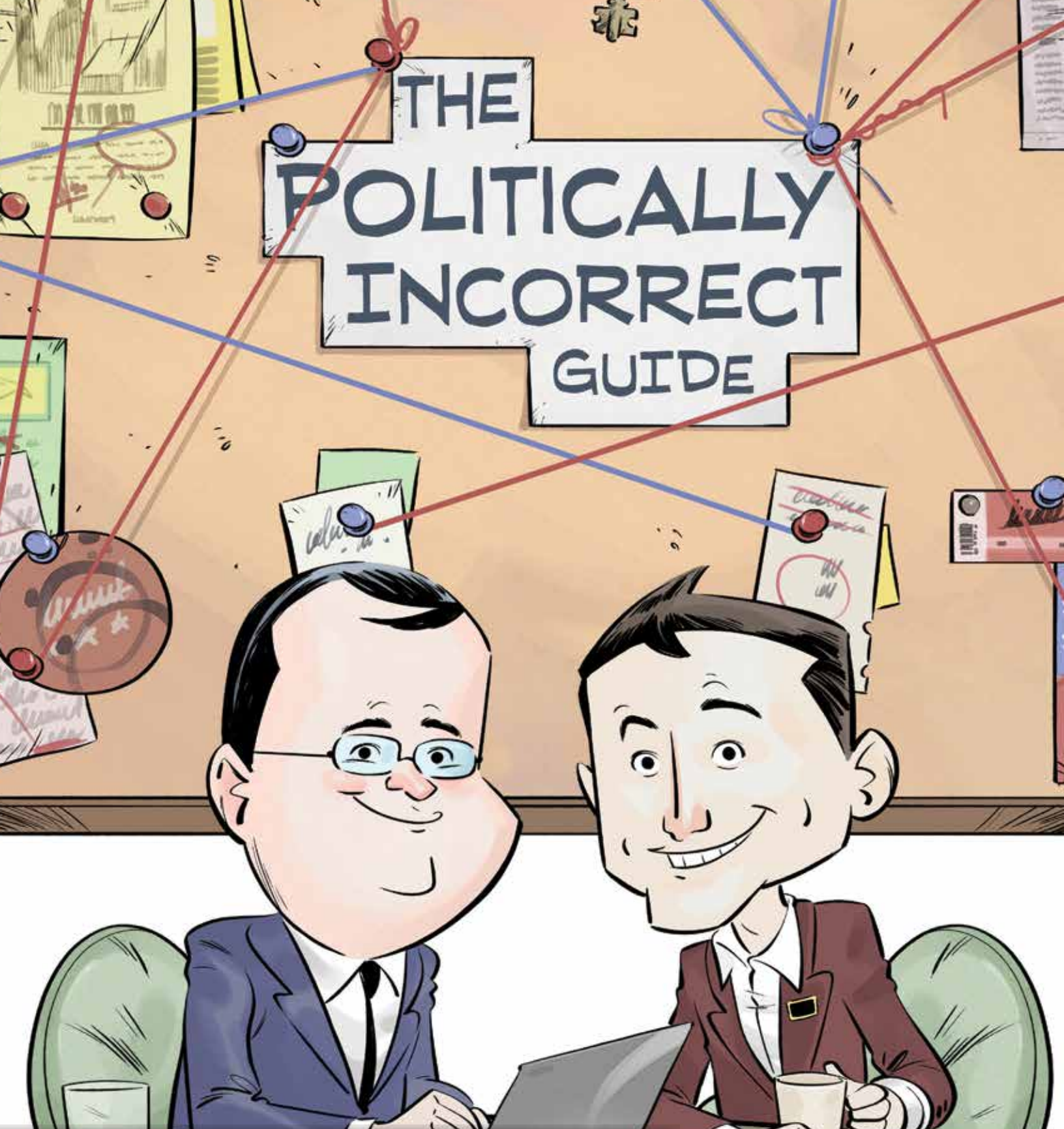
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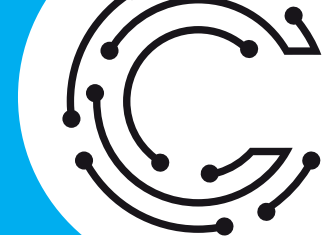
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WHAT IS MARK ZUCKERBERG'S ELECTION MONEY DOING IN GEORGIA?

By Scott Walter

The biggest question the Georgia legislature should ask is whether a California billionaire should be allowed to waltz into the Peach State and finance aspects of their elections.

Imagine if a billionaire of conservative or libertarian leanings—Charles Koch, say—had given \$350 million to a nonprofit run by Republican operatives who previously worked at a “dark money” outfit tied to Karl Rove where they trained digital activists and campaign workers.

Then imagine this nonprofit group re-granted the millions of dollars to local election officials to “help” them carry out the 2020 election—buying drop boxes for ballots, hiring temporary staff, conducting “voter education,” and the like.

Finally, imagine that in 2020, a state that usually voted for the other party in presidential elections narrowly flipped to the donor’s preferred party, and counties receiving “help” were disproportionately ones that helped the Republican win the state, with many counties shifting dramatically from their historical patterns in a red-ward direction.

Even supposing there were perfectly ethical and legal reasons for all this, because of the appearance of election influence from private parties with deep pockets, it would be front-page news. The *New York Times* would be outraged a nonprofit gave the appearance of acting in a partisan basis in an electoral process. Elected officials in the disfavored party would be loudly objecting, threatening lawsuits, demanding investigations of the election officials who accepted the funds, and insisting election laws be changed to prevent any such effort in the future.

As head of Capital Research Center, a watchdog on the use and abuse of nonprofits, I would sympathize with the angry politicians and happily critique the scheme publicly. But I know of no such effort by right-leaning donors or nonprofits.

I do know, however, of a scheme by left-leaning out-of-state donors Mark Zuckerberg and wife Priscilla Chan to give \$350 million to an allegedly “nonpartisan” nonprofit, the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL), which in turn re-granted the funds to thousands of governmental election officials around the country. CRC has begun state-by-



Credit: Anthony Quintana. License: <https://bit.ly/3skkRkO>.

In November, Capital Research Center documented a scheme by left-leaning out-of-state donors Mark Zuckerberg and wife Priscilla Chan to give \$350 million to an allegedly “nonpartisan” nonprofit, the Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL), which in turn re-granted the funds to thousands of governmental election officials around the country.

state studies of how these funds were used, beginning with Georgia (Pennsylvania is next). As I testified Friday to the Georgia state Senate, the Georgia data are startling.

We can’t specify all funding CTCL gave to Georgia counties, because the Center isn’t disclosing that information to the Associated Press or anyone else, even though they’re required to reveal it in their next IRS filing (which conveniently won’t appear until a year from now). But using local government records and news accounts, we’ve uncovered many of the largest grants, mostly given to the largest urban areas, and CTCL has disclosed which counties received grants, though not the amounts. Notably, CTCL funded less than one-third of all counties.

Scott Walter is president of Capital Research Center.

We've correlated the grants with the official vote totals for the counties involved. Here are some notable discoveries we've found:

- Nine out of ten of CTCL's largest known grants went to counties Joe Biden won.
- Of the ten counties with the greatest shifts to the Democratic presidential candidate (comparing 2016 to 2020 votes), nine received CTCL grants.
- These nine grantees averaged a 13.7 percent shift toward the Democrat. Two, Cobb and Gwinnett, were among the four counties that delivered Biden the most votes.
- Although CTCL funded more counties won by Donald Trump than by Biden in raw numbers, it only funded 21 percent of all Trump counties versus 55 percent of Biden counties. So a Biden county was more than two-and-a-half times more likely to receive funding.
- CTCL funded all four counties that provided Biden 100,000 or more votes.
- And CTCL funded those four counties lavishly. Per capita, they received between \$4.38 and \$10.47 for every man, woman, and child.
- By contrast, so far as we currently know, only one county won by Trump was funded above one dollar per capita (Cherokee), and that county's Democratic vote leapt up 70 percent, compared to a 24 percent rise in its Republican vote. Trump counties like Carroll, Camden, and Lumpkin received about a half-dollar or less.
- Biden carried 33 counties that delivered him 10,000 or more votes. CTCL funded 70 percent of them. By contrast, Trump carried 46 counties that gave him 10,000 or more votes, but CTCL funded only 20 percent of them. So the most vote-rich counties for Biden were three-and-a-half times more likely to be funded than Trump's most vote-rich counties.
- Totaling votes in all 44 counties CTCL funded, the Republican presidential vote rose 207,000 over the last election. The Democratic presidential vote jumped by 530,000, or more than two-and-a-half times the Republican rise.



The New York Times would be outraged if a conservative nonprofit gave the appearance of acting in a partisan basis in an electoral process.

Do these numbers sound nonpartisan? If not, shouldn't the authorities in Georgia and other battleground states, and authorities in Washington, start investigating what happened, and whether CTCL, which is legally forbidden to act as a partisan in elections, overstepped the law? There may be perfectly ethical explanations for all this that involve zero electoral influence by outside parties, but public trust in elections requires avoiding even the appearance of conflicts of interest.

I gave the Georgia senators some obvious questions to ask: How did these relationships between CTCL and counties in Georgia begin? Did CTCL reach out first? What preconditions did the Center put on its funds? Did the counties fulfill their budgetary and other obligations under Georgia state law when using these funds? Who designed voter "education" materials and advertisements?

Here's an especially obvious question: Was any money spent on training to deter vote fraud, such as how to match signatures?

The biggest question the Georgia legislature should ask is whether a California billionaire should be allowed to waltz into the Peach State and finance aspects of their elections? Do they want billionaires in the future to steer election resources so unequally and inequitably?

That's still a live question for Georgia and her voters, because CTCL is already offering more grants to county offices for the U.S. Senate runoff elections in January. As I told the Peach State senators, some states forbid this kind of funding. Georgia can too. ■

This article first appeared in the Federalist on December 7, 2020.

Read previous articles from the Commentary series online at <https://capitalresearch.org/category/commentary/>.



THE BILLIONAIRE DRAGGING HOLLYWOOD (EVEN FURTHER) LEFT

By Ken Braun

Summary: *Almost a century ago the film industry was still in its infancy and Russian communist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin predicted he could win the world for Marxism if he could just control the movies. Imagine what might happen if a billionaire, made rich from the fruits of capitalism itself, decided to deploy Lenin's business model to sell an anti-capitalist environmental agenda? There's no need to imagine: The reality is here in the form of the American film firm Participant, and the left-wing funding empire of its founder, Jeffrey Skoll.*

Crafting clever jokes about Hollywood's leftism has always been treacherous business because the truth is frequently more absurd than fiction.

For example, way back in 1936 the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League was founded with the honorable purported goal of encouraging President Franklin D. Roosevelt to fight against Adolph Hitler and fascism. It counted among its membership Edward G. Robinson, Henry Fonda, Jack Warner, Spencer Tracy, Lucille Ball, and many more of the American film industry's finest names. But in truth at least some of them had unwittingly joined a front group of the Communist Party USA, which was little more than a puppet of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

The organization's slavish devotion to Stalin was exposed on August 24, 1939, the day news broke of the signing of the Nazi-Soviet (Molotov-Ribbentrop) Pact. Literally the next day the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League rebranded itself the Hollywood League for Democratic Action. Within a week Hitler would invade Poland, leading to British and French declarations of war against Germany, but the league (which had swiftly lost many—but not all—of its movie star members) switched sides to preach *against* American involvement in the “anti-Nazi” war they had once been created to support. Just 22 months later Hitler betrayed Stalin by invading the Soviet Union, causing Hollywood's hypocritical communist left to make *yet another* moral U-turn, back to demanding American involvement.

With that in mind . . . Did you hear the joke about the billionaire who purposely built a left-wing film studio because he thought Hollywood wasn't lefty enough?



Credit: Skoll World Forum. License: <https://bit.ly/3nBYXsL>.

A 2013 profile on eBay's co-founder Jeffrey Skoll in The Guardian explained his mission as producing “blockbusters that feature political or social messages” and that “making movies is just part of Skoll's new mission, where he invests in . . . progressive causes ranging from social entrepreneurship to fighting climate change.

Once again, a preposterous punchline cannot be comic because the story is 100 percent true!

Participant Media

Shortly after earning his MBA from Stanford in 1995, Canadian-born Jeffrey Skoll teamed up with eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and became the first president of the online auction website. In 2001, Skoll left the company when he was worth an estimated \$2 billion (now \$5.5 billion, good for 115th place on the 2020 Forbes 400 list of richest Americans).

Ken Braun is CRC's senior investigative researcher and authors profiles for InfluenceWatch.org and the Capital Research magazine.

In 2004, Skoll founded his film company, Participant Media, since then simplified as merely Participant. A 2013 profile in *The Guardian* explained Skoll's mission as producing "blockbusters that feature political or social messages" and that "making movies is just part of Skoll's new mission, where he invests in . . . progressive causes ranging from social entrepreneurship to fighting climate change." Speaking of a forthcoming film, Skoll told *The Guardian* his objective was to "really galvanise world opinion."

By "galvanise," Skoll really meant "gin up a public panic around alarmist and exaggerated predictions of Doomsday." Participant has produced numerous films with this theme, but none so infamous as the first: Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006).

As Skoll tells the story, his eyes "welled up with tears" in 2004 when he moderated a panel discussion where Gore gave a slide show presentation warning of imminent climate catastrophe. Davis Guggenheim, who became the director of *An Inconvenient Truth*, quotes Skoll's instructions after seeing the slide show: "I'll give you the money right now. I'll write a check today. I want you to start tomorrow."

An Inconvenient Truth would go on to win the Oscar for "best feature documentary" at the February 2007 Academy Awards ceremony. The next year Gore won the Nobel Peace Prize. But reviews were harsher from those judging the film's factual accuracy rather than its political correctness.

Some Inconvenient Math

In October 2007, a British judge ruled *An Inconvenient Truth* had introduced "nine scientific errors" within a "context of alarmism and exaggeration." A local school official in Britain had become concerned about plans to show the film to students and sued to block the presentation. The judge allowed the screenings to go forward, but with the stipulation that competing and alternative views must be taught alongside the film's "one sided" and "apocalyptic vision."

An example of what the judge ruled to be a "distinctly alarmist" claim was the film's assertion that melting ice in

Antarctica and Greenland would result in a 20-foot sea level increase within the "near future." The film horrifically presented this outcome by showing computer-generated images of South Florida and Manhattan vanishing under the waves.

In truth, NASA's online "Vital Signs of the Planet" database shows sea level increases since January 1993 to be averaging *3.3 millimeters per year*—about one-eighth of an inch. Twenty feet is equivalent to 6,096 millimeters. So, at the current rate of sea level rise the 20-foot surge will be complete not in the "near future," but after *1,847 years*.

Humanity has shown it can accomplish a lot when given two millennia to play with.

To the extent they burned fuel at all, the primitive economies of 1,847 years ago ran mostly on wood and whatever else happened to light on fire. Today, if a climate crisis were deemed dire enough, modern economies could rather painlessly pay their way *within a couple of decades* to a transition to zero-carbon nuclear energy and plentiful low-carbon natural gas. The inclination of climate alarmists to shun these workable solutions in favor of ponderously playing around with subsidizing unreliable wind and solar energy naturally fuels a healthy skepticism about the real urgency of their concern.

Adaptation to (very) slowly rising seas is also quite doable. Rotterdam, one of Europe's largest, oldest, and most prosperous cities has been engineered to exist with most of it below sea level—significant parts 15 feet or more below.

So, don't start building an ark just yet: We have options.

The less-than-panicky truth about sea level increases clearly inspires us to make rational, long-term, yet very affordable changes to energy usage, carbon output, city planning, seawall construction, floodwater diversion, and more. *An Inconvenient Truth*, on the other hand, is designed to give the children of Miami nightmares about drowning, encourage irrational and hasty economic restrictions, and—apparently—make Jeffrey Skoll cry some more.

Hoo-ray for Hollywood!



Participant released An Inconvenient Truth in 2006 and An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power in 2017. And that's just a couple of boxcars from Gore's much longer Skoll gravy train that includes \$65 million in direct funding for Gore's nonprofit the Climate Reality Project.

While the film was of dubious value for climate awareness, it was quite valuable for Al Gore. His Nobel Prize alone—which he split with another recipient—was worth an estimated \$1.4 million.

Ten years later, in May 2016, Gore was conceding nothing about the alarmist holes in his plot:

I wish the film had over-estimated the seriousness of the crisis, but unfortunately it actually underestimated how serious it is. But on the positive side, solutions are now being developed so quickly that there is real cause for hope and optimism.

Gore had an ongoing interest in keeping that panic fog machine humming along. The following year (2017), Participant released *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power* . . . also starring Al Gore.

And that's just a couple of boxcars from Gore's much longer Skoll gravy train. The Capital Research Center's Influence-Watch profile of Skoll demonstrates 65 million more reasons why Gore might not want to discover less-than-catastrophic news about the climate:

In addition, the Climate Reality Project (formerly the Alliance for Climate Protection) has received at least \$65 million in direct funding from Skoll's three foundations during donor years 2007 through 2018. Founded and led by Gore, the Climate Reality Project promotes environmentalist approaches to reducing climate change and opposes the use of conventional energy sources including gasoline, natural gas and coal. According to the charitable record-keeping service FoundationSearch, this is almost half (48.2 percent) of total foundation donations given to the Climate Reality Project for those years.

Follow the (Dark) Money

The largesse larded on Gore is not the only example of lefty gifts shipped out through Skoll's funding empire, which includes the Skoll Foundation, the Skoll Fund, and the Skoll Global Threats Fund, a subsidiary of the Skoll Foundation. From their founding through 2017 the Skoll foundations collectively granted nearly \$500 million to all recipients.

The nonprofit recordkeeping service FoundationSearch shows a healthy majority of this went to some objectively good causes, such as a very prescient \$2.9 million invested in a public health organization seeking to improve the detection of infectious diseases. Similarly, in April 2020, the Skoll Foundation announced a special \$100 million donation from Skoll for COVID-19 pandemic relief efforts.



Credit: Collision Conf. License: <https://bit.ly/3usEHmu>.

By “galvanise,” Skoll really meant “gin up a public panic around alarmist and exaggerated predictions of Doomsday.” Skoll’s film company, Participant, has produced numerous films with this theme, but none so infamous as the first: Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006).

But even those good deeds could not be presented without politicized strings. Also in 2020, Participant hustled out *Totally Under Control*, a documentary film promoted as the “definitive account of the Trump administration’s incompetence, corruption and denial in the face of this global pandemic.”

Similarly, through 2017 at least \$129.4 million of the total given by the Skoll foundations (which includes that \$65 million shoveled to Gore’s Climate Reality Project) was sent to a variety of left-leaning advocacy organizations. Some prominent examples include \$5 million for the Environmental Defense Fund and \$400,000 given to Media Matters for America, which was founded by Clinton family lap/attack dog David Brock.

A big chunk of Skoll’s left-wing policy money was hard to track, such as the \$20 million in 2017 alone that FoundationSearch shows the Skoll Fund granted to the New Venture Fund. New Venture is a nonprofit tentacle of the for-profit Arabella Advisors, a financial clearinghouse and management firm for hundreds of left-wing advocacy organizations. Arabella’s empire took in revenue exceeding \$600 million in 2018. A typical example of New Venture’s work is Fix the Court, a Democratic Party–favoring advocacy organization used to oppose the confirmations of Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh to the U.S. Supreme Court. (See also *Big Money in Dark Shadows*, a comprehensive research report covering Arabella’s network.)

Sometimes referred to as a “dark money” arrangement, Arabella’s business practices often make it difficult if not impossible for an outside observer to track the money going in to the specific Arabella network program it is funding. For example, \$10 million of the \$20 million the Skoll Fund gave to New Venture in 2017 was identified opaquely as “General Nonprofit Support.” The other \$10 million was somewhat less cryptically earmarked as “Mission2020”—a reference to a New Venture program that generally funds left-leaning climate projects.

“Gasoline” for the Sierra Club

Sometimes when it is clear where the Skoll money went, the evidence confirms a radical agenda.

According to tax records, the Skoll Global Threats Fund has given at least \$565,000 to the Sierra Club Foundation since 2010. Despite its size (more than \$140 million total assets as of 2016) and efforts to cultivate a mainstream reputation, Sierra is a deceptively radical climate activist organization.

Legendary nature photographer Ansel Adams was a Sierra board member for 37 years and believed nuclear energy was “the only practical alternative that we have to destroying the environment with oil and coal.” This pro-nuclear opinion was once shared by others in the Sierra Club’s leadership, including Will Siri, a Sierra president during the late 1960s. But acceptance of nuclear energy ended in 1969, when an acrimonious leadership squabble lurches the Sierra Club in a radical anti-nuclear direction. (Adams gave up his board seat shortly thereafter in 1971.)

Today, the Sierra Club remains “unequivocally opposed to nuclear energy” and denounces it as “no solution to Climate Change,” a position to the radical left of many prominent climate policy advocates. Nuclear energy has been embraced as a zero-carbon solution by major mainstream climate policy organizations such as the Nature Conservancy (total assets more than \$6 billion), and former NASA scientist James Hansen.

Participant is also unequivocally supportive of Sierra’s radical message. Participant creates activist campaigns to support many of its films and partnered with the Sierra Club to promote *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*. In January



Credit: Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. License: <https://bit.ly/3ydrONT>.

Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, a controversial environmental group receiving both funding and promotion from Skoll’s empire, warmly embraces the pirate analogies, as shown by its ship RV Martin Sheen flying the Jolly Roger. The ship, ironically designated a research vessel, is named for the award-winning actor, activist, and Sea Shepherd supporter.

2020, Participant CEO David Linde explained how Participant’s campaign promoted Sierra’s left-wing energy policy:

The Sierra Club has been and is actively out there trying to convert. I think it’s 50 American cities . . . to renewable energy by the year 2030. So, the movie itself is about converting to renewable energy. And so, we were able to partner with them in providing the movie to the kinds of convenings and meetings that they’re holding around the country to effectively put a little bit of gasoline in their campaign.

Gasoline? What an interesting choice of words. Wanting to make the point about energy that is truly effective, even Skoll’s film company executive couldn’t bring himself to say “put some wind in their sails.”

And, speaking of sails . . .

Promoting the “Pirates”

Another radical ally of the Skoll empire is the violence-curious Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Sea Shepherd has received at least \$680,000 from Skoll’s network—with \$120,000 of that coming in as late as 2017, according to FoundationSearch. Skoll’s film company has also promoted Sea Shepherd.

Attacking Japanese whaling ships on the high seas is one of Sea Shepherd's extralegal weapons. (Japan is one of a few nations still conducting limited legal whale harvesting.) A 2013 ruling from a U.S. federal judge denounced Sea Shepherd's behavior as little better than piracy:

You don't need a peg leg or an eye patch. When you ram ships; hurl containers of acid; drag metal-reinforced ropes in the water to damage propellers and rudders; launch smoke bombs and flares with hooks; and point high-powered lasers at other ships, you are, without a doubt, a pirate, no matter how high-minded you believe your purpose to be.

A 2016 essay from the Center for International Maritime Security quoted Sea Shepherd founder Paul Watson boasting: "Since Sea Shepherd was established in 1977 we have rammed more ships, sunk more ships, boarded more ships and blockaded more harbours than most of the world's Navies."

Greenpeace, a radical left-wing environmental activist group that is peacefully opposed to Japanese whaling, issued a 2015 statement denouncing Sea Shepherd for "morally wrong" and violent tactics: "We believe that throwing butyric acid at the whalers, dropping cables to foul their props, and threatening to ram them in the freezing waters of the Antarctic constitutes violence because of the potential consequences."

Sea Shepherd warmly embraces the pirate analogies. A 2017 annual report, which thanks Jeffrey Skoll for his generosity, shows their stylized Jolly Roger pirate flag logo emblazoned on massive black boat sails, clothing, and other official items.

And Participant proudly embraces Sea Shepherd. The organization is heroically portrayed in *Watson*, a 2019 documentary produced by Participant with Skoll credited as the executive producer.

Useful Idiots for OPEC

For landlubbers, Participant released *Promised Land* in early 2013, a propaganda effort aimed at killing the U.S. natural gas boom while it was still in its infancy. The fictional drama was produced by and starred Matt Damon and John Krasinski. (Jeffrey Skoll is credited as an executive producer.)

In the years since the film's release the American energy boom has made the U.S. a dominant world energy producer for the first time in decades and the functional equivalent of energy independent for the first time in the lifetime of nearly everyone alive. Falling prices for abundant domestic natural gas also led electricity producers to switch away from using coal as their base fuel.

For each unit of energy, burning natural gas emits 50 percent less carbon than coal. Not coincidentally, the International Energy Agency reports total U.S. carbon emissions in 2019 were 5.4 percent lower than in 2013, despite a growing economy and population.

CC _____
Greenpeace, a radical left-wing environmental activist group, issued a statement denouncing Sea Shepherd for "morally wrong" and violent tactics.

To portray all this wonderfulness as something sinister, the *Promised Land* plot cooked up alarmist and fabricated concerns about the safety of hydraulic fracturing ("fracking"), the drilling technology that made the boom possible. The film portrays a fictional energy firm that hatches an elaborate "enemies are hidden everywhere" conspiracy to conceal the alleged fracking dangers from small town landowners.

But again, because this is Hollywood leftists trying *deliberately* to be leftists, there appears to have been a real-life conspiracy even more absurd and hypocritical than the on-screen fiction.

The Heritage Foundation's Daily Signal reported that *Promised Land* was partially financed by "Image Media Abu Dhabi, a subsidiary of Abu Dhabi Media." The report unpeeled the corporate onion layers and revealed Abu Dhabi Media to be a "wholly owned" enterprise of the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). At the time, the UAE ranked "seventh worldwide in proven natural gas reserves."

So, *Promised Land's* financiers had absolutely every motive on Earth to prevent the booming U.S. domestic energy industry from muscling in on their global oil and gas market share. Just as the top Hollywood names of the 1930s were duped into serving as stage props for Joseph Stalin, more than 75 years later Matt Damon and John Krasinski had stumbled into becoming useful idiots for OPEC.

The Real Joke Is on the Audience

Hiding highly relevant yet inconvenient facts are a feature of other Participant documentaries.

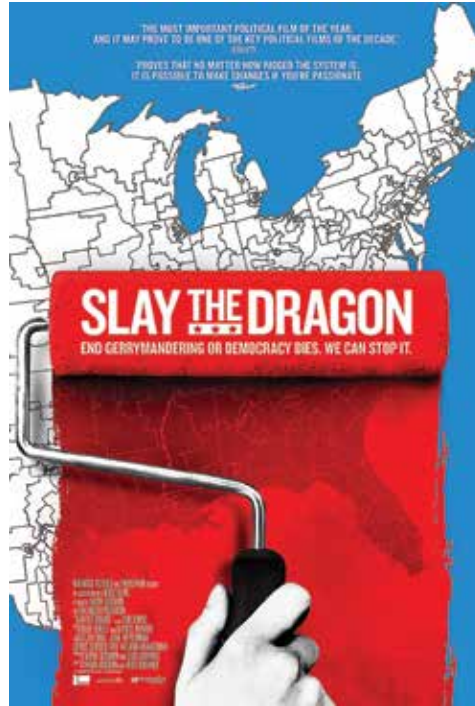
Viewers not in the know might watch *Slay the Dragon* (2020) and come away thinking they have witnessed a victory against legislative gerrymandering by underfunded, apolitical grassroots citizen-activists in Michigan who vanquished sinister political professionals. At one point the film shows a leader of the deceptively named Voters Not Politicians (VNP) ballot campaign somberly speculating that the allegedly big money political establishment will outspend VNP by at least 4 to 1. And VNP founder Katie Fahey is presented as a newcomer to the political process who “doesn’t do politics for a job.”

Swallowing this narrative with extra-credulous gulps, a reviewer for the Philadelphia Film Society wrote that *Slay the Dragon* was “More than just a David versus (an absurdly huge, rich, powerful, and amoral) Goliath story.”

Indeed, so much more! *It was also a complete lie.*

The *Dragon* audience is not told about the \$13.9 million Voters Not Politicians spent to pass their amendment to the Michigan Constitution. *Bridge Magazine*, a Michigan political news website, characterized the sum as a “staggering” total, with “much of it” coming in “from out-of-state dark money groups with a history of supporting Democratic causes.”

And who was Katie “Dark Money” Fahey’s biggest funder, chipping in \$5.5 million? That would be the Sixteen Thirty Fund, yet another of the four left-wing nonprofit subsidiaries spinning around the aforementioned Arabella



Credit: The Bottom Line. License <https://bit.ly/3h3a5XY>.

Viewers not in the know might watch Slay the Dragon (released by Participant in 2020) and come away thinking they have witnessed a victory against legislative gerrymandering by underfunded, apolitical grassroots citizen-activists in Michigan who vanquished sinister political professionals.

Advisors network. Recall that the New Venture Fund, another Arabella satellite, received at least \$20 million from Skoll’s foundations.

What a coincidence. Why wouldn’t the documentary produced by Skoll’s film company mention this big chunk of establishment cash falling into the lap of the supposed “Davids” fighting the alleged “Goliath” in Michigan? Perhaps for the same reason the film didn’t tally up the nice checks to VNP from other reliable left-leaning donors, such as the National Redistricting Action Fund, affiliated with the National Democratic Redistricting Committee; the National Education Association; and SEIU United Healthcare Workers West (Local 2005), a California-based affiliate of the national lefty labor union famous for its purple t-shirts and its aggressive and often illegal tactics.

Then there is the alleged big money establishment, which raised just \$3.2 million, all of it from Michigan sources. Katie Fahey and VNP received \$2.2 million more than their opponents from just the out-of-state lefties at the Arabella. And adding it all up,

VNP enjoyed a funding advantage of more than 4 to 1.

This was precisely the opposite of the 4 to 1 *disadvantage* portrayed in the film. The film coyly never mentions any of the actual funding numbers. Getting this central fact exactly backward was either overwhelming incompetence by the filmmakers (and executive producer Jeffrey Skoll) or simply a deliberate lie by omission.



Slay the Dragon was purportedly a David and Goliath tale showing the left-wing establishment outgunned by a 4 to 1 spending deficit. In reality, after tens of millions in contributions from Skoll’s foundations and other Democratic party funders, the advantage was precisely the opposite.

Perhaps the title *Big Lefty Dark Money Against the Diminutive Dragon* didn't poll well with the Participant focus groups.

But that all aside, just how could Katie “doesn't do politics for a job” Fahey rake in such sums for that 2018 campaign?

The end of the *Slay the Dragon* shows a euphoric Fahey at the November 2018 VNP victory party. What doesn't make it into the film is what happened almost precisely two years earlier, the morning after the November 2016 election. That morning the Associated Press reported on Hillary Clinton's concession phone call to then President-elect Donald Trump, and quoted the reaction of just one attendee of Clinton's ill-fated “victory” party:

“My disappointment makes me not trust the rest of the world,” said Katie Fahey, who had flown to New York from Grand Rapids, Michigan, wearing a red pantsuit, expecting a victory party. “I don't even want to go out. I want to wear sweatpants and curl myself up in a corner.”

It seems at least plausible Fahey already had important political contacts that went missing from the *Slay the Dragon* plot. The jokes about Hollywood's leftist agenda are often more at the expense of the audience than the filmmakers.

Promoting the Agenda

Participant also rolled out a “social impact campaign” for *Slay the Dragon*, which was similar to the arrangement with the Sierra Club for promoting Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Sequel*. The campaign provided screenings of the film to potential activists and partnerships with Voters Not Politicians in Michigan and similar left-leaning organizations in other states.

Most Hollywood studios veer to the left merely because of cultural gravity. What sets Participant apart is its willingness to aggressively partner with leftist organizations to promote the agenda of the films. Climate alarmist films such as *Merchants of Doubt* and *Last Call at the Oasis* have been paired with campaigns promoting left-leaning climate policy organizations such as 350.org, Greenpeace, the Environmental Defense Fund, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the Sierra Club.

The radical-left political squatters of Occupy Wall Street were celebrated in *99%: The Occupy Wall Street Collaborative Film*. For this 2013 film, Participant created an issue campaign promoting Represent.us, a left-leaning organization seeking tighter restrictions on the funding of political

speech. Three years later the failed presidential campaign of Democrat Hillary Clinton spent \$768 million, almost double that of Republican rival Donald Trump, according to the *Washington Post*. And during the 2020 election cycle, according to data compiled at OpenSecrets.org, Jeffrey Skoll personally forked over at least \$11 million to two federal committees promoting the election of Democrats: \$7 million to Senate Majority PAC, and another \$4 million to Priorities USA Action. (Canadian-born Skoll's direct political giving in the United States appears to have been smaller in prior years, likely because he reportedly did not become a U.S. citizen until 2007).

One might guess from all this mixing of leftist missions among the Skoll properties that Participant has been more of a fringe filmmaker and not a producer of well-known features.

That guess would be wrong.

Of the at least 114 films produced in the history of Skoll's studio there are a few recognizable titles starring A-list talent, compelling stories, and far less bulky political pills to choke down. Examples include *Charlie Wilson's War* (starring Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts), *Lincoln* (Daniel Day Lewis), *Bridge of Spies* (Tom Hanks again), and *7 Days in Entebbe*, a dramatic retelling of the “most daring rescue mission ever attempted”—the 1976 Israeli commando raid that freed hostages held in Uganda.

Even among the documentaries there is *Waiting for Superman* (2010), a brutally frank criticism of public education and teacher unions widely celebrated by right-of-center reformers such as the Heritage Foundation.

But tellingly, the social impact campaign Participant created for the *Superman* did not include Heritage or any of the many right-of-center education reformers on the list of “Organizations Making a Difference.” The Participant campaign did point viewers to the Ford Foundation, one of the nation's wealthiest and oldest funders of resolutely left-wing politics and public policy.

With the left side of U.S. politics too closely aligned with those teacher unions for too long, the strongest education reform energy over the last few decades has been with the right-center advocates of parental choice. An astute and suspicious observer of this fact might be on solid ground in suspecting Participant's social media campaign for *Superman* was a conscious effort to steal some of that momentum away from the right-center opposition.

And that's not the only tactic a clever pattern-seeking primate might notice.

Recall the 2013 profile in *The Guardian* that identified even Skoll's "blockbusters" as having "political or social messages."

The road to winning the war for American culture obviously has routes running through Hollywood. The slick agitprop celebrating Al Gore and Occupy Wall Street probably doesn't pay the bills and may not create enough of a pipeline into the mass audiences that go to the movies for pure escapist fun. Participant's forays into popular, less political action films—the "blockbusters"—are a feature, not a bug, of Jeffrey Skoll's strategy to shove America further left.

In his 1998 book *Hollywood Party: How Communism Seduced the American Film Industry in the 1930s and 1940s*, journalist Kenneth Lloyd Billingsley wrote that "Stalin reportedly claimed he could easily convert the world to Communism if he controlled the American film industry."



Participant's forays into popular, less political action films—the "blockbusters" like Charlie Wilson's War and Lincoln—are a feature, not a bug, of Jeffrey Skoll's strategy to shove America further left.

The Soviet dictator was improving on the observations of his predecessor, Russian communist revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, who looked upon the then-infant film industry of the 1920s and declared that "of all the arts the most important for us is the cinema."

This analysis of Participant and the Skoll network began with

an anecdote from that era about the misadventures of the Soviet-controlled Hollywood Anti-Nazi League. Jeffrey Skoll should obviously not be mistaken for a communist threat, let alone one on the level of the Soviet Empire, or even a revolutionary menace of any sort. But his integration of a left-progressive funding empire with a film production company replicates a lot of the same business model. ■

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THE LEFT'S HOLLOW VICTORY

By Michael Watson

Summary: *In late 2020, the Electoral College met to formally elect Joe Biden and Kamala Harris president and vice president of the United States in the wake of the 2020 elections. But confusion reigned in what should have been a triumphant moment for an ascendant Left fueled by rising demographics, record turnout, and the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, which empowered the state to levels previously unseen in America. While the American electorate determined that the Trump administration would end after only four years, its successes led that very same electorate to limit the Left's congressional power, reject aggressive liberal policies at the ballot box, and give Republicans a strong state-level base from which to build for a post-Trump era.*

The 2020 elections were not supposed to be like this.

Polling and expert analysis predicted that Joe Biden would not only be elected president but win a majority not seen since Ronald Reagan won in 1980, with a potential “blue Texas” heralding a generation of Democratic ascendancy. Instead, securing Biden’s Electoral College majority came down to just over 43,000 votes in Arizona, Georgia, and Wisconsin, as Florida and Ohio stayed in the Republican column and President Donald Trump showed unexpected resilience with Hispanic constituencies. Biden won narrowly by persuading skeptics of Donald Trump as a political figure to lend him their votes, not by riding an inevitable demographic wave to an “Emerging Democratic Majority.”

The handicappers predicted that House Democrats would ride Biden’s landslide coattails to expand their caucus by over 10—perhaps as many as 20—seats, bringing their numbers to levels last seen in the first two years of the Obama administration. But that didn’t happen. Republican women and ethnic minorities won Democratic-held seats in “rising American electorate” strongholds like Miami-Dade, Florida; Salt Lake City, Utah; and Orange County, California while holding seats in suburban Texas, the Rio Grande Valley, and Midwestern suburbs that the handicappers had written off as toss-ups or worse. As of writing, Republicans had won every race the *Cook Political Report* considered a toss-up for which a winner could be projected. While Rep. Nancy Pelosi



Credit: Gage Skidmore. License: <https://bit.ly/2KDJkdM>.

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(D-CA) remains speaker of the House of Representatives, she commands the narrowest Democratic-held majority since 1931 and the narrowest majority held by any party since 2001. This is hardly an auspicious position from which to advance “defunding the police,” a Green New Deal, and major gun control legislation.

Meanwhile, Senate Democrats were predicted to thrust ahead of Biden’s coattails, marching the liberal Democratic flag into formerly conservative Republican territory. Maine moderate Sen. Susan Collins (R), whose vote for Justice Brett Kavanaugh’s confirmation had proved decisive, was a dead woman walking, and a tidal wave of out-of-state liberal money presaged a wipeout for the last Northeast Republican senator. But liberals would go further, defeating prominent red-state Republicans like Senate Judiciary Committee Chair

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Credit: David Perdue. License: <https://bit.ly/3p445D7>.

Credit: Showtime. License: <https://bit.ly/3mndzWj>.

(Left: David Perdue. Right: Jon Ossoff) As of writing, Republicans hold 50 seats pending two runoffs in Georgia—what the Cook Political Report considered that the party’s best-case scenario before November 3.

Lindsey Graham (R-SC), retribution for the confirmations of three Supreme Court Justices under President Donald Trump; Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC), a Judiciary Committee member closely tied to that state’s GOP; and Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), a Republican rising star and prominent woman in a party sorely lacking in non-white-male faces. The Democratic “blue wave” could even extend as far as Kansas, Texas, or Alaska, giving Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) a stonking majority that could eliminate the legislative filibuster and pass major left-wing wish-list items like court-packing, abolishing the Electoral College, and fully socialized medicine.

But that did not happen.

As of writing, Republicans hold 50 seats after the Democrats appear to have won both Senate runoffs in Georgia, leaving the Senate split 50–50 (including 2 independent senators who caucus with the Democrats). Now Schumer has the unenviable task of supplicating West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin (D) and any other centrist Democratic senators to get a meager agenda through budget reconciliation and compromise under the filibuster.

State-Level Wipeout

But *even bigger* prizes were on offer for the ascendant Left of November 2, 2020. The *Cook Political Report* considered the battle for control of the Texas House of Representatives—and with it, whether Republicans would retain full control of congressional redistricting in the state—a toss-up. And Democrats hoped to elect their first statewide elected official

since 1994, breaking the longest statewide drought for any state-level major party in the country. Beyond the Lone Star State, Democrats were predicted to break the Republican trifecta in Arizona, seven Republican-held chambers were considered toss-ups, and six more were considered vulnerable but leaning Republican. A state-level blue wave would empower the well-funded efforts of former Attorney General Eric Holder’s National Democratic Redistricting Committee, giving Democrats control of the district lines that will determine control of the House of Representatives for the next decade.

But then the election results rolled in, and the impossible happened. Republicans not only did not *lose* state legislative chambers, but *gained* total control of the New Hampshire General Court, with control of the Alaska House—controlled previously by a Democratic coalition—undetermined as of writing. Republicans maintained supposedly vulnerable “trifectas” (control of the governorship and both houses of the legislature) in Arizona, Iowa, Texas, and Georgia; they held vulnerable legislative chambers in Democratic-governed North Carolina, Michigan, and Pennsylvania; and held the state Senate in Minnesota, denying Democrats a trifecta in the Land of 10,000 Lakes. As a result of the surprising statehouse results, Republicans will control redistricting over an estimated 188 seats to Democrats’ control over 73 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.



But then the election results rolled in, and the impossible happened. Republicans not only did not lose state legislative chambers but gained ground.

But at least liberals would enjoy uninterrupted victories in their California strongholds, with all factions of the Left targeting the dead hands of a long-dead purple California in the state’s ballot measure process. Government worker unions grasped the weakest part of the state’s political “third rail,” the “Proposition 13” property tax-limitation measure of 1978, targeting the beleaguered business community for *another* tax increase. Woke capital—including ex-Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer, two health insurance companies, social liberal groups including the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and Big Labor groups like the California Teachers Association—sought to expunge a ban on affirmative action from the state constitution. The state Democratic Party and the ACLU proposed breaking the seal on minors voting by extending the right to vote in primaries to 17-year-olds

turning 18 before the general election. Government worker unions, Black Lives Matter chapters, and other radical-Left associations pushed a measure to expand rent control. And Big Labor and the state's political establishment pushed a "bail reform" measure that would have replaced conventional cash bail with "risk assessments" for pretrial release.

They all failed. Even in a state that the Biden-Harris ticket carried by just under a two-to-one margin, the Left saw the public say, "This far and no further." Those weren't the only losses for progressives in the Golden State: In addition to Republicans taking back four House seats they had lost in the 2018 blue wave, rideshare businesses persuaded voters to pass a ballot measure to clip the wings of Big Labor's "AB 5" independent contracting ban, and Stockton Mayor Michael Tubbs—a Mike Bloomberg protégé—was defeated by a Republican, appropriately surnamed "Lincoln."

A Presidential Trickle

The polls were clear: There was no doubt that former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) would be elected president and vice president of the United States. The FiveThirtyEight A-rated pollster SurveyUSA found a Biden national lead of 8 points over President Trump; the B-plus-rated Quinnipiac found a Biden lead of 11, comparable in scale to Ronald Reagan's 1980 triumph over incumbent President Jimmy Carter. The *Cook Political Report* cautioned that polling error "could help Biden"—bringing into play a 1964-style total Republican wipeout.

But on November 4, the country did not wake up to a total Republican wipeout—it woke up to uncertainty, as late-arriving mail-in ballots were counted in the Upper Midwest and Georgia. While Biden and Harris eventually prevailed, they did so by a relatively narrow margin, with a presumptive Electoral College margin exactly mirroring Trump's presumptive 2016 margin of 306-232. (The official margin in 2016 was slightly different due to "faithless electors.") If just over 43,000 Biden voters had switched to Trump in the states of Arizona, Wisconsin, and Georgia, the Electoral College would have been evenly divided, and the incoming House of Representatives would have been poised to re-elect Trump by a vote of state delegations.

And instead of the triumph of an Emerging Democratic Majority powered by "rising" demographics (especially



The pre-election polls were clear: There was no doubt that former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) would be elected president and vice president of the United States.

Credit: U.S. Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur/Ohio. License: <https://bit.ly/2LGLmPE>.

Hispanic Americans), Biden's win hinged on mundane vote-switching and ticket-splitting by moderate, suburban, and largely white voters who had voted for Trump or a third-party candidate in 2016 but chose not to re-elect him, even as many of them chose Republican candidates for Congress or state offices.

And the county-by-county results showed that not only had the emerging Democratic majority of "rising American electorate" demographics *not* delivered the White House to Biden, but President Trump had made notable inroads with that Democratic bloc: He carried Florida—against the prediction of the highly-rated pollsters NYT/Siena, Monmouth, and Marist—largely by swinging majority-Hispanic Miami-Dade, the state's most populous county, 22 points to the right. And while some observers wished to write off the Florida gains as reliant upon the idiosyncratic national-origin makeup of the state's Hispanic communities, the pattern repeated (albeit to a less pronounced degree) across the country, with 78 of the 100 majority-Hispanic counties in the country swinging to the right even as the national electorate slipped slightly to the left. As of writing, Biden won slightly more than 4 percent more ballots nationwide, compared to Hillary Clinton's 2016 margin of about 2 percent.

For liberal politicians, the responses to this blue trickle and *contrarrevolución roja* ranged from outrage to exasperation. Former President Barack Obama, on a radio show while touring to sell his third memoir, blamed the Hispanic swings on "evangelical Hispanics" who put "the fact that he [Trump] supports their views on gay marriage or abortion"



Credit: Grae Skidmore. License: <https://bit.ly/3p7uViu>.

While Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) remains speaker of the House of Representatives, she commands the narrowest Democratic-held majority since 1931 and the narrowest majority held by any party since 2001.

ahead of “the fact that Trump says racist things about Mexicans or puts undocumented workers in cages.” Rep. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) targeted the use of the term “Latinx” by left-wing activists. Other Democrats warned that Republican messaging highlighting the “defund the police” rhetoric of the radical wing of Black Lives Matter had resonated with their constituents.

The New House Republicans

The knives were already out. Republican incumbents, especially in suburban districts, were announcing mass retirements. Over 20 had quit and not sought other offices. The *Cook Political Report* projected up to 20 net Republican seat losses, with no hope of narrowing Speaker Pelosi’s Democratic majority. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the largest business lobby and historically a Republican stalwart, all but conceded defeat in the House, endorsing 23 freshman Democrats including some like Abby Finkenauer (D-IA), Xochitl Torres Small (D-NM), and Harley Rouda (D-CA) who had voted for the odious union-favor Protecting the Right to Organize Act (H.R. 2474).

But Finkenauer, Torres Small, and Rouda will not be in the 117th Congress. All three lost to Republican challengers, as did at least nine of their colleagues. Republicans held almost all the seats made vacant by the slate of retirements, losing only two North Carolina districts redrawn as safely Democratic by North Carolina’s Democratic courts and an open seat in the Atlanta suburbs.

The “Texodus” that pundits proclaimed as the House Republicans’ death knell and the herald of “blue Texas” never materialized. All seven Texas Republicans who retired were replaced by Republicans, including former House Rules Committee Chairman Pete Sessions, a casualty of the 2018 blue wave who ran for a neighboring seat; President Trump’s former physician, Ronny Jackson; and former Irving Mayor Beth Van Duyne. Even the Rio Grande Valley seat vacated by moderate and Trump-skeptical GOP Rep. Will Hurd (R-TX), whom *Cook Political Report* handicapper Dave Wasserman called “probably the only Republican capable of holding” the seat, remained in Republican hands through Navy veteran Tony Gonzales.

There was something curious about how the party of “old white dudes” cut Pelosi’s majority: All the Republicans who defeated Democratic incumbents were either women, minorities (if the Portuguese-descended David Valadao counts as Latino), or both. As of writing, at least 30 of the at least 45 incoming Republican Representatives are women, ethnic minorities, or military veterans.

Senate Money on Fire

On September 18, 2020, Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the Court’s arch-liberal and an ACLU alumna, died of cancer. Senate Republicans and President Trump announced shortly thereafter that the president would nominate a replacement, and the Senate would consider the nominee. Democratic donors responded with what the *New York Times* called “a spontaneous outpouring of donations the likes of which they had never seen.” Democrats were already outspending Senate Republicans in races across the nation, but Ginsburg’s death and the subsequent nomination of Judge Amy Coney Barrett made the GOP’s money disadvantage all but terminal.

Liberal podcasting network Crooked Media, run by Obama administration and Clinton 2016 campaign veterans, raised \$18.5 million for Senate Democrats in its Get Mitch or Die Trying campaign in the three days following Ginsburg’s passing. The Bulwark commentator and erstwhile conservative Bill Kristol predicted the Supreme Court fight “could help Democratic challengers in many Senate races. And . . . I’m not so sure Mitch McConnell will prevail.”

But McConnell did prevail. The week before Election Day, the Senate confirmed Justice Barrett. Democrats and liberal judicial activists like Demand Justice vowed revenge, expecting the tsunami of money to wash away even red-state Republican Senators like Lindsey Graham (R-SC), the chair of the Judiciary Committee that had advanced Barrett’s



Credit: European University Institute. License: <https://bit.ly/3p451Vj>.

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nomination. This would enable a new, large Democratic Senate majority to carry out a final assault on the filibuster, pack the Supreme Court, and enable the Left to run roughshod over constitutional norms. Jamie Harrison, Graham's Democratic rival, raised \$107 million through mid-October, far outstripping the three-term incumbent. Graham wasn't alone: Democratic candidates outraised Republicans in each of the top 10 most expensive Senate races nationwide. All told, through the end of September, the liberal fundraising vehicle ActBlue had processed \$1.5 billion for Senate Democrats, outstripping its Republican counterpart WinRed by nearly \$1 billion.

But then votes were cast and counted. Graham won comfortably, outpolling Harrison, the former chair of the state Democratic Party, by 10 points. Sen. McConnell beat his challenger Amy McGrath, who had raised \$88 million, by 19 points. Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA) won re-election by 7 points, and Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT) by 10 points despite their Democratic opponents outraised them. Top Democratic recruit Cal Cunningham flopped in his challenge to Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) after a sex scandal.

But perhaps most galling of all to the dreams of a Left ascendant and able to "abandon defensive crouch liberal constitutionalism," moderate Sen. Collins defied Maine's controversial liberal-favoring "ranked-choice voting" system and the polls to win an outright majority over her opponent, State House Speaker Sarah Gideon (D). Yet *no public poll used by RealClearPolitics showed her leading*. Reports following the astounding result showed that Democrats' money and advertising tsunami may have in fact *backfired*,

with national groups' all-but-bullying of Maine's long-time incumbent turning off independent voters.

After the votes were counted, Democrats and Demand Justice were no longer strategizing to pass a Judiciary Reform Act of 2021 to add four seats to the Supreme Court. They were de-camping for two Georgia run-off elections and starting at a Senate agenda dictated for two years by either West Virginia's center-left Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin or their nemesis, Cocaine Mitch.

A Declawed Redistricting Tiger

Smart Democrats knew an even bigger prize than a federal "trifecta" plus packing the Supreme Court was on offer in 2020. Every decade, the U.S. Census determines the apportionment of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives, and states are obligated to redraw congressional districts to ensure approximately equal representation among districts within a state. In most states, these districts are drawn by the state legislature, sometimes without being subject to a gubernatorial veto.

Democrats were caught napping by the red tide in 2010 that gave Republicans control of state legislatures to a degree unprecedented since before the Great Depression. As a result, state legislatures drew maps favoring Republicans relative to a state-based proportional outcome, as past Democratic state legislatures had drawn maps favoring Democrats.

But Democrats would not let themselves be caught napping again. In January 2017, before the Obama administration had even finished, former Attorney General Eric Holder announced the formation of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee (NDRC) to make sure Democrats would retake control of the process. NDRC spun up two affiliated groups, National Redistricting Foundation and National Redistricting Action Fund, to carry out litigation, while NDRC would play in state legislative races to ensure Democratic control.



Smart Democrats knew an even bigger prize than a federal "trifecta" plus packing the Supreme Court was on offer in 2020: Control of the process of determining congressional districts for the next decade.



Credit: Citizen University. License: <https://bit.ly/31ADuME>.

Ballot Measure Warnings

California is a weird state. In its largely mythical Republican past, its Republicans were as often progressive-liberals like Sen. Hiram Johnson, Gov. Earl Warren, and Sen. Thomas Kuchel as conservatives like Gov. Ronald Reagan, Sen. S.I. Hayakawa, or Gov. Pete Wilson. Sen. Johnson was Teddy Roosevelt's 1912 "Bull Moose" Progressive Party running mate. Gov. Warren was later chief justice for much of the U.S. Supreme Court's aggressively liberal 1950s–1970s period. And Sen. Kuchel was a Warren ally who declined to endorse Richard Nixon in his unsuccessful 1962 gubernatorial campaign and who denounced Ronald Reagan's conservative faction as a "neo-fascist political cult of right-wingers in the GOP."

But the 20th-century conservatives of California's purple era left behind a series of "dead hands" to keep the state from fully indulging its 21st-century liberal id. Proposition 13, a constitutional amendment in 1978, limited the rate of property assessment increases, limiting the growth rate of the state's otherwise high tax burden. Proposition 209, a constitutional amendment passed in 1996, ordered that "the state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting," barring state-level affirmative action programs.

Or at least they did until 2020, when the organized institutions of California's 21st century liberal id would break those dead hands and insert their own into the state constitution. Proposition 15 would repeal the portion of Proposition 13 applied to commercial property and was backed by the state's ruling Democratic Party; the state's hegemonic government worker unions (the California Teachers Association, AFSCME, and SEIU); and the political-advocacy machine of Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg. Proposition 16—also backed by the state Democratic Party, the government worker unions, and liberal activists like the Akonadi Foundation's Quinn Delaney and ex-Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer—would expunge Proposition 209 and enshrine critical race theory in California government practice.

But merely lifting the dead hand of Proposition 13 activist Howard Jarvis and expunging the colorblind vision of Ward Connerly from the state constitution were not enough for California's liberals in a year they believed would deliver the final, all-conquering triumph of left-progressivism. Liberal mega-donors John Arnold, Ballmer, and Tom Steyer backed a proposal to end cash bail. Left-wing groups and Patty Quillin, the wife of Netflix's CEO, pushed a measure to expand voting in primary elections to certain 17-year-

The Bulwark commentator and erstwhile conservative Bill Kristol predicted the Supreme Court fight "could help Democratic challengers in many Senate races. And . . . I'm not so sure Mitch McConnell will prevail." But McConnell did prevail.

The 2017, 2018, and 2019 elections were marked by a state-level "blue wave," with Democrats gaining gubernatorial-state legislative "trifectas" in Virginia, Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, and Washington while breaking Republican trifectas in Kentucky, Kansas, Michigan, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin. Holder targeted 12 states for the 2020 elections to build on his 2017–2019 victories, which had already seen judges in Pennsylvania and North Carolina redraw congressional districts to favor Democrats.

But the electorate caged Holder's redistricting tiger. Contrary to the predictions at the "Crystal Ball" of liberal University of Virginia psephologist Larry Sabato, Democrats gained control of *zero* state legislative chambers, falling short most notably in the Minnesota Senate, Michigan House, and both houses of the Arizona Legislature. Democrats had dreamed of flipping the Texas House, but Republicans maintained their majority with no net change in partisan balance.

When the dust settled, *Republicans* had gained two trifectas. In New Hampshire, Gov. Chris Sununu cruised to his second re-election—New Hampshire elects its governor to a two-year term. But unlike in 2018 when Democrats retook control of the state legislature and the Executive Council (which can veto certain gubernatorial actions), Sununu's Republicans stormed to majorities in all three state bodies. Montana meanwhile broke a 16-year streak of Democratic governors, electing then-U.S. Rep. Greg Gianforte (R) to the governorship on his second attempt, giving Republicans their first trifecta in the state since 2004.



Despite serving only one term, President Trump leaves office with his party in better shape than two-term Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama left theirs.

olds. And the radical Left, led by “ex-Trotskyite” Michael Weinstein’s AIDS Healthcare Foundation, pushed a measure expanding economically ruinous rent control laws. In a year when a Democratic ticket bearing home-state intersectional hero Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) would storm to a nationwide landslide, surely California would finally bury its Reaganite, swing-state past once and for all.

But as mail votes rolled in and Election Day progressed into California’s traditional “Election Month,” Jarvis (who passed from this life in 1986) lived, and Connerly triumphed again despite being outspent nearly twenty-to-one. Cash bail was retained, avoiding a repeat of New York’s baleful experiment in “reform.” Seventeen-year-olds will not be voting. Voters rejected rent control. And voters went further by backing a measure supported by the ridesharing industry that created an exemption and regulatory structure for the industry outside of California’s “AB 5” framework, a framework that Biden and Harris had endorsed for the entire much less Democratic country.

While Biden-Harris carried the state by a margin of about two-to-one, *even Californians* drew lines in the sand beyond which liberalism could go no further. Other states, both red and blue, sent similar messages: Montana expanded gun rights over \$1.2 million in objections from its state government worker union, Illinois rejected a graduated-rate “progressive” income tax backed by its billionaire Governor J.B. Pritzker (D), and Kathryn Murdoch’s Unite America failed to pass ranked-choice voting in Massachusetts.

Conclusion

The 2020 elections, like so many in recent American politics, returned a mixed verdict. Republicans lost control of the White House and the direction of the administrative state, but the electorate dashed Democrats’ dreams of a 1932-style or 1964-style repudiation of conservative Republican ideology and agendas. But the Democrats’ narrow Presidential victory obscured shifts that obviated the Left’s cherished notion of a demographic “Emerging Democratic Majority” as President Trump narrowed his losses in non-white precincts, even as upscale white suburbs turned against him.

Despite serving only one term, President Trump leaves office with his party in better shape than two-term Presidents



Credit: Gage Skidmore. License: <https://bit.ly/3p0pqNK>.

In a year when a Democratic ticket bearing home-state intersectional hero Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) would storm to a nationwide landslide, surely California would finally bury its Reaganite, swing-state past once and for all. But even Californians drew lines in the sand beyond which liberalism could go no further.

George W. Bush and Barack Obama left theirs. While 43 and 44 exited, leaving their parties a regional rump and bare, ruined choirs respectively, Trump exits with Republicans in control of a majority of state legislatures and a majority of governorships with both Houses of Congress nearly evenly divided. In the words of *Commentary* magazine’s Noah Rothman: “Trump lost. And so, astonishingly, did his pursuers.”

And while liberals and left-progressives claimed their victories, like a minimum wage increase in Florida and a tax hike in Arizona, even the bluest electorates defeated furthest extensions of identity politics, labor unionism, and government-worker rent-seeking. After the summer of Black Lives Matter demonstrations that sent left-wing race-conscious ideological tomes from Ibram X. Kendi and Robin DiAngelo to the top of bestseller lists, California voted for race-neutrality by a larger margin than a much less blue—and much whiter—California had done in 1996.

So while the electorate closed the book on the Trump administration, it did not hand an overwhelming endorsement to left-liberalism. The future of American politics will remain as it always has been: Highly competitive, with majorities frequently won and quickly lost. ■

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BIG MONEY IN DARK SHADOWS

Arabella Advisors' Half-billion-dollar
"Dark Money" Network

Hayden R. Ludwig

According to media personalities and politicians, nameless, faceless donors wield outsized influence over the American political process due to the so-called "dark money" they use to fund think tanks and advocacy groups. But that's far from the whole story. "Dark money" exists on both sides of the aisle. In fact, the Left seems to have deeper and darker pockets of cash than anyone suspected.

Learn more about liberal "dark money" in CRC's original report.



CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER
AMERICA'S INVESTIGATIVE THINK TANK

ORGANIZATION TRENDS



POLITICAL AND POLICY-ORIENTED GIVING AFTER CITIZENS UNITED: AN UPDATE TO CRC'S 2017 ANALYSIS

By Shane Devine and Michael Watson

Summary: CRC researchers find that the left-wing advantage in election funding through public policy and “dark money” groups increased in the 2018 elections. In the 2018 election cycle, liberal grantmakers increased their public policy 501(c)(3) giving by nearly 10 percent to \$8.1 billion while conservative giving remained stable at \$2.2 billion—increasing the imbalance from nearly 3.4 to 1 in 2014 to 3.7 to 1 in 2018. “Dark money” funding through 501(c)(4) groups flipped from a 3.6 to 1 advantage for conservatives to a nearly 2 to 1 (\$81 million to \$42 million) advantage for liberals.

Introduction

In February 2018, Michael Hartmann and Michael Watson of the Capital Research Center published a report summarizing their research into the aftereffects of the January 2010 *Citizens United* decision, in which the Supreme Court held that it was unconstitutional to limit donations supporting independent political expenditures provided that neither the expenditures nor the communications are formally “coordinated” with any particular candidate’s campaign.

Based on the idea that *Citizens United* and related cases transformed political spending by enlarging existing organizations and spurring the creation of new organizations to influence politics and inform policy, their report sought to answer a question: Did it similarly change philanthropic support of traditional public policy organizations, effectively displacing and shifting support from those organizations to “Citizens United” groups?

Findings of the 2018 Report

Many observers understood that election spending undoubtedly increased in absolute dollars and at a faster rate after *Citizens United*, but few considered the possibility that the decision affected “traditional” public policy philanthropy—that is, giving to 501(c)(3) groups like think tanks.

To estimate the answer to this question, the Hartmann/Watson study analyzed the scope of three “rivers” of political



Credit: Public Citizen. License: <https://bit.ly/3nzZCr>.

Based on the 2006 and 2014 snapshots, CRC documented an appreciable increase in support of public policy recipients since Citizens United. The percentage increase was bigger for conservative groups, but in raw-dollar terms, support of liberal groups remained much, much larger.

and public policy funding: conventional political contributions to 527 groups like campaigns and committees, “Citizens United” money to 501(c)(4) groups, and support for policy-oriented 501(c)(3) public charities as they were in the 2014 election cycle. The results showed narrow conservative/Republican advantages in 527 and 501(c)(4) spending, but

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Michael Watson is Capital Research Center’s research director and managing editor for InfluenceWatch.



The percentage increase in political and public policy spending was bigger for conservative groups, but in raw-dollar terms, support of liberal groups remained much, much larger.

a three-to-one left-progressive advantage in the vastly larger 501(c)(3) public policy charity space.

Specifically, they found that total reported revenues received by 372 groups in 2006 supported by the selected conservative grantmakers totaled almost \$1.3 billion. In 2014, the same revenues totaled almost \$2.2 billion, a roughly 71 percent increase over 2006 levels. As for liberal grantmakers, the 2006 sum of reported revenues of 1,078 left-of-center groups totaled over \$4.9 billion. In 2014, they exceeded \$7.4 billion, about a 50 percent increase. In 2014, the liberal-conservative ratio was nearly 3.4 to 1.

These groups were selected from the grant recipient lists of 12 major private foundations – six left-leaning (Community Initiatives, Marisla Foundation, NEO Philanthropy, Open Society Foundations, Proteus Fund, and Tides Foundation) and six right-leaning (Bradley Foundation, Bradley Impact Fund, Donors Trust, Charles Koch Foundation, Sarah Scaife Foundation, and Searle Freedom Trust).

Based on the 2006 and 2014 snapshots, the trend appeared to indicate an appreciable increase in support of public policy recipients since *Citizens United*. The percentage increase was bigger for conservative groups, but in raw-dollar terms, support of liberal groups remained much, much larger.

Support of conservative public policy recipients exceeded the support of conservative independent groups in elections and approached the amount given directly to Republican candidates. Support of liberal policy groups far exceeded total financial support for liberal independent groups in elections and the funds that contributed directly to Democratic candidates. Unlike amounts given to the political and independent groups, the giving to nonprofits was not even close to being distributed equally between liberal and conservative organizations.

Update for 2018 Cycle

While the 501(c)(3) river is only one of three, readers asked the most questions about that river last time, as it is by far the biggest. We decided to focus on that funding river because it more clearly maps the greater landscape of money in politics. Additionally, major policy groups have already published comprehensive reports on 2018 spending on 527

political party/PAC election spending and 501(c)(4) spending, rendering an additional report by CRC unnecessary.

For example, total election spending in the 2018 midterms surpassed \$5.7 billion, making it the most expensive midterm ever, according to the Center for Responsive Politics (which runs the website OpenSecrets.org). Democrats outspent Republicans across all four categories—party committees, outside groups, Senate candidate campaigns, and House candidate campaigns—by over \$450 million, but the largest spending disparity was in House candidate races, in which Democrats spent \$300 million more than Republicans.

Table 1. Spending in the 2018 Midterms

	Democrats	Republicans
House Candidates	\$ 932,399,430	\$ 632,516,031
Senate Candidates	\$ 559,917,920	\$ 430,012,076
Outside Groups	\$ 516,650,490	\$ 506,171,580
Party Committees	\$ 752,475,512	\$ 741,739,679
Total	\$ 2,761,443,352	\$ 2,310,439,366

Source: OpenSecrets.org, “Most Expensive Midterm Ever: Cost of 2018 Election Surpasses \$5.7 Billion.”

Interestingly, liberal “dark money” groups—what many have chosen to call 501(c)(4)s or SuperPACs—spent \$81 million on the 2018 election, compared to the \$42 million spent by conservatives—in stark contrast to the \$140 million spent by conservatives and the \$39 million spent by liberals in 2014. Expenditures by the liberal 501(c)(4) group Majority Forward reached \$41 million, more than half of the 2018 total. Meanwhile, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce backed away from its conservative recipients, spending only \$12 million in 2018 compared to the \$35 million it doled out in 2014. In total, “dark money” groups spent \$147 million in 2018, with independent or bipartisan groups accounting for the other \$24 million. Campaign finance reform advocacy group Issue One pointed out that the 2018 election cycle was the first time liberal “dark money” groups outspent their conservative counterparts since the *Citizens United* decision in 2010. In September 2020, Issue One projected that liberal “dark money” groups might outspend conservatives during the 2020 election as well.



Credit: WP. License: <https://bit.ly/2WubMwU>.

In September 2020, Issue One projected that liberal “dark money” groups might outspend conservatives during the 2020 election, after showing that liberal SuperPACs outspent conservative ones by a nearly 2 to 1 margin in 2018.

Considering these points, we at Capital Research decided to update and improve our data on contributions to “traditional” public policy groups by conducting a similar investigation into their receipts during the 2017–2018 election cycle.

For this present study, we followed the same procedure but switched out some private foundations for others, which is explained in more detail in the Methodology section. The results show that both conservative and liberal groups have increased their spending, but the left-wing advantage persisted and seems to have grown.

In the 2017–2018 cycle, the 301 groups supported by the selected conservative grantmakers received a total of a little over \$2.2 billion, a roughly 1.67 percent increase over 2014 levels. The 907 left-of-center groups selected by liberal grantmakers received over \$8.1 billion, about a 9.65 percent increase. In raw dollar amounts, liberal 501(c)(3) revenue outmatched conservative revenue by 3.7 to 1—a significant increase over the 3.4 to 1 ratio for 2014.

Table 2. 501(c)(3) Revenue, 2017–2018

Year	Conservative	Liberal	Total
2006	\$1,275,252,885	\$4,948,333,644	\$6,223,586,529
2014	\$2,183,260,640	\$7,447,972,154	\$9,631,232,794
2018	\$2,219,669,246	\$8,052,853,471	\$10,272,522,717

Methodology

To establish these numbers, we examined the publicly available revenue figures for policy-oriented 501(c)(3) public charities. These policy organizations were selected from a list of private foundations that Candid, the reputable authority on philanthropies, considers to be the major foundations in U.S. political philanthropy.

We chose five left-of-center and five right-of-center foundations from the list that we felt were most representative of their respective political camps. For the left, these were the Ford Foundation, the Foundation to Promote Open Society, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation; for the right, these were the Mercer Family Foundation, the John Templeton Foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Searle Freedom Trust, and Donor’s Trust.

Using these foundations’ tax filings, we recorded the names of all the domestic policy organizations to which they gave grants and discarded all other recipients, such as international, cultural, and purely educational (e.g., universities and museums) institutions. Then, we looked up each recipient’s most recent annual revenue as reported in the tax filings, compiled them in a spreadsheet, and calculated the totals.

Due to the uneven availability of the foundations’ 990 forms (organizations’ tax forms become available only after they file them, meaning they are not all released at the same time), we were unable to use the most recent tax forms in every case. For organizations with no 990 forms available for 2018, we instead used the revenue data from their 990s for 2017. The data are thus a mix of 2018 and 2017 revenue numbers.

CC —————
The results show that both conservative and liberal groups have increased their spending, but the left-wing advantage persisted and seems to have grown.

Findings

As we found in the previous report, the data indicate that giving to “traditional” public policy groups has continued to increase after *Citizens United*, and much more was given to liberal nonprofits than conservative ones. The evidence from this update has made this hypothesis more robust because we have used a stronger set of sample groups. Not only that, the updated data indicate that the upward trend documented in the previous report was not a one-off fluke, but the begin-

Dark Money

Money spent on political activity that cannot be traced to a specific donor



Credit: Citizen Genius. License: <https://bit.ly/3p44qgr>.

The results of CRC's analysis indicate that associating "dark money," "money in politics," and other such labels solely with conservative, free-market groups is misinformed at best and hypocritical at worst.

ning of a pattern that accurately captures how the world of political philanthropy is responding to *Citizens United*.

The results also indicate that associating "dark money," "money in politics," and other such labels solely with conservative, free-market groups is misinformed at best and hypocritical at worst. The Capital Research Center believes that individuals have the constitutional and natural right to financially contribute to influence politics and policy. Those who report on money in the political world should be aware of the universality of the practice, and those who point fingers at others while engaging in similar behavior should think twice before doing so. ■

Read previous articles from the Organization Trends series online at [CapitalResearch.org/category/organization-trends/](https://www.CapitalResearch.org/category/organization-trends/).

A project of Capital Research Center

CLIMATE DOLLARS

HOW ONE FLAWED STUDY FOOLED THE MEDIA AND POISONED THE DEBATE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

In a widely cited 2014 study, sociologist Robert Brulle purportedly exposed a "climate change counter-movement" of center-right groups "distort[ing] the public's understanding of climate change." He calculated that from 2003 to 2010, these nonprofits recorded revenues averaging "just over \$900 million" annually—a number that led to media claims that, "Conservative groups spend \$1bn a year to fight action on climate change."

A Capital Research Center study cuts Mr. Brulle's calculations down to size: Not only is Brulle's assessment off by 93 percent, the resources of environmentalist groups and government agencies overwhelmingly dwarf those of skeptics. To learn more about the climate debate, visit www.ClimateDollars.org.



THE NISKANEN CENTER

By Hayden Ludwig

Summary: *The Niskanen Center is a case study in how an organization abandons the center-right for the left—with a healthy dose of left-wing money. Founded by a libertarian climate skeptic turned global warming apostle, the group aims to infiltrate the liberty movement with the Left’s climate change agenda, normalizing an ideology which threatens to replace market-based capitalism with command-and-control socialism.*

Editor’s Note: This is one section of a forthcoming CRC report on the full range of eco-right groups.

The Niskanen Center is a nominally right-leaning think tank that’s best described as “libertarian-turned-liberal” owing to its general abandonment of libertarianism and marked turn to the left.

Niskanen was formed after a 2014 rift between the libertarian Cato Institute and a handful of staffers—most notably then-vice president Jerry Taylor—who adopted the theory of catastrophic manmade global warming. In early 2015, they broke away to form the Niskanen Center, a separate think tank headed by Taylor. Since then, the group has been criticized by observers on the political Right as an “infiltrator” in the conservative/liberty movement for attempting to legitimize left-wing views of climate change among conservatives and libertarians and for its substantial funding from left-wing foundations.

The group has provided pro bono legal representation to plaintiffs suing oil companies ExxonMobil and Suncor in 2018, with Taylor arguing that “oil companies should be held accountable for climate change.” Notably, Niskanen chief counsel David Bookbinder is the former chief climate counsel to the Sierra Club, where he was involved in the 2007 Supreme Court case *Massachusetts v. EPA*, which



Credit: SIEPR. License: <https://bit.ly/3my0Sw4>.

The Niskanen Center was formed after a 2014 rift between the libertarian Cato Institute and a handful of staffers—most notably then-vice president Jerry Taylor—who adopted the theory of catastrophic manmade global warming.

established the EPA’s authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions.

The Niskanen Center authors publish reports on a number of issues—including poverty, regulation, fiscal and monetary policy, immigration, and health care—but it’s arguably best known for its full-throated defense of climate alarmism. Niskanen president Jerry Taylor is a prominent defender of carbon taxes and the author of an extensive 2015 paper “The Conservative Case for a Carbon Tax.”

Hayden Ludwig is a research analyst at CRC.



“A libertarian think tank just gave up on libertarianism,” wrote the left-leaning website Quartz, when the Center’s president Jerry Taylor “abandon[ed] ideology.”



Credit: John Locke Foundation. License: <https://bit.ly/2WCe7Z8>.

The center is named for William Niskanen, a senior economic aide to President Ronald Reagan and longtime Cato Institute chairman who died in 2011. Yet the climate alarmism espoused by Jerry Taylor and the Niskanen Center has been described as “violat[ing] the spirit and memory of William Niskanen.”

The center is named for William Niskanen, a senior economic aide to President Ronald Reagan and longtime Cato Institute chairman who died in 2011, four years before the center’s founding. Yet the climate alarmism espoused by Taylor and the Niskanen Center has been described by Cato Institute adjunct scholar Robert L. Bradley Jr. as “violat[ing] the spirit and memory of William Niskanen, who never bought into climate alarmism/forced energy transformation—and who was not interested in second-best in this area.”

[William] Niskanen understood the politics of the climate issue and motivations of the other side and was not about to let a theoretical ideal about controlling real pollutants (choosing taxation over command-and-control) change his views about carbon dioxide. That [Jerry] Taylor is using climate advocacy to fund his new center is a double whammy to Niskanen’s memory. The Niskanen Center should be renamed. And “libertarian” should be taken out of its descriptive and promotional material for so long as climate alarmism/forced energy transformation is atop the masthead.

Abandoned Libertarianism and Attacks Conservatism

Despite its decidedly liberal views on numerous political issues, the Niskanen Center originally identified itself as a “libertarian advocacy organization.” In the group’s IRS Form

990 filings for 2015 and 2016, for instance, Niskanen called itself “a libertarian 501(c)(3) think tank.” But as of its 2017 filing, it’s just a “501(c)(3) think tank.”

In October 2018, president Jerry Taylor wrote that he had “abandoned” his left-leaning libertarianism in a piece entitled “The Alternative to Ideology” (he now prefers to describe himself as “a Republican”):

When we launched the Niskanen Center in January 2015, we happily identified ourselves as libertarians. Sure, we were heterodox libertarians, but there are many schools of libertarianism beyond those promoted by Charles Koch’s political operations. The school we identified with was a left-libertarianism concerned with social justice. . . . I have abandoned that libertarian project, however, because I have come to abandon ideology.

Groups on the left praised Taylor’s announcement. “A libertarian think tank just gave up on libertarianism,” wrote the left-leaning website Quartz, which hailed Taylor even as it lamented that “ever fewer temperate souls are left to hold the middle ground in politics.” *New York Magazine’s* Jonathan Chait, a liberal, noted that Niskanen’s pro-big government ideas constitute “frontal assaults on the basic orientation of the libertarian political project.”

In early 2019, Niskanen hosted a conference in which Chait applauded the group’s attacks on conservatives as the future of the Republican Party. “The Niskanen Center is the one institution planning for what can follow after the cleansing fire,” he said, referring to an imaginary point in the near future when “today’s Republican Party is destroyed, rendered incapable of wielding power at the national level, and its governing philosophy discredited completely.”

Adoption of “Open Society” Theory. Ironically, Taylor’s new-found “alternative to ideology” is itself the ideology held by elite liberal globalists called the “open society.” If that sounds familiar, that is because billionaire George Soros made it famous with his handful of ultra-wealthy groups, including the Foundation to Promote Open Society, Open Society Policy Center, and Open Society Foundations.

The “open society” theory was envisioned by Karl Popper, a philosopher and former Marxist who advocated for social engineering. A 1994 obituary by the center-right magazine *Reason* called him an “anti-authoritarian” who was “not a doctrinaire libertarian.”

According to a recent conspectus published by the group intended for donors, Niskanen describes its *new* mission as “work[ing] to promote an open society both through active



Credit: Jot Ito. License: <https://bit.ly/3mMDoSd>.

Niskanen runs the Open Society Project, an anti-Trump attack group created in November 2016 with funding from eBay founder and liberal billionaire Pierre Omidyar (pictured above).

engagement in the war of ideas and direct engagement in the policymaking process.”

We are globalists who share progressives’ desire to robustly address economic and social inequality, liberals’ commitment to toleration and civil liberties, moderates’ embrace of empiricism rather than dogma, conservatives’ belief in the wealth-creating power of free markets, and libertarians’ skepticism about the ability of technocratic elites to solve complex economic and social problems.

Niskanen runs the Open Society Project, an anti-Trump attack group created in November 2016 with funding from eBay founder and liberal billionaire Pierre Omidyar. Niskanen claims the project’s “Meeting of the Concerned” led to the creation of Bill Kristol’s Republicans for the Rule of Law (also funded by Omidyar), which regularly launches ads accusing President Trump of “obstruct[ing] justice.”

Critically, the group identifies itself as an effective door for the Left to infiltrate the Right:

As an organization heavily staffed by those who have come out of the world of libertarianism, we have long-standing personal ties and credibility on the right. This is critical because the messenger is often more important than the message, and few who traffic in our arguments have any credibility with conservatives (the political audience that arguably needs to hear our arguments the most). . . .

Accordingly, we educate policy actors about climate science and directly confront climate skeptics; encourage Republicans to defend regulatory authority to address greenhouse gas emissions . . . and, above all, promote carbon taxation as the best federal response to climate risk.

Support for the Green New Deal. Taylor has even called himself “a friend” of the far-left activists pushing the Green New Deal, calling their cause “just” if “sometimes given to overstatement.” In a bizarre 11,000-word love letter to the movement, Taylor offers advice to climate change alarmists about how to avoid conservative criticism:

You are inadvertently confirming conservative suspicions that you are stoking fears about climate change as a convenient excuse to achieve your real objective: **dismantling capitalism as we know it and putting society on a wartime footing under the direction of avowed socialists** [emphasis added].

While that’s an unfair characterization of the motivations of most of the climate activists I know, “solution aversion” and the suspicion that environmentalists are fundamentally hostile to contemporary American society are two key factors fueling conservative opposition to climate action.

“The most important thing you’ve done right,” Taylor concluded, “is to elevate climate change to the top of the progressive agenda while making a strong moral case for action.”

Climate Change Lawsuits. The Niskanen Center has been tied to at least one climate-related lawsuit.

In April 2018, the City of Boulder, Colorado, and County of San Miguel, Colorado, filed a lawsuit against oil and natural gas companies ExxonMobil and Suncor, accusing the “fossil fuel-producing corporations” of harming the climate. The Colorado communities were represented in the lawsuit by a joint climate group which included Hannon Law Firm—a group that litigates environmental lawsuits and whose founder Kevin Hannon was chief outside legal counsel in the suit—the environmentalist nonprofit EarthRights International, and the Niskanen Center, which represented the plaintiffs pro bono.

Taylor and Niskanen chief counsel David Bookbinder co-authored a blog post in April 2018 entitled, “Oil companies should be held accountable for climate change.”

The climate litigators claimed that ExxonMobil and Suncor were culpable for over \$100 million in climate damages—

including wildfires, flooding, road maintenance, landscaping, and individuals work efficiency.

Two Cato Institute experts, Randal O’Toole and Robert Bradley Jr., individuals who had known William Niskanen, criticized the Niskanen Center’s involvement in the lawsuit as going directly against the memory of Niskanen and what he believed with regard to climate policy. They related William Niskanen’s belief that “the case for a global warming treaty is shockingly weak” and that he had “never bought into climate alarmism.”

Niskanen Center for Public Policy. The Niskanen Center for Public Policy is the 501(c)(4) lobbying arm of the Niskanen Center. Interestingly, the lobbying group received an IRS tax-exemption in February 2016 but appears to be all but dormant, reporting low revenues and almost no expenditures in 2017 (the latest available year). Little about the group is published online, and it does not have a website of its own.

Nevertheless, the group describes its mission in part as “developing and advocating for legislation, regulations, and government programs to improve the environment, protect natural resources, and stimulate the economy.” It remains unclear how much lobbying the group has actually done thus far.

The Conservative Case for a Carbon Tax

Arguing for a carbon tax has become a major priority of the Niskanen Center. In March 2015, the Niskanen Center released “The Conservative Case for a Carbon Tax,” a 28-page proposal authored by president Jerry Taylor. In it, Taylor argued that “conservatives should embrace a carbon tax” instead of debating the merits of catastrophic manmade climate change or global warming theory. The only alternative he allows is “command and control” regulation proposed by radicals on the Left, such as cap-and-trade bills and other onerous policies.

A carbon tax, Taylor wrote, should be passed “in return for elimination of EPA regulatory authority over greenhouse gas emissions, abolition of green energy subsidies and regulatory mandates, and offsetting tax cuts to provide for revenue neutrality.” The costs of a carbon tax would be “invisible” to energy consumers.

The Niskanen Center is a major proponent of a tax on carbon dioxide emissions. It has called for a tax on methane produced by agriculture (“especially the livestock sector”) as well as oil and natural gas. It supported California’s cap-and-trade program extension in 2016 but pushed for a carbon tax, which would supposedly make “California an even more competitive economic dynamo.”

Niskanen is credited with assisting then-Rep. Carlos Curbelo (R-FL) with introducing the carbon tax bill MARKET CHOICE Act (H.R. 6463) in 2018. The Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives rejected the bill, and the House later passed a resolution (H.Con.Res. 119) “expressing the sense of Congress that a carbon tax would be detrimental to the United States economy.”

In September 2019, Niskanen announced its support for the 2019 MARKET CHOICE Act, a carbon tax plan introduced by Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Francis Rooney (R-FL), Salud Carbajal (D-CA), and Scott Peters (D-CA).

Jerry Taylor has stated his support for a plan proposed by the Stanford Energy Modeling Forum, which would enact a \$65 per ton tax on carbon dioxide emissions by 2022, rising to \$296 per ton in 2045. Taylor has claimed that the total cost to the U.S. economy from this plan “would be less than 0.2 percent of GDP.”

“Taylor argued that conservatives should embrace a carbon tax” instead of debating the merits of catastrophic manmade climate change or global warming theory.

Taylor’s essentially costless estimate is, to be charitable, *optimistic*. To put it in perspective, the carbon tax proposed by Republican Rep. Carlos Curbelo (FL) in 2018 set a \$24 tax per ton of carbon dioxide starting in 2020—a level the center-right Competitive Enterprise Institute projected would raise the average household’s annual expenditures for gas and utilities by over \$1,000. Taylor’s preferred carbon tax is *nearly three times* larger than the rate proposed by Curbelo.

Even a \$20 per ton carbon tax would shrink the size of the economy by 0.8 percent, according to the right-leaning Tax Foundation, costing Americans 425,000 jobs and raising taxes by \$1.3 trillion over a decade.

Leadership and Staff

The leadership of the Niskanen Center includes a mix of libertarians, moderates, and environmentalists.

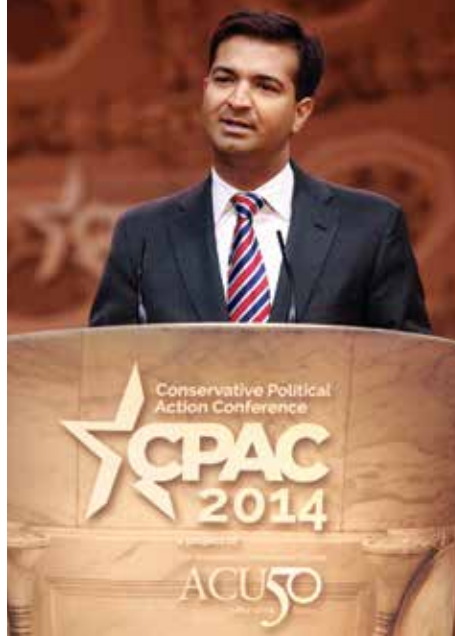
Niskanen Board of Directors. Jerome “Jerry” Taylor is the founding president of Niskanen Center, a position he has held since 2015. Before his 2014 split with the Cato Institute, Taylor worked as the group’s director of natural resources studies, assistant editor of its magazine *Regulation*, senior fellow, and finally vice president. Prior to that, Taylor worked as director for energy and environment at the center-right group American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). In 2018, Taylor received total compensation of \$233,464 as president of the Niskanen Center.

Taylor’s brother, James, is a senior fellow for environment and energy policy at the center-right Heartland Institute, a group that is skeptical of global warming theory. James Taylor has described a “‘revenue-neutral’ carbon tax [as] a costly myth.”

Besides Taylor, Niskanen’s board of directors includes Kathryn Washburn, wife of the late William Niskanen; sex industry entrepreneur Phil Harvey; investment adviser Robert Litterman; Niskanen vice president Joseph Coon; vice president for research Will Wilkinson; vice president for government affairs Andrew Mills; director of immigration Kristen de Pena; director of development David Osborne; and chief counsel David Bookbinder.

Phil Harvey is a philanthropist, population control advocate, and founder of DKT International, a nonprofit that sells low-cost contraceptives to the Third World (mostly condoms, oral and injectable contraceptives, and IUDs). The group is heavily funded by the left-wing Gates, Hewlett, Packard, and WestWind Foundations and receives funding from the United Nations Population Fund.

Harvey is also president of Adam & Eve (formerly Population Planning Associates), a North Carolina-based “porn powerhouse” that sells sex toys, condoms, and erotic media and produces pornographic films. In 1970, he used revenues from his sex industry retailer to form Population Services



Credit: Gage Skidmore. License: <https://bit.ly/38ox12a>.

Niskanen is credited with assisting then-Rep. Carlos Curbelo (R-FL) (pictured above at the 2014 Conservative Political Action Conference) with introducing the carbon tax bill MARKET CHOICE Act (H.R. 6463) in 2018.

International, a major international population control advocacy group. Harvey has donated at least \$50,000 to Niskanen.

Robert Litterman is a founding partner of Kepos Capital, a New York–based investment adviser. Prior to that, he worked for 23 years at Goldman Sachs, where he co-developed a notable asset allocation model. Litterman is a carbon tax advocate, arguing that carbon emitters should support carbon pricing policies in exchange for an end to carbon-related tort liability akin to the tobacco industry. The Litterman Family Foundation has donated at least \$160,000 to the Niskanen Center, as well as the left-wing groups Planned Parenthood, Environmental Defence, World Wildlife Fund, and Resources for the Future. (Litterman is a board member for World Wildlife Fund and Resources for the Future).

Niskanen chief counsel David Bookbinder is the former chief climate counsel to the Sierra Club, where he managed the group’s involvement in the 2007 U.S. Supreme Court case *Massachusetts v. EPA*. That case established the EPA’s authority to regulate “dangerous” greenhouse gas emissions under the Clean Air Act of 1970, even though the law itself had nothing to do with the climate. *Massachusetts v. EPA* gave the EPA the power to regulate virtually all emissions in the United States.

Prior to that, he litigated numerous cases for increased regulation in California, “which effectively imposed a moratorium on new coal-fired power plants,” brags Niskanen’s website.

Bookbinder, certainly no conservative, also claims he “led Sierra Club’s work on judicial nominations, including the filibusters” against the George W. Bush administration’s judicial appointments between 2003 and 2006. He was also involved as Niskanen’s counsel in the 2018 climate-related lawsuit against ExxonMobil and Suncor.



Niskanen board member Robert Litterman is a carbon tax advocate and a board member for the left-wing World Wildlife Fund and Resources for the Future.



According to its own internal documents, Niskanen is overwhelmingly funded by left-wing donors.

In addition, Bookbinder was a founding partner at the environmental consultancy Element VI Consulting, “where he offered advice and insights to organizations interested in U.S. climate policy.” Element VI Consulting has done work for the Niskanen Center, receiving \$151,691 for consulting services in 2015, making it the center’s largest listed independent contractor.

Niskanen Advisory Board. The Niskanen Center has an advisory board of 25 members. Notable members include failed 2016 presidential candidate Evan McMullin and his running mate, Mindy Finn. Both are founders of the anti-Trump group Stand Up Republic, whose funders include many of the same left-wing foundations as the Niskanen Center: Pierre Omidyar’s Democracy Fund, the Hewlett Foundation, and Silicon Valley Community Foundation. In addition, Jerry Taylor is a board member for Stand Up Republic.

George P. Shultz, another advisory board member, served as director of the Office of Management and Budget as well as Secretary of Labor, Treasury, and State Departments in the Reagan administration. He is chair of the Shultz-Stephenson Task Force on Energy Policy at the center-right Hoover Institution, based in Stanford University in California. Shultz is the co-author of a 2013 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed alongside University of Chicago economics professor Gary Becker calling for a “revenue-neutral carbon tax.” Shultz is an advisory board member for the pro-carbon tax group Citizens’ Climate Lobby.

The full Niskanen advisory board is listed below:

- Mindy Finn, Stand Up Republic
- Evan McMullin, Stand Up Republic
- George P. Shultz, Hoover Institution
- David Frum, Senior Editor of *The Atlantic*
- Yuval Levin, Editor of *National Affairs*
- Reihan Salam, Executive Editor of *National Review*
- Eli Lehrer, R Street Institute
- Eliot Cohen, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Relations
- Anat Admati, Stanford University

- Brandon Arnold, National Taxpayers Union
- Radley Balko, journalist and author
- Tom Nichols, author
- Virginia Postrel, author and columnist
- Stuart Butler, Brookings Institution
- William A. Galston, Brookings Institution
- Benjamin Wittes, Brookings Institution
- John H. Cochrane, Hoover Institution
- Tyler Cowen, Mercatus Center
- J. Bradford Delong, University of California at Berkeley
- Daniel Drezner, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University
- Jacob T. Levy, McGill University
- Alexander McCobin, Conscious Capitalism
- Mark S. Weiner, Rutgers University
- Justin Wolfers, University of Michigan
- Matt Zwolinski, University of San Diego

Funding

Most Niskanen funding appears to come from left-wing donors.

Donors Niskanen Center. Niskanen’s known funders are almost exclusively on the left, although it has received at least \$250,000 from the eco-Right group ClearPath. According to its own internal documents, Niskanen is overwhelmingly funded by left-wing donors, receiving grants from the Energy Foundation, Laura and John Arnold Foundation, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Linden Trust for Conservation, Claws Foundation, Alex C. Walker Educational and Charitable Foundation, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

Over \$6.5 million in grants to the Niskanen Center between 2015 and 2018 has been traced. It came overwhelmingly from left-wing foundations, including George Soros’s Foundation to Promote Open Society, the Hopewell Fund (part of the “dark money” network managed by Arabella

Advisors), the Hewlett Foundation, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation. Some of these grants bear descriptions which shed light on how the funds were meant to be used, including “climate change litigation” and “carbon tax advocacy.”

Since 2016, Niskanen has received at least \$2.75 million from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, a major funder of eco-Right groups which also funds the League of Conservation Voters Education Fund and the anti-fossil fuel group Oil Change International. In 2017 alone, Hewlett funding accounted for almost a *quarter* of Niskanen’s total annual revenues.

The Democracy Fund—private foundation of eBay founder Pierre Omidyar, a major liberal donor—has granted at least \$290,000 to the Niskanen Center and Niskanen Center for Public Policy since 2018.

Niskanen has received at least \$160,000 from the Litterman Family Foundation, the personal philanthropy of Niskanen Center board member Robert Litterman, an investment manager and carbon tax advocate who sits on the boards of the eco-Right group Climate Leadership Council, the World Wildlife Fund, and Resources for the Future—the last two are left-wing environmental groups that have received substantial donations from Litterman’s foundation. Litterman has also donated to the left-wing groups Environmental Defense, Climate Central, and Planned Parenthood.

Donors to Niskanen Center for Public Policy. The only known grants to the Niskanen Center for Public Policy, Niskanen’s 501(c)(4) lobbying arm, come from groups on the left.

According to a 2019 donation history, the Center for Public Policy reported three grants from funding groups for advocacy:

- George Soros’s Open Society Foundations: \$500,000 in 2017 for “Immigration and Foreign Policy Departments advocacy.”
- Pierre Omidyar’s Democracy Fund Voice: \$175,000 in 2018 for “Open Society Project advocacy.”
- Sall Family Foundation: \$200,000 in 2018 for “Climate policy advocacy.”

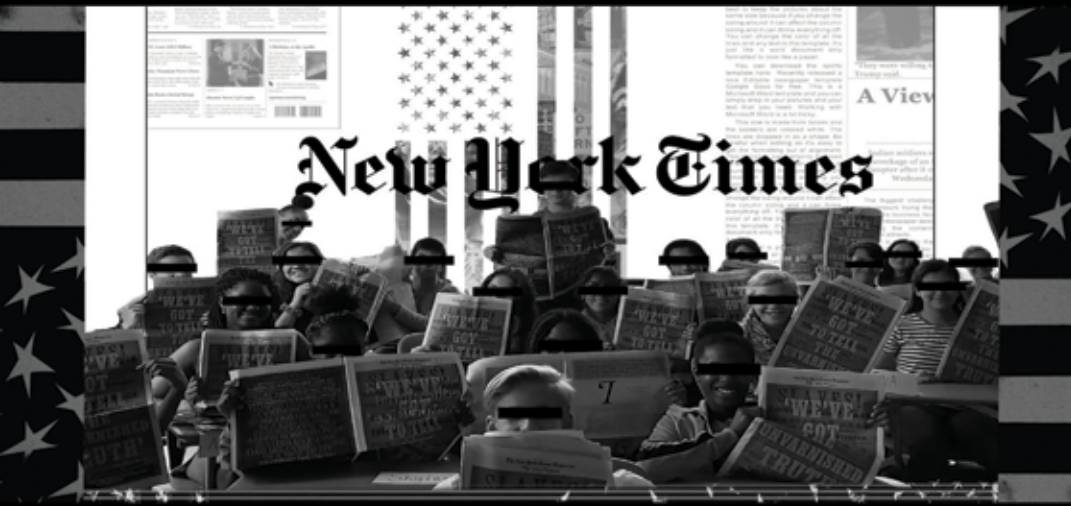
The left-wing Environmental Defense Action Fund reported a \$10,000 grant to the Niskanen Center for Public Policy in 2015. And in 2017, the Sustainable Markets Foundation granted \$54,000 to the Niskanen Center for Public Policy for “climate change.”

The Sustainable Markets Foundation provides administrative support and grants to far-left environmentalist groups, including 350.org and Frack Action, and is itself funded by left-wing foundations including the Rockefeller Family Fund, Tides Foundation, and TomKat Charitable Trust. The group has been accused of being a “dark money” organization by the center-right *Washington Free Beacon*. In 2019, it was discovered that the Sustainable Markets Foundation had paid an LLC, Our Next Economy, in independent contractor fees reportedly to support the Climate Investigations Center (CIC), a center-left environmental journalism group, instead of using grants. ■

Read previous articles from the Green Watch series online at CapitalResearch.org/category/green-watch/.

ARCHITECTS OF WOKE:

The 1619 Project's Fake History



STOKELY CARMICHAEL



& RACISM WITHOUT RACISTS

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK & THE ROMANCE OF REVOLUTIONARY TERROR



CRC's Architects of Woke series takes aim at far-left post-modernist and Marxist thinkers and activists responsible for the spread of identity politics on college campuses and in society at large.

The series is hosted and directed by award-winning filmmaker Rob Montz, whose online documentary work has attracted millions of views and coverage in major outlets, including *The Economist*, *USA Today*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and The Adam Carolla Podcast.

Subjects of the Architects of Woke include the fake history of the 1619 Project, the wildly popular radical socialist podcast *Chapo Trap House*, far-left political activist Howard Zinn, University of California at Berkeley feminist gender theorist Judith Butler, highly influential Marxist-Leninist philosopher Slavoj Žižek.

Watch the entire series at [DangerousDocumentaries.com](https://www.DangerousDocumentaries.com).



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SHELBY STEELE AND ELI STEELE DISCUSS WHAT KILLED MICHAEL BROWN?

By Joseph (Jake) Klein

Summary: Joseph (Jake) Klein interviews Shelby Steele and Eli Steele on their latest movie *What Killed Michael Brown?* and how liberalism has devastated the black community.

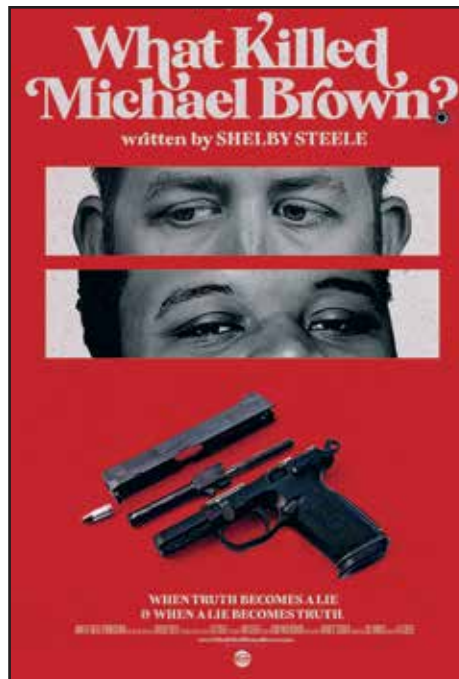
JOSEPH (JAKE) KLEIN: Hi everybody. I'm Jake Klein of the Capital Research Center. You might recognize my voice from a bunch of the animated videos on this channel. I am here with Shelby Steele and Eli Steele, who have a new film *What Killed Michael Brown?* You can find more about it at whatkilledmichaelbrown.com.

Shelby is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. In 2006, he received the Bradley Prize for his contributions to the study of race in America. And in 2004, he was awarded the National Humanities Medal. He has written five books including *White Guilt* and *The Content of Our Character*, which received the National Book Critics Circle Award. I've read *White Guilt*, and it's wonderful. I highly recommend it.

And Eli Steele is an award-winning filmmaker and graduate of Claremont McKenna College and Pepperdine University School of Public Policy. His career highlights include *How Jack Became Black*, *What's Bugging Seth?*, winner of 10 film festivals, and *Katrina*, an MTV network pilot, which won him the Breakthrough Filmmakers Award. *What Killed Michael Brown?* marks his first professional collaboration with his father, Shelby Steele.

So first question, how did you guys decide to come together and make this film together?

ELI STEELE: We always kind of wanted to make a movie together. I love the book *White Guilt*, and I always thought it would be a great movie, in a way, but it's kind of hard to



Credit: IMDb. License: <https://imdb.to/37CgZS>.

*The very title of Shelby and Eli Steele's important 2020 film *What Killed Michael Brown?* implies that the answer is not as simple as we might think. The film steps back and tackles the harder questions about what is going on with race in America today.*

the Selma of our time." And we were kind of like, "No, it's not." I mean Selma is a very real thing that happened, a very real fight against oppression. What happened in Ferguson was completely different. And so we wanted to make a movie that would sort of hold up a mirror to America and say, "This is what you did. This is what you created. And why do we do this?"

KLEIN: So, I guess that opens up to the big question of the film *What Killed Michael Brown?* The implication is that

film. And so we kind of, back and forth, tried to come up with the idea, tried to come up with some kind of platform we'd both be interested in.

And in 2014, when Michael Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson, that was sort of a transformative period, because for the first time we really saw two narratives come out of it. And one was not winning. Normally, you might have what my father calls the political truth, the false narrative, then the reality might come out, and then [false narrative] fades away. But that never happened. The false narrative became the dominant narrative of the shooting. And eventually, it became accepted by almost all the major institutions in America, through colleges, through corporations.

And we were curious, why did this happen? Why was there such a need to believe in this? And many ways Ferguson became the new Selma and people were using that phrase, "It's

Joseph (Jake) Klein is CRC's film and video producer and head of the media operations.

it's not as simple as we think it is. So what then, in short, without having to watch the whole film, what killed Michael Brown?

SHELBY STEELE: On the broadest level, what killed Michael Brown was the peculiar liberalism that came out of the 1960s. America had just, in 1964, passed the Civil Rights Bill. America had confessed its long, terrible collusion with racism. The men had owned up to slavery, owned up to Jim Crow segregation, owned up to racism in countless forms. It was, at least I believe, an extremely heroic moment. I think that admission, that confession in the mid-'60s was likely America's greatest moment as a nation—that it could actually own up and admit to that. So it was honorable in every way.

But when you confess, you put a sort of clout in the hand of other people [who] can always sort of hit you with it. They can say, "Well, you know you don't have the moral authority to support this argument, or whatever it is you're arguing for, because you did this, and by your own admission."



"The liberalism that came out of the 1960s . . . was very helpful to whites. It brought back a degree of moral authority. It did absolutely nothing for blacks."

—Shelby Steele

I think white America's been in that position ever since, of having to prove its innocence of racism from the 1960s on. I'm old. I grew up in segregation. I know it well. After the mid-'60s the government couldn't do enough—welfare expanded, the war on poverty came, Great Society, affirmative action, public housing, school busing, you name it. American couldn't do enough to win back its moral authority and, therefore, its legitimacy as a nation. It worked hard, and it wanted to do that.

So this liberalism was very helpful to whites. It brought back a degree of moral authority. It did absolutely nothing for blacks. It gave them public housing and then destroyed the black family in America. It gave them school busing. It tore up the entire American education system. It gave them welfare that did nothing more than breed dependency.

It's as though this liberalism was designed to destroy a people, rather than uplift a people. It created the world of public housing and, especially, bad public schools. Michael

Brown went to four public schools in four years. So it created a world that put Michael Brown in the position where, on an aimless, hot afternoon, he attacked a white cop and lost his life. So the event, the death of this young teenager was, as we argue, indirectly caused by the breakdown in black America that was the result of this liberalism that destroyed our family life, destroyed our value system, and created a black underclass. Michael was a part of that.

So ours is a critique of American culture during this period.

KLEIN: There's certainly a very controversial claim in there, which shouldn't necessarily be controversial given the facts. But it doesn't necessarily seem that everyone is aware of the facts, which are that Michael Brown charged a police officer and the police officer shot in self-defense. I think most people marching in the Black Lives Matter movement today probably would not recognize that narrative, even though there's been a lot of discussion of that in the years since this has happened. I mean, what do you think is going on there? Why is there still such a mistaken narrative in the minds of arguably the majority of Americans. I haven't looked at any polling, but it certainly seems like it could be that way. But why is it that potentially the majority of Americans are still mistaken about what actually happened there?

ELI STEELE: Right. I think it's probably be after, like my father was talking about, the '60s. When you came out of the '60s, you created this need to redeem America. So you create all these social constructs, ideologies. You put America on that path towards redemption. And white supremacy was nothing but a social construct that kept everybody in place: Black people are inferior, white people are superior. But [this] really kind of used the same tools for identity policy for today. And so we've come up with ideas like systemic racism, intersectionality, power differential. So we've created almost every possible explanation to reduce Americans to skin color. So somebody who adopts that way of thinking, all they need to see is white cop, black kid. That's it.

Just to give you an example, I was at the white privilege conference, and they were saying that this justice system needs to move from intent, like what goes on in the mind of the criminal, to impact. In other words, if it's a white cop who shoots a black kid, that's all you need to know. It's racism. And so they've adopted this very simplistic way of thinking. But if you see everything in race, then how can you ever move beyond race to a better place?

KLEIN: You open the film with a claim that race is never an end, but always a means, and that race has no role in human affairs. But to play devil's advocate, what I think Black Lives Matter activists might say—or even a large, large, large number of people out there—is that they don't want race

to matter either. That's the goal, but as long as there are still racists and institutional racism, just ignoring it they call color blindness and they mock that. They say it's wishful thinking and it won't actually make it go away. So how do you respond to that? Couldn't it be the case that there are still a bunch of racist cops out there? And then, aren't you calling just for us to ignore that? Or is there evidence to the contrary?

SHELBY STEELE: Well, no, I mean, I would never want to ignore racist cops. On the other hand, I'm not one to make a national issue out of policing—bad, racist policing—when very little of it actually exists to begin with. But mainly, if you look at what Black Lives Matter and other groups like that are saying, they all say the same thing. They all come from a belief that came out of the '60s. Again, I hate to keep going back to the '60s, but that's where we think things started that we're dealing with today.

When America admitted its mistake, its evil, its wrongdoing and had to then redeem itself, that had the effect of taking the victimization that blacks experienced, the racism that they experience. And if they could claim racism, they could get the larger society to give them things, to change, to pass new laws, to create new programs—as we very quickly did. And to create what we call today the grievance industry of minorities who, in a sense, constantly claim victimization, claim racism, so they can manipulate the larger society.

In other words, racism becomes a means to power. It is power in itself. So Black Lives Matter and other groups like that will fight you to the end if you say, “You know, blacks are not as remotely as victimized as they used to be.”

White Americans made a lot of moral progress. There isn't, literally, as much racism anywhere, and I can testify to the truth of that having been born and raised in a segregated America and seeing the change, which stuns me still. I have segregation flashbacks, I like to call them, all the time.

So victimization is something now that black militant groups are clinging to because they sense that's where their power is. And it is a tragedy because then it infuses the younger generation. It infuses them with a black identity that, as I call, is victim-focused. I'm black because I'm a victim. I'm a victim; that's synonymous with being black. I'm not a free man. Don't say I'm free. Want to make a Black Lives Matter person angry, tell him he's free.

I say, you're free all the time. If you grew up and knew what real segregation was, you would know you're free. You can be the president if you want. You can do anything. But they will fight you until the end, tooth and nail, to argue that they're not free. Well, what a sad, ironic, and tragic circum-



Credit: 4WardEver UK. License: <https://bit.ly/2W1kpPX>.

“In 2014, when Michael Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson, that was sort of a transformative period, because for the first time we really saw two narratives come out of it. . . . The false narrative became the dominant narrative of the shooting.”
—Eli Steele.

stance for a group to find itself in that's trying to overcome four centuries of victimization: to then find themselves gaining power by clinging to the victimization, by exploiting it, by using it to manipulate their way through society.

So whites, on the other hand, don't really know much. They look at this, and they're confused. They know they're not racist as they used to be, but they don't have any confidence in themselves. They're not allowed to say that. And so, we have this stalemate where no one can really tell. What we try to do in this film is dive into the center of all of that, and Michael Brown was, again, a tragic figure, but you see those forces at work in his fate, in the tragedy of his fate.

KLEIN: I'd love to dive in on the psychology of that, because it seems to me to be the case that there is definitely an activist class, where it is power. They want to use this to achieve certain ends, but I wonder to what extent the desire for power is broadly representative of people that believe and push for these narratives and are seemingly trying to make the world a better place. And the people that want power are trying to make the world a better place, too. They're just wrong. Right?

SHELBY STEELE: And whites don't know they're being hustled. I grew up in segregation, in an all-black, segregated community, segregated schools. There was no need to give me a talk. The fact that you now have to give kids a talk to let them know. All you're doing is infusing them with fear and



“If you’re black, the way you gesture your identity, is to claim victimization, claim that racism is systemic. It’s everywhere. It’s institutional. It’s structural. It’s just ubiquitous as the air itself.”

—Shelby Steele

anxiety. You should give them a talk to tell them how free they are, what a blessing freedom is, how hard their people worked to win their freedom. But to sit a young kid down and say, “Oh, you’re going to run into this and it’s going to be hard for you, and you’re going to be overwhelmed.” This is suicidal. We’re killing off the spirit, the courage to go out in the world and make the world your oyster. Find yourself.

KLEIN: I completely hear and agree with what you’re saying there. I don’t think victimhood, when it’s not actually present, is psychologically healthy. But, nonetheless, it seems to be the case that the parents that are worried about having to have that talk with their kids, they’re not worried about broad societal power in that moment.

SHELBY STEELE: They are.

KLEIN: Oh, you think so?

SHELBY STEELE: I think so. I think it’s a part of the collective experience, the collective identity. If you’re black, the way you gesture your identity, is to claim victimization, claim that racism is systemic. It’s everywhere. It’s institutional. It’s structural. It’s just ubiquitous as the air itself. Because as you extend racism, this evil, what blacks are really doing is expanding their territory of entitlement. They’re saying, “You don’t just owe me for an isolated incident of a tragedy like Michael Brown. You owe me for systemic racism, so you’re in debt to me. And I’m owed, and I’m looking for preferences, I’m looking to be treated that way, to be offered things. I want entitlements.”

And so, we take our own history, the tragedy of our history and it’s all the victimization we endured, and again, we turn it into a hustle. We try to shake down the larger society. And we’re good at it. We’ve pretty much taken over education in America. Education is now taught from the point of view of black victimization. And whites are saying they don’t know what to do. They’re confused, they don’t see they’re being had.

ELI STEELE: In my own life, I’ve been pulled over by the police just because I fit the profile of some robbery or something that’s just happened. I’ve also had two separate incidents where the police pulled guns on me, one of them on the south side of Chicago—I almost got shot. Which—

interestingly, when I tell that story—because I’m deaf, some people in the deaf community want me to turn that story into some story of a large victimization story. And part of me is like, well those incidents were almost like a perfect storm of things that I almost could fault the police officer. I mean, usually, when they find out that I’m deaf, they usually are stunned, and you can see the relief on their face. They had no idea. But they were trying to communicate with me or something like that.

But my point is that the power is to turn this—whatever power we have in the deaf community—is to turn that into some kind of a political coin and exploit that into something bigger. But then, what happens if I do that? I become trapped in that. I become the symbol for that victimization, and it comes at a personal cost to me. And then, I chose to take the point of view that, yes, that was tragedy. Yeah, it scared the crap out of me, but thank god the police officer was well-trained. They did not fire. They did not make a mistake. And I’m thankful for that. But it’s really interesting, because the way they feel it should go affects how you live your life.

KLEIN: I think that there’s multiple types of power that it would be useful to disambiguate. I think, when I hear you talking about power, it’s about people owing the community things. Right? So let’s call that, just for the sake of conversation right now, policy power. But I think there’s another type of power that might be relevant in this, which is psychological power, one’s own self-image. And I want to ask you about this because I grew up in the Jewish-American community, and what I found there, when I was growing up, was a lot of people complaining about anti-Semitism who I know never experienced anti-Semitism once in their life. I happen to think existing online anti-Semitism has gotten a little worse in the last couple years, but it’s still negligible. And certainly when I was growing up, none of my friends or family friends who were complaining about anti-Semitism were actually experiencing any.

But I don’t, that often, see Jewish-Americans asking for reparations or policy power sort of things. But when I tried to figure out what was going on there, the best explanation that I could come up with was it was sort of a search for

a psychological power. A sense that, if anything goes wrong in my life—not anything, but certain things—I can blame it on my identity, and then I don't have to feel bad about it. And then, when I do achieve things, I can feel a sense of I overcame something real hard, and I can feel even more rewarded mentally for it.

SHELBY STEELE: You got it. That's my work.

KLEIN: Do you think that's part of it, as well? And how would you weigh those against each other?

ELI STEELE: It should be from my father, just a quick thing is this huge lesson from the Holocaust. The best revenge is the life best lived. So if you want revenge over Hitler, if you want revenge, you live your life and you live your life the way you're supposed to. You become somebody. My grandfather, real quickly, was in the Lower East Side, probably two or three years after the war, and he went into this tenement and all were crying. They were still crying over family members that they had lost, and how much better life would be if those people were here. And so my grandfather basically said, "What are you crying about? What good is that going to do for you? You need to go to work. You need to do something now." And so, that's what he did, and almost everybody in that room died middle class or better. But they had to psychologically accept that they will never get justice.

SHELBY STEELE: Eli's grandfather was a Holocaust survivor. Great man, learned a lot from him about this use of victimization as power. The tragedy of post-'60s liberalism in America is that we allowed, in our desire to redeem ourselves from the past, we thought we'd pay off victimization. And so, it became power to minorities. And so they claim victimization all the time, everywhere, at this point. And within universities, within corporations, there are HR departments that now insist on employees and so forth, as victims. And it's transformed the curriculum in most universities. So it's not an idle power; it's extremely powerful.

Last year they eliminated the SAT at University of California for admissions because of the racial disparities in performance and so forth, so almost in honor of this victimization. Well, a society that keeps responding that way is going to



Credit: Renair Gaither. <https://bit.ly/2KTP06G>

"Just think about the 'defund the police.' If you went into Ferguson and told them that we want to take away the police, what do you think they would say? No, they don't want to get rid of the police. So that's what Black Lives Matter is. It's all these big ideas, but there's no real grounding in reality." —Eli Steele.

destroy itself, going to eat [itself] up. My argument is, that if you come from a group, as I do, that had four centuries of oppression, you don't need people to lower standards for you, you need people now to raise them. Ask us to perform at the same level or higher than everybody else. So this is, again, the perversion, the corruption that we try to get to in this film, and Michael Brown is a great example of it because the hunger of so many people in America who rush into this little town, Ferguson, and get a piece of that action, get a piece of that power, was dramatic, a dramatic, vivid display of this corruption that I think now threatens. You see it years later in the George Floyd demonstrations and so forth. I'm sure we'll see it again.

KLEIN: Well, let's talk about the George Floyd stuff real quick before we wrap up. Well, first of all, this film is coming out at the perfect time, because of what happened this year, as tragic as it is. I'm glad that we have this film to think about in the wake of it. So we put out, on our YouTube channel, a video about the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of the events with George Floyd and all the protests that happened in the summer. We did it with our mutual friend, Bob Woodson; he narrated that video for us. And it goes through all the things that Black Lives Matter thinks, but you don't always hear in the protests, but they'll say very openly on their websites that police brutality isn't their only

or main cause. They want to abolish capitalism. They praise Fidel Castro. They want to abolish police and prisons. They want to replace the nuclear family with communal child raising, like they had in the early Soviet Union or on Israeli kibbutzes, both of which were very failed experiments.

Yet, after the events with Michael Brown and after the events with George Floyd, we see this organization and this movement rising to insane heights. I mean, we listed at the end of our video, all the major corporations that gave money to the official Black Lives Matter organization even though they support all that stuff. And I mean, you wouldn't believe it. The Pokemon company supports Black Lives Matter financially. That's nuts.

SHELBY STEELE: Because they want their imprimatur of racial innocence.

KLEIN: Do you think that most of the people that are being big activists on this cause right now, do they know about all the stuff that Black Lives Matter actually supports? Or do they know, and they just don't care?

ELI STEELE: Well, now some of them, one of them said, "Did you know that the police began the slave patrol?" But the point is, that person never knew that. So when you're giving new pieces of information to that person, they just blow it way up and they conflate it, 200 years and flatten that into every cop is a direct descendant of slave patrol. So that's the sort of the naivete in the way they're thinking.

Just think about the "defund the police." If you went into Ferguson and told them that we want to take away the police, what do you think they would say? Think of the place where Michael Brown was shot. No, they don't want to get rid of the police. The crime is up and everything after Michael Brown was shot. So that's what Black Lives Matter is. It's all these big ideas, but there's no real grounding in reality.

SHELBY STEELE: The one thing that I think is important and stuff that I've written a lot about that I think is relevant here is white guilt. White guilt, as a phenomenon, I think is very much underrated in American life. I think it's extremely powerful. White guilt, in a sense, makes room for Black Lives Matter and other groups like that that are trading on their victimization. White guilt is the other side of that. Corporate America, Amazon just gave Black Lives Matter \$100 million.



Credit: simone.brunozzi. License: <https://bit.ly/37C0Hd0>.

"Amazon just gave Black Lives Matter . . . \$10 million. Wow. What for? Who gets that money? What is it? Well, it's white guilt money, because what Amazon wants to do is say, 'We're not racist, and \$10 million is nothing to us.'"—Shelby Steele.

ELI STEELE: \$10 million.

SHELBY STEELE: Excuse me, \$10 million. Wow. What for? Who gets that money? What is it? Well, it's white guilt money, because what Amazon wants to do is say, "We're not racist, and \$10 million is nothing to us." And so, Black Lives Matter then takes \$10 million and has a good time with it. Our culture has come to the place in America where we basically exist to shake down America. Our future in getting ahead, we're not going to get ahead through innovation and hard work, we're going to get ahead through shake down. So they love black victimization, they love that Michael Brown was killed by a white cop. It's money in the bank for them. Well, that's the race as a means to power. Race as to means to power for whites who then can say, "I'm not guilty anymore." And race as a means to power to blacks who say, "I'm more entitled than I ever was, and there are not enough reparations." There never will be.

KLEIN: So then, for the average person or also one of these corporations that are giving money to this explicitly communist movement, would you say that it's not necessarily that they don't know or that they know and don't care, but it's that maybe they don't know and they don't care to find out?

SHELBY STEELE: That's pretty good. I think that's right on the money. They don't care to find out. They don't want to find out. That's why Amazon canceled us. They're not saying it's not true. They just don't want it out there. Thankfully they've retreated, so I give them credit for that.



“If you reject Black Lives Matter . . . you’re Uncle Tom, you’re a coon. If you accept them, then you get that badge that you’re not a racist, that you’re being an anti-racist.”

—Eli Steele

KLEIN: I didn’t even think to ask you guys about that.

SHELBY STEELE: We’re up against that denial. Both sides are trying to say, “Don’t look at the real us.”

ELI STEELE: We have nothing to offer Amazon. We have nothing to offer Amazon, if you think about that. Our vision, our view, it offers nobody anything except basically a reality check. It tells you this is what happened, here we are. Black Lives Matter offers you two things, animus or you get racial forgiveness. So if you reject Black Lives Matter, you’re on the other side, you’re Uncle Tom, you’re a coon. If you accept them, then you get that badge that you’re not a racist, that you’re being an anti-racist. That’s an enormous power to have. And we, because of our position, we don’t offer anybody anything, so that’s why people just ignore us and walk over us. So that’s enormous psychological power that Black Lives Matter has, and any black has.

SHELBY STEELE: We want Americans to stop allowing themselves to be blackmailed.

KLEIN: A lot of our viewers might be familiar with the background. Do you want to tell us what exactly happened with Amazon?

ELI STEELE: We wanted to get the film out before the election because we figured that race would be a discussion. And Amazon—all the platforms, iTunes and so forth—has a shorter window, two or three weeks. So we submit it, and after two days, we were put into content review. And basically, the criteria for that are four things, which is offensive content and then three other things, like public domain, things that we’d never qualify or fit into. There’s really no reason to put us into that. They held us in content review for quite a long time, then on October 13, we got a letter from Amazon that basically said, “Your documentary has been rejected. It does not qualify for resubmission,” and to kind of put the lock on everything, “You cannot appeal.” So it was a 300 percent rejection.

Then most Americans, if an opportunity closes, you look for somebody else, so we moved on. We just said, “Okay, forget it,” and we went onto Vimeo, or whatever it’s called, and got the film on there. While we were doing that we had massive publicity with the *Wall Street Journal*, Fox News, and

National Review and several other publications that came to our defense and raised our cry over why we had been canceled by Amazon. I’m sure once you see the movie, you’re not going to see any quality issues with the film, and you’ll say, “Why had we been rejected?”

Then on Friday, Amazon puts the film on the platform, without notifying any of us. And so, you can’t do that, because once you say no, you forfeit all rights to the property, to the intellectual property. So basically, you’re putting it up there and taking 50 percent and I had no idea. So we issued... our lawyers told us to have a cease and desist and take it down. And so they did. They did this on Sunday. And then on Tuesday they reached out again, and we had a conversation, we exchanged emails, and basically I told my side of the story, they said their side of the story. They’re a corporation so they’re never going to admit what happened. But they admitted, basically, that they need to improve things on their side, the way the whole process works.

And I remain convinced that the only possible explanation for why we, of all the films, were pulled into content review was politics. I mean we have a title that’s called *What Killed Michael Brown?* Oh, and then Amazon claimed that they sent a letter by mistake. That’s a pretty big mistake to make. That’s too many coincidences, too many things. Like one coincidence, maybe, but not two or three. And so obviously that leads me to believe that it’s really political. But it shows the power of the voice. We have a lot of fans, customers calling Amazon and leaving messages. At first, I was like, “Yeah, that’s really going to have an impact.” But then once I started getting the emails and seeing on Twitter, seeing on Facebook, and I was like, “Oh wow, okay. These people really know that people are calling and protesting.” So now we’re on Amazon, and it’s been a great platform. I mean, it’s a huge platform. It’s the only way we could get the message out.

SHELBY STEELE: So we had our moment of glory. Our David and Goliath. We were David for a moment.

ELI STEELE: I made the film in my bedroom. I live in a small apartment. I get off my bed. I walk like two steps and make the film. I edit it. We communicate over FaceTime and then we have to all of a sudden go to war with Amazon.

KLEIN: Well, anytime they do something like that, they always call it a mistake. When we get into issues with YouTube or any other social media companies and then we have to put pressure on them. It's always, "Oh, it was a mistake. We didn't mean to do it." Every single time. Luckily for you guys you had the *Wall Street Journal* on your side, and you have Shelby who has a lot of recognition in the public and can go out and get attention. And you have the Streisand effect, where the harder they try to bury something, the more people just want to go and see it. So you guys are the winners.

ELI STEELE: But imagine if I didn't have my father. What power would I have? That's what's so damaging about Amazon, because I think they underestimated us. They didn't really understand the leverage that we could bring. But that's very damaging to artistry because the whole point of an artist is to go where other people don't want to go. But why would you spend two and a half years making a movie, if I'm not going to be able to platform it? That's why it's a huge issue. And if we had the fear in the beginning, "You know what? It'd be too controversial for Amazon." Well, then you would never have a film of public record that opposes the popular narrative.

KLEIN: Yeah. It's the same thing, we get our content censored, they'll always fix it for us, but I want to keep fighting, because what if I didn't have a known organization with a budget behind me, what if I was just some independent content producer? We'd never be able to get anything done.

Okay, I know we ran a little bit over time, I had a bunch of other questions I wanted to ask you guys, Eli, do you want to remind people where they can see the film? Anything else you want them to know about it?

ELI STEELE: The best place to see the film or get all the information is whatkilledmichaelbrown.com. Everything's there.

KLEIN: All right. Thank you, guys, so much. It's a really great film. Definitely go to that website. Watch it. Thank you so much.

SHELBY STEELE: Thank you so much for having us and good luck to you in your endeavors. ■

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