

THE CHRONICLE REVIEW

# How Right-Wing Billionaires Infiltrated Higher Education

Chronicle Review illustration by Scott Seymour, original image by Randy Lyhus

By Jane Mayer FEBRUARY 12, 2016 PREMIUM

If there was a single event that galvanized conservative donors to try to wrest control of higher education in America, it might have been the uprising at Cornell University on April 20, 1969. That afternoon, during parents' weekend at the Ithaca, N.Y., campus, some 80 black students marched in formation out of the student union, which they had seized, with their clenched fists held high in black-power salutes. To the shock of the genteel Ivy League community, several were brandishing guns. At the head of the formation was a student who called himself the "Minister of Defense" for Cornell's Afro-American Society. Strapped across his chest, Pancho Villa-style, was a sash-like bandolier studded with bullet cartridges. Gripped nonchalantly in his right hand, with its butt resting on his hip, was a glistening rifle. Chin held high and sporting an Afro, goatee, and eyeglasses reminiscent of Malcolm X, he was the face of a drama so infamous it was regarded for years by conservatives such as David Horowitz as "the most disgraceful occurrence in the history of American higher education."

John M. Olin, a multimillionaire industrialist, wasn't there at Cornell, which was his alma mater, that weekend. He was traveling abroad. But as a former Cornell trustee, he could not have gone long without seeing the [iconic photograph](#) of the armed protesters. What came to be known as "the Picture" quickly ricocheted around the world, eventually going on to win that year's Pulitzer Prize.

Traveling almost as fast was the news that Cornell's administrators had quickly capitulated to the demands of the black militants, rather than risk a bloody confrontation. Under duress, the university's president had promised to accelerate plans to establish an independent black-studies program at Cornell, as well as to investigate the burning of a cross outside a building in which several black female students lived. And to the deep consternation of many conservative faculty members and students on campus, the president also agreed to grant full amnesty to the protesters, some of whom were facing previous disciplinary proceedings following an earlier uprising in which they had reportedly flung books from the shelves of Cornell's library, denouncing the works as "not relevant" to the black experience.

By all accounts, the confrontation was especially distressing to Olin. Cornell's library was one of four buildings on the Cornell campus bearing his family's name. Both he and his father had graduated from the university and had been proud and generous donors. Almost worse than the behavior of the protesters, from his standpoint, was the behavior of Cornell's president, James A. Perkins, a committed liberal who had gone out of his way to open the university's doors to inner-city minority students and now seemed to be bending the curriculum and lowering disciplinary standards to placate them.

## **It was an attempted takeover, but instead of waging it with bandoliers and rifles, Olin chose money as his weapon.**

"The catastrophe at Cornell inspired Olin to take his philanthropy in a bold, new direction," according to John J. Miller, whose authorized biography, *A Gift of Freedom*, provides a treasure trove of original research on Olin's life and legacy. Olin "saw very clearly that students at Cornell, like those at most major universities, were hostile to businessmen and to business enterprise, and indeed had begun to question the ideals of the nation itself," a memo from his foundation recounts.

As a result, according to Miller, instead of continuing to direct the bulk of his charitable contributions to hospitals, museums, and other standard patrician causes, as he had in the early years after he set up the John M. Olin Foundation in 1953, Olin embarked on a radical new course. He began to fund an ambitious offensive to reorient the political slant of American higher education to the right.

His foundation aimed at the country's most elite universities, the Ivy League and its peers, cognizant that these institutions were the incubators of those who would hold future power. If these young cadres could be trained to think more like him, then he

and other donors could help secure the country's political future. It was an attempted takeover, but instead of waging it with bandoliers and rifles, he chose money as his weapon.

By the time the John M. Olin Foundation spent itself out of existence in 2005, as called for in its founder's will, it had spent about half of its total assets of \$370 million bankrolling the promotion of free-market ideology and other conservative ideas on the country's campuses. In doing so, it molded and credentialed a whole new generation of conservative graduates and professors. "These efforts have been instrumental in challenging the campus left — or more specifically, the problem of radical activists' gaining control of America's colleges and universities," Miller concluded in a 2003 pamphlet published by the Philanthropy Roundtable, an organization run for conservative philanthropists.

"These guys, individually and collectively, created a new philanthropic form, which was movement philanthropy," said Rob Stein, a progressive political strategist, speaking of the Olin foundation and a handful of other private foundations that funded the creation of a conservative counter-intelligentsia during this period. "What they started is the most potent machinery ever assembled in a democracy to promote a set of beliefs and to control the reins of government."

#### ADVERTISEMENT

Stein was so impressed that he went on to try to build a liberal version of the model. Each side would argue that the other had more money and more influence, depending on how broadly they defined the rival camp. But beginning in the 1970s, the left felt hard-pressed to match the far-ranging propagation of ideology pioneered by a few enterprising donors on the right.

There is little doubt that the Cornell uprising radicalized Olin's philanthropy, but the official account citing this as the key to his thinking is incomplete. The protest took place in 1969, and Olin didn't begin to transform his foundation into an ideological instrument aimed at "saving the free enterprise system," as his lawyer put it, until four years later, in the spring of 1973. On closer inspection, it appears that there were additional factors involved that shed less flattering light on his motivations.

**F**ounded by Olin's father, Franklin, in 1892, the Olin Corporation had begun in

East Alton, Ill., as a manufacturer of blasting powder for coal miners but expanded into making small arms and ammunition. By 1973, the Olin Corporation was

embroiled in multiple serious controversies over its environmental practices, undermining its reputation, threatening its revenues, and ensnaring the company in expensive litigation. It was against this backdrop of serious clashes with the increasingly robust regulatory state that John Olin directed his lawyer to enlist his fortune in the battle to defend corporate America. As he put it, "My greatest ambition now is to see free enterprise reestablished in this country. Business and the public must be awakened to the creeping stranglehold that socialism has gained here since World War II."

At first, the foundation funneled money into the same conservative think tanks that Richard Mellon Scaife and Joseph Coors, a scion of the archconservative Colorado-based Coors brewery family, were supporting: the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hoover Institution, the think tank located on Stanford University's campus.

But soon John Olin's focus diverged. Perhaps because of his upset over Cornell, his foundation became uniquely centered on transforming academe. As he wrote in a private letter to the president of Cornell, he regarded the campus as overrun by scholars "with definite left-wing attitudes and convictions." Olin noted, "It matters little to me whether the economic development is classified as Marxism, Keynesianism, or whatnot." He said he regarded "liberalism" and "socialism" as "synonymous." All of these academic trends, he asserted, needed "very serious study and correction."

To get his bearings, Olin's labor lawyer, Frank O'Connell, contacted a handful of other private conservative foundations. He sought advice from colleagues at the Koch and Scaife foundations, as well as a few others on the right such as the Earhart Foundation and the Smith Richardson Foundation, which was funded by the Vicks VapoRub fortune. George Pearson, who was running the Charles G. Koch Foundation at that point, guided O'Connell, assigning him a free-market reading list that included [Hayek's essay](#) "The Intellectuals and Socialism." Hayek's point was emphatic: To conquer politics, one must first conquer the intellectuals. O'Connell recalled, "It was like a home-study course."

The fledgling right-wing foundations were also studying their establishment counterparts during this period, particularly the giant Ford Foundation. By the late 1960s, Ford was pioneering what its head, McGeorge Bundy, a former dean at Harvard and national security adviser to the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, called "advocacy philanthropy." Ford was, for instance, pouring money into the environmental movement, funding the Environmental Defense Fund and the Natural Resources Defense Council. By supporting public-interest litigation, it showed conservatives how philanthropy could achieve large-scale change through the courts

while bypassing the democratic electoral process, just as the early critics of private foundations had feared.

## **'What they started is the most potent machinery ever assembled in a democracy to promote a set of beliefs and to control the reins of government.'**

In 1977, Olin raised his foundation's stature by choosing William Simon as its president. Simon was a social acquaintance of Olin's from East Hampton, where they both had beach houses, and Olin described Simon's thinking as "almost identical with mine." While Olin kept a low profile, however, Simon loved the spotlight, the hotter the better. As William Voegeli, who was program officer at the Olin foundation from 1988 to 2003, recalled, Simon was like Alice Longworth's description of her father, Theodore Roosevelt. "He wanted to be the bride at every wedding, and the corpse at every funeral."

Simon had been energy czar and later Treasury secretary under Presidents Nixon and Ford and was a famously intemperate critic of those he considered "stupid." This large category included liberals, radicals, and moderate members of his own Republican Party. Like Olin, he was incensed by the expansion of the regulatory state. He especially detested environmentalists and other self-appointed guardians of the public interest, describing them as the "New Despots." In his 1978 manifesto, *A Time for Truth*, he wrote, "Since the 60's, the vast bulk of regulatory legislation passed by congress ... [has] been largely initiated by a powerful new lobby that goes by the name of the Public Interest movement."

### ADVERTISEMENT

Simon disparaged these "college-educated idealists" who claimed to be working for "the well being of 'consumers,' the 'environment,' 'minorities,'" and other nonmaterial causes, accusing them of wanting to "expand the police powers of the state over American producers." He challenged their purity. Noting that they claimed to care little for money, he accused them of being driven by another kind of self-interest. Quoting his colleague Irving Kristol, the neoconservative intellectual, he charged that these usurpers wanted "the power to shape our civilization." That power, he argued, should belong exclusively to "the free market."

Simon's hatred and suspicion of the liberal elite approached Nixonian levels in his 1980 sequel manifesto, *A Time for Action*. He claimed that a "secret system" of

academics, media figures, bureaucrats, and public-interest advocates ran the country. Simon warned that unless businessmen fought back, "Our freedom is in dire peril."

Simon's foreboding, like that of Olin, is somewhat hard to fathom given that both men had reached pinnacles of American power and wealth. They were both millionaires many times over, with more properties, possessions, titles, honors, and accomplishments than they could easily count. Both men were born into privilege. Simon was chauffeured to grade school, and his family was so wealthy he likened his parents to the carefree and careless characters in F. Scott Fitzgerald's fiction.

Nonetheless, he regarded himself proudly as self-made. His father evidently lost his mother's fortune, motivating Simon to make his own. On Wall Street, he became a hugely successful partner at Salomon Brothers, where he was an early leader in the lucrative new craze for leveraged buyouts. But what neither Olin nor Simon had was influence over the next generation. "We are careening with frightening speed towards collectivism," Simon warned.

Only an ideological battle could save the country, in Simon's view. "What we need is a counter-intelligentsia. ... [It] can be organized to challenge our ruling 'new class' — opinion makers," Simon wrote. "Ideas are weapons — indeed the only weapons with which other ideas can be fought." He argued, "Capitalism has no duty to subsidize its enemies." Private and corporate foundations, he said, must cease "the mindless subsidizing of colleges and universities whose departments of politics, economics and history are hostile to capitalism." Instead, they "must take pains to funnel desperately needed funds to scholars, social scientists and writers who understand the relationship between political and economic liberty," as he put it. "They must be given grants, grants, and more grants in exchange for books, books, and more books."

Under Simon's guidance, the Olin foundation tried to fund the new "counter-intelligentsia." At first, it tried supporting little-known colleges where conservative ideas — and money — were welcome. But Simon and his associates soon realized that this was a losing strategy. If the Olin foundation wanted impact, it needed to infiltrate prestigious universities, especially the Ivy League.

The man who put his mark on the Olin foundation more than its namesake, or even Simon, was its executive director, Michael Joyce, a fierce former liberal who had become an acolyte of Kristol's. A friend of Joyce's said that he believed philanthropy was about power and that those with great fortunes needed political capos like him to tell them how to wield it. Joyce was a brawler who wanted to take on America's liberal establishment, not just supplement it in some milquetoast way. In the words of Ralph Benko, a libertarian blogger for *Forbes*, "Joyce was a true radical. He was inspired by Antonio Gramsci. He wanted to effect radical transformation."

In Miller's view, Joyce was "an intellectual among activists, and an activist among intellectuals. He understood how the world of ideas influenced the real world." Joyce was characteristically more blunt. "My style," he said, "was the style of the toddler and the adolescent: fight, fight, fight, rest, get up, fight, fight, fight. No one ever accused me of being pleasant. I made a difference. It was acknowledged by friend and foe."

Joining Joyce was James Piereson, a thoughtful, soft-spoken neoconservative whose path to the Olin foundation had also run through Irving Kristol. Piereson had befriended the Kristol family at the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught government and political theory alongside Irving's son, Bill. Both had felt marginalized by their more liberal peers. Having closely observed America's academic intelligentsia, Piereson concluded that the foundation needed to "penetrate" the most elite institutions "because they were emulated by other colleges and universities of lesser stature." As Hillel Fradkin, who also worked at the Olin foundation, put it, "The only way you're going to change the debate in this country is by looking to those schools. Giving money to conservative outposts won't get much done."

What emerged was a strategy they called the "beachhead" theory. The aim, as Piereson later described it in an [essay](#) offering advice to fellow conservative philanthropists, was to establish conservative cells, or "beachheads," at "the most influential schools in order to gain the greatest leverage." The formula required subtlety, indirection, and perhaps even some misdirection.

#### ADVERTISEMENT

The key, Piereson explained, was to fund the conservative intelligentsia in such a way that it would not "raise questions about academic integrity." Instead of trying to earmark a chair or dictate a faculty appointment, both of which he noted were bound to "generate fierce controversy," he suggested that conservative donors look for like-minded faculty members whose influence could be enlarged by outside funding. In time, such a professor could administer an expanded program. But Piereson warned that it was "essential for the integrity and reputation of the programs that they be defined not by ideological points of view."

To overtly acknowledge "pre-ordained conclusions" would doom a program. Instead of saying the program was designed to "demonstrate the falsity of Marxism" or to promote "free enterprise," he advised that it was better to "define programs in terms of fields of study, [like the] John M. Olin Fellowships in Military History." He wrote, "Often a program can be given a philosophical or principled identity by giving it the name of an important historical figure, such as the James Madison Program on American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University." (Indeed, after years of trial

and error, the Olin foundation funded Princeton's Madison Program with \$525,000 in start-up grants in 2000. Run by Robert George, an outspoken social and religious conservative, the program serves as the beau ideal of the "beachhead" theory. As a friend of George's [described him](#) to *The Nation* in 2006, he is "a savvy right-wing operative, boring from within the liberal infrastructure.")

Piereson warned conservative philanthropists that taking the liberal out of liberal-arts education would require patience and cunning. As a former academic himself, he knew how politically charged a frontal assault would be. Rather than openly trying to overhaul academia overnight, he suggested, "perhaps we should think instead about challenging it by adding new voices." As he put it, "This may well be the best means of changing the college culture, for a few powerful voices of criticism may at some point bring the entire ideological house of cards crashing down upon itself."

**I**f the Olin foundation was less than transparent about its mission, it was not for the first time. Between 1958 and 1966, it secretly served as a bank for the Central Intelligence Agency. During these eight years, the CIA laundered \$1.95 million through the foundation. Olin, according to Miller, regarded his undercover role as part of his patriotic duty. Many of the government funds went to anti-Communist intellectuals and publications. But in 1967, the press exposed the covert propaganda operation, triggering a political furor and causing the CIA to fold the program. The CIA money at the Olin foundation, which was not publicized at the time, disappeared as quietly as it had arrived. The idea of using the private foundation to fund ideologically aligned intellectuals, however, persisted. The Olin foundation invested in William F. Buckley Jr., whose television show, *Firing Line*, the foundation supported. It also funded Allan Bloom, author of the best-selling slam from the right at American higher education, *The Closing of the American Mind* (in which Bloom also lashed out at rock music as a "nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbation fantasy"). The foundation also supported Dinesh D'Souza, author of *Illiberal Education*, which blasted "political correctness," castigating rules requiring sensitivity to women and minorities as the overreaching of liberal thought police.

In addition, the Olin foundation funded professors at leading universities all over the country, including Harvard's Harvey C. Mansfield and Samuel P. Huntington. It donated \$3.3 million to Mansfield's Program on Constitutional Government at Harvard, which emphasized a conservative interpretation of American government,



and the foundation donated \$8.4 million to Huntington's John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, which inculcated a hawkish approach to foreign policy and national security.

**'If the conservative intellectual movement were a Nascar race, and if the scholars and organizations who compose it were drivers zipping around a race track, virtually all of their vehicles would sport an Olin bumper sticker.'**

Through these carefully curated programs, the foundation trained the next generation of conservatives, whom Joyce likened to "a wine collection" that would grow more valuable as its members aged, increasing in stature and power. The foundation kept track of those who passed through Huntington's Olin program, proudly noting that many went into public service and academia. Between 1990 and 2001, 56 of the 88 Olin fellows at the Harvard program continued on to teach at the University of Chicago, Cornell, Dartmouth, Georgetown, Harvard, MIT, Penn, and Yale. Many others became public figures in government, think tanks, and the media.

In all, by the time it closed its doors in 2005, the Olin foundation had supported 11 separate programs at Harvard, burnishing the foundation's name and ideas and proving that even the best-endowed American university would allow an outside ideological group to build "beachheads," so long as the project was properly packaged and funded.

On top of these programs, the foundation doled out \$8 million to more than a hundred John M. Olin faculty fellows. These funds enabled scores of young academics to take the time needed to do research and write in order to further their careers. The roster of recipients includes John Yoo, the legal scholar who went on to become the author of the George W. Bush administration's controversial "torture memo" legalizing the American government's brutalization of terror suspects.

#### ADVERTISEMENT

Without the rigorous peer-review standards required by prestigious academic publications, the Olin foundation was able to inject into the mainstream a number of works whose scholarship was debatable at best. For example, Olin-foundation funds enabled John R. Lott Jr., then an Olin fellow at the University of Chicago, to write his

influential book *More Guns, Less Crime*. In the work, [Lott argued](#) that more guns actually reduce crime and that the legalization of concealed weapons would make citizens safer.

Politicians advocating weaker gun-control laws frequently cited Lott's findings. But according to Adam Winkler, the author of *Gunfight*, Lott's scholarship was suspect. Winkler wrote that "Lott's claimed source for this information was 'national surveys,'" which under questioning he revised to just one survey that he and research assistants had conducted. When asked to provide the data, Winkler recounts, Lott said he had lost it in a computer crash. Asked for any evidence of the survey, writes Winkler, "Lott said he had no such evidence." (Proving that the recipients of Olin funds weren't ideologically monolithic, Winkler, too, had received funds from the foundation.)

Another Olin-funded book that made headlines and ended in accusations of intellectual dishonesty was David Brock's *The Real Anita Hill*, to which the foundation gave a small research stipend. In the book, Brock defended the Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas by accusing Hill of fabricating her sworn testimony against him during his Senate confirmation hearings. Later, though, Brock recanted, admitting that he had been wrong. He apologized for the book and said that he had been deceived by conservative sources who had misled him.

Still, the combined impact of the Olin grantees was "a triumph," according to Miller. Writing in 2003, he enthused that "a small handful of foundations have essentially provided the conservative movement with its venture capital." He noted that in contrast to the days when Lionel Trilling had declared conservatism over, "conservative ideas are in broad circulation, and many believe they are now ascendant." He added, "If the conservative intellectual movement were a Nascar race, and if the scholars and organizations who compose it were drivers zipping around a race track, virtually all of their vehicles would sport an Olin bumper sticker."

In time, the Olin foundation's success in minting right-leaning thinkers drew the envy of the left. "On the right, they understood that books matter," says Steve Wasserman, executive editor at large for Yale University Press, who formerly tried but failed to get wealthy liberal donors to match the intellectual investments being made by conservatives. "I remember meeting at a restaurant in California with some of the major Democratic operatives and funders, Margery Tabankin, Stanley Sheinbaum and Gary David Goldberg. I was telling them that they needed to figure out a way to fund books on the left. But books aren't sexy. They weren't interested. They didn't think that in the political culture it mattered. The Democrats were hostage to star personalities and electoral politics."

**T**he Olin foundation's most significant beachheads, however, were established

in America's law schools, where it bankrolled a new approach to jurisprudence known as Law and Economics. Lewis Powell, in an influential 1971 memo, had argued that "the judiciary may be the most important instrument for social, economic and political change." The Olin foundation agreed. As the courts expanded consumer, labor, and environmental rights and demanded racial and sexual equality and greater workplace safety, conservatives in business were desperate to find more legal leverage. Law and Economics became their tool.

As a discipline, Law and Economics was seen at first as a fringe theory embraced largely by libertarian mavericks until the Olin foundation spent \$68 million underwriting its growth. Like an academic Johnny Appleseed, the Olin foundation underwrote 83 percent of the costs for all Law and Economics programs in American law schools between the years of 1985 and 1989. Over all, it scattered more than \$10 million to Harvard, \$7 million to Yale and Chicago, and over \$2 million to Columbia, Cornell, Georgetown, and the University of Virginia. Miller writes, "John Olin, in fact, was prouder of Law and Economics than any other program he supported."

Following Piereson's cautious playbook, the program's title conveyed no ideology. Law and Economics stresses the need to analyze laws, including government regulations, not just for their fairness but also for their economic impact. Its proponents describe it in apolitical terms as bringing "efficiency" and "clarity" to the law, rather than relying on fuzzy, hard-to-quantify concepts like social justice.

Piereson, however, admitted that the beauty of the program was that it was a stealth political attack and that the country's best law schools didn't grasp this and therefore didn't block the ideological punch it packed. "I saw it as a way into the law schools — I probably shouldn't confess that," [he told The New York Times](#) in 2005. "Economic analysis tends to have conservatizing effects."

In a later interview with the Johns Hopkins University political scientist Steven M. Teles, Piereson added that he would have preferred to fund a conservative constitutional-law program, but had the foundation tried such a direct political challenge, it probably would have been barred entry to America's best law schools. "If you said to a dean that you wanted to fund conservative constitutional law, he would reject the idea out of hand. But if you said you wanted to support Law and Economics, he would be much more open to the idea," he confided. "Law and Economics is

neutral, but it has a philosophical thrust in the direction of free markets and limited government. That is, like many disciplines, it seems neutral, but it isn't in fact."

ADVERTISEMENT

The Olin foundation's route into the country's best law schools was circuitous. The foundation began by financially supporting an early leading figure in Law and Economics, the libertarian Henry Manne, an acolyte of the Chicago school of free-market economics. Brilliant, impolitic, and an ideological purist, Manne "was considered a marginal, even eccentric character in the legal academy," according to Teles, when the Olin foundation first started funding him in the early 1970s. To the frustration of the foundation, he didn't teach at high-prestige schools.

In 1985, however, the foundation seized a golden opportunity to establish a beachhead at the pinnacle of legal prestige. That year, Harvard Law School was riven by controversy. Leftist professors were urging students to "sabotage" corporate law firms from within. Conservative professors and alumni were scandalized. The ruckus attracted national press coverage in *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. Among the many outraged Harvard Law School alumni was one of the Olin foundation's trustees, George Gillespie. Sensing an opening, he contacted a conservative Harvard Law School professor, Phillip Areeda, whom he had been in school with, and offered the foundation's help.

The Olin foundation took the initiative, and Harvard took the cash. Out of this ideological pact came the John M. Olin Center for Law, Economics, and Business at Harvard Law School, on which the foundation ultimately spent \$18 million. The donation was the biggest in Olin's history. Harvard's president at the time, Derek Bok, was reportedly delighted at the new source of funding and the opportunity to soothe the disgruntled alumni.

After Harvard approved Law and Economics, other schools soon followed. By 1990, nearly 80 law schools taught the subject. Olin fellows in Law and Economics, meanwhile, began to beat a path to the top of the legal profession, winning Supreme Court clerkships at a rate of approximately one each year, starting in 1985. Many of the adherents were outstanding lawyers and not all were conservative, but they were changing the prevailing legal culture.

By 1986, Bruce Ackerman, then a professor at Columbia Law School, called Law and Economics "the most important thing in legal education since the birth of Harvard Law School." Teles, in his 2008 book, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement*, described Law and Economics as "the most successful intellectual movement in the law of the past 30 years, having rapidly moved from insurgency to hegemony."

As Law and Economics spread, underwritten at each step by the Olin foundation and other conservative backers including the Kochs and Scaife, liberal critics grew alarmed. The Alliance for Justice, a liberal nonprofit in Washington, published a critical report in 1993 warning that "a small wealthy group" was trying to "fundamentally alter the way that justice is dispensed in our society." It revealed that the Olin foundation was paying students thousands of dollars to take classes in Law and Economics at Georgetown Law School and to attend workshops on the subject at Columbia Law School.

Despite this ethically dubious situation, only one law school, at the University of California in Los Angeles, turned the Olin funds away, arguing that by plying students with grant money, the foundation was "taking advantage of students' financial need to indoctrinate them with a particular ideology."

More controversial still were Law and Economics seminars that the Olin foundation funded for judges. The seminars were initiated by Henry Manne, who had become dean of the George Mason University School of Law, which he was trying to transform into a hub of libertarian jurisprudence. The seminars treated judges to two-week-long, all-expenses-paid immersion training in Law and Economics, usually in luxurious settings like the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Florida. They soon became popular free vacations for the judges, a cross between Maoist cultural re-education camps and Club Med. After a few hours of learning why environmental and labor laws were anathema, or why, as Manne argued, insider-trading laws did more harm than good, the judges broke for golf, swimming, and delightful dinners with their hosts.

Within a few years, 660 judges had gone on these junkets, some, like the U.S. Court of Appeals judge and unconfirmed Supreme Court nominee Douglas Ginsburg, many times. By one count, 40 percent of the federal judiciary had participated, including the future Supreme Court justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Clarence Thomas.

A variety of major corporations eagerly joined Olin and other conservative foundations in footing the bills. A study by the nonpartisan Center for Public Integrity found that between 2008 and 2012 [close to 185 federal judges](#) attended judicial seminars sponsored by conservative interests, several of which had cases before the courts. The lead underwriters were the Charles Koch Foundation, the Searle Freedom Trust, ExxonMobil, Shell Oil, the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer, and State Farm, the insurance company. Topics ranged from "The Moral Foundations of Capitalism" to "Terrorism, Climate, and Central Planning: Challenges to Liberty and the Rule of Law."

Simultaneously, the Olin foundation provided crucial start-up funds for the Federalist Society, an organization for conservative law students founded in 1982. With \$5.5 million from the Olin foundation, as well as large donations from foundations tied to Scaife, the Kochs, and other conservative legacies, the Federalist Society grew from a pipe dream shared by three ragtag law students into a powerful professional network of 42,000 right-leaning lawyers, with 150 law-school campus chapters and about 75 lawyers' groups nationally. All of the conservative justices on the Supreme Court are members, as are former vice president Dick Cheney, the former attorneys general Edwin Meese and John Ashcroft, and numerous members of the federal bench. Its president, Eugene B. Meyer, son of a founding editor of *National Review*, acknowledged that without Olin funding "it possibly wouldn't exist at all." Looking back, the Olin foundation's staff described it as "one of the best investments" the foundation ever made.

The Olin foundation also backed what came to be known as the Collegiate Network, privately financing a string of right-wing newspapers on America's college campuses. Among them was *The Dartmouth Review*, which infamously published an editorial in *Ebonics* proclaiming, "Now we be comin' to Dartmut' and be up over our 'fros in studies, but we still be not graduatin' Phi Beta Kappa." The paper hosted a feast of lobster and champagne to mock a student fast against global hunger, sledgehammered shantytowns erected by students protesting apartheid in South Africa, and published a transcript of a secretly taped meeting of students belonging to Dartmouth's gay student association. *The Dartmouth Review* became an incubator for right-wing media figures like D'Souza and the future conservative radio host Laura Ingraham. Its counterpart at Vassar, meanwhile, gave starts in journalism to the ABC correspondent Jonathan Karl and Marc Thiessen, an online columnist at *The Washington Post* best known for his defense of the Bush administration's use of torture.

**J**ohn M. Olin died in 1982 at the age of 89, but after his death his foundation

became even more robust. He left it about \$50 million in his estate and another \$50 million in a trust for his widow, which came to the foundation in 1993 after she died. The funds were well invested, growing to some \$370 million in all before the foundation spent it down and closed its doors in 2005. Olin had directed his foundation to shut down during the lifetime of the trustees for fear that it would fall into the hands of liberals, as he believed the Ford Foundation had tragically done. As the Olin foundation spent itself out of existence, Michael Joyce jumped to a new and far more powerful private foundation, started by another conservative family. In

1985, a corporate merger in Milwaukee created a spectacular windfall, boosting a previously sleepy local charity, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, overnight into a nonprofit juggernaut. Its assets rocketed from \$14 million to over \$290 million, making it one of the 20 largest foundations in the country. Swimming in cash, the foundation's small, unpaid staff, which had mostly focused on conventional local do-gooding until then, sought out Joyce, telling him, "We've got money, and we want to do what you did at Olin. We want to become Olin West."

Almost on the spot, Joyce moved to Milwaukee to run the Bradley foundation himself. At the Bradley foundation, Joyce had a freer hand. "He basically invented the field of modern conservative philanthropy," according to Piereson. During the next 15 years, the Bradley foundation would give away \$280 million to his favorite conservative causes. It was small in comparison with older research foundations like the Ford Foundation, but unlike Ford, under Joyce's direction Bradley regarded itself as a righteous combatant in an ideological war, giving it a single-minded focus.

At least two-thirds of its grants, according to one analysis, financed conservative intellectual activity. It paid for some 600 graduate and postgraduate fellowships, right-wing think tanks, conservative journals, activists fighting Communism abroad, and its own publishing house, Encounter Books.

When Joyce took over the Bradley foundation, he funded many of the same academic organizations he had at Olin, including half of the same colleges and universities. (The Bradley foundation gave both Harvard and Yale \$5.5 million during its first decade under Joyce's management.) "Typically, it was not just the same university but the same department, and in some cases, the same scholar," Bruce Murphy wrote in *Milwaukee Magazine*, charging that this led to a kind of "intellectual cronyism."

The anointed scholars were good ideological warriors but "rarely great scholars," he wrote. For instance, Joyce stuck with Charles Murray in the face of growing controversy over his 1994 book, *The Bell Curve*, which correlated race and low IQ scores to argue that blacks were less likely than whites to join the "cognitive elite," and was loudly and convincingly discredited. The Manhattan Institute fired Murray over the controversial project. "They didn't want the grief," says Murray. But Joyce reportedly kept an estimated \$1 million in grants flowing to Murray, who decamped to the American Enterprise Institute. "I knew from Mike Joyce my fellowship was portable," Murray says. But the controversy stirred by the book clouded the Bradley foundation's reputation. Joyce, who was accused of racism, said he had received death threats. He felt so threatened he demanded enhanced security. The book, he acknowledged, left "an indelible imprint on us."

When Joyce stepped down from Bradley in 2001 amid rumors of alcoholism and erratic and self-destructive behavior, his achievements transcended his personal problems. He was showered with accolades from the right. *National Review* described him as "the chief operating officer of the conservative movement." It added, "Wherever you looked in the battle of ideas, a light dusting would have turned up his finger-prints." The tribute concluded, "Over the period of his Bradley service, it's difficult to recall a single, serious thrust against incumbent liberalism that did not begin or end with Mike Joyce."

By 2012, the Bradley foundation's assets had reached more than \$630 million, enabling it to dole out more than \$32 million in grants during that year alone. The funds continued to finance welfare-reform initiatives that required the poor to find jobs, as well as attacks on public schools. The foundation also continued to support conservative beachheads in 35 different elite colleges and universities including Harvard, Princeton, and Stanford.

The foundation's annual Bradley Prizes had by then become the glittering Academy Awards ceremony for conservatives, a night at Washington's Kennedy Center on the banks of the Potomac filled with evening gowns, tuxedos, overlong acceptance speeches, live musical fanfares, and up to four annual \$250,000 prizes given to a Who's Who of the movement.

Over the years, winners have included the columnist George Will, who subsequently became a trustee of the foundation. [Also honored](#) with the award were the founders of the Federalist Society as well as Princeton's Robert George; Bill Kristol, the editor of *The Weekly Standard*; the Harvard professor Harvey Mansfield; the Fox News president, Roger Ailes; and the Heritage Foundation's stalwarts Ed Meese and Ed Feulner. Almost all of the recipients had played major roles in tugging the American political debate to the right. And almost all had also been supported over the years by a tiny constellation of private foundations filled with tax-deductible gifts from a handful of wealthy reactionaries whose identities and stories very few Americans knew but whose "overarching purpose," as Joyce said, "was to use philanthropy to support a war of ideas."

*Jane Mayer is a staff writer at The New Yorker. This article is adapted from her new book, Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right, just out from Doubleday.*