AG: The article to begin with. How did you get the idea for it?

JM: I actually had been watching, I’m a New Yorker, and I’d been seeing David Koch’s name appear in all these places, including, finally, Lincoln Center. My parents are in the arts and I was interested. Who is David Koch? And I’d remembered there’d been this piece long ago in the New York Times about an epic battle between the brothers out in Kansas and I wanted to know more about who they were.

AG: And what surprised you when you started to find out things?

JM: Everything. They are just, an incredible dynasty story in America. Everything is bigger than life. The amount of money, they way they fight with each other, the aspirations they have in terms of influencing politics in this country. Everything was just amazing.

AG: Give us a little bit of background about how they made their fortune. Their dad was rather wealthy. For all their anti-communist ideology, he made his money…well, tell us the story.

JM: Well, that was to begin with, one of the amazing things of this family. They owed their fortune to Joseph Stalin, the father, Fred Koch was of Dutch descent, came to America. He was from Texas, he went to MIT. In 1927, he came up with some method for refining oil that was better than the method that was being used. He tried to get it sold in America. The major oil companies in America supposedly blocked him because they had a monopoly on their process. So he took his own method to Russia at the time, in 1927 and thereafter. He wound up working with Joseph Stalin and he basically set up the oil business for the Soviet Union and then, the people that the father Fred had been working with, some of them ended up being purged and murdered. People that he knew himself. So he became a virulent anti-communist. He moved back to America. He moved to Wichita, Kansas, which was a deeply conservative part of America. He was one of the first early founders of the John Birch Society, which existed to fight communism. And this became his mission in life, along with protecting capitalism and making a huge pile of money. So that’s the milieu in which the 4 Koch Brothers grew up and they were taught from an early age that big government is bad. Capitalism is great. And they made big fortunes themselves out of the money they inherited but they inherited hundreds of millions of dollars. In a way, I look at them, not
as self-starters, so much as Prince-lings. They are Princes in a sorta Aristocratic family in America. And in a way, this ideology they have of the free market and how making money equals freedom and how it’s virtuous. In some ways it’s a little bit like theories that old kings had about divine right. It makes it okay that they have inherited this huge pile of money. That it’s right and good that they did.

AG: The ideology is also really interesting in terms of the failure to adjust to any sense of scale. The ability of them to see American government as a form of Soviet style totalitarian government and that to me seems really.

00:05:24 JM: Well, it’s interesting because if you look through the generations of their family, they have done this repeatedly. The father Fred Koch came back to Kansas having, seen the light about the horrors of Stalin, which of course really were horrible and he began to see the United States government, particularly anything progressive in the United States government as the beginning of some sort of socialist and communist takeover. So, it begins with opposition to the New Deal and it continues to 50s, the anti-communist period and then, obviously, the Soviet Union in our lifetime has crumbled and fallen apart. But the sons have transferred this same type of paranoia about big government to Obama at this point. So that if you listen to Tea Party rhetoric, you hear these same phrases. “He’s a socialist, he doesn’t understand America, he’s taking over the private sector with big government.” It’s been the same line that they’ve been using since they used it on Stalin.

AG: What ever happened to the whole idea…their obsession is freedom. What was it? Roosevelt's four freedoms. How many were there? What ever happened to freedom from want? Why don’t these guys get that? The idea that if you’re at the bottom of the pile, it can be something so debilitating that you’ll never get up off the map and that in fact, we’re #20 for infant mortality or worse, particularly amongst the developed nations.

00:07:16 JM: Well, I mean it’s hard to know, I mean, one can’t be a psychologist when you haven’t had a chance to talk to these people personally but you can say from the outside that it’s a far-less guilt inducing argument that they have. They’ve got, just an inordinate amount of money and in their ideology, the poor will be hurt more if they give some of it to them. So they feel that if they describe redistributive economic policies as hurtful to the poor. They’ve become handouts that make the poor dependent. And there have been a number of social scientists that have prorogated these views
too. But that ideology is appealing, I suppose, if you have a tremendous amount of money. You might feel guilty otherwise. But this way, they can feel virtuous.

AG: Well, you get to the heart of it. Because it does seem like a lot of their ideology coincides rather nicely with self-interested. And if you look at the ideology, it means you can pollute freely. In terms of Koch Industries, and the freedom they've been aggressive in terms of trying to promote. Economic freedom by way of not having any rules or regulations. The freedom to pollute.

00:08:52 JM: Koch Industries is a conglomerate. It makes about a hundred billion dollars a year. It’s the second largest privately held company in America. Tremendously profitable. Their interests sorta range from oil refining and pipelines and lumber and papermaking and tons of chemicals and also trading all kinds of derivatives. So there are many areas in which their business interests butt into regulations and pretty much, across the board, the Kochs who have lobbyists in Washington, have pushed hard to weaken regulations. Whether it’s about air pollution, where they are among the top ten air polluters in America or in terms of chemicals that they dump or in terms of financial regulations allowing them to trade freely. Their free market ideology, they argue, is always pure and is just about principle. But at the same time, it does dovetail with their interests, you can see. It’s a very touchy subject with them. They very much reject the idea that they’re just doing this to promote their self-interest. They argue that this for everybody’s interest.

AG: But in terms of libertarian agenda, don’t they put their fingers on the scale of government quite a bit. If you’re a libertarian, don’t you want as little government as possible? But they’re spending a lot of time actually pushing for very specific legislative policies, right?

00:11:10 JM: Yeah, which ones were you thinking of Alex? To remind my dim brain.

AG: More or less, in terms of the lobby structure.
00:11:29 JM: They consistently lobby for, among other things, low taxes, particularly low taxes on capital gains so that an awful lot of their income is taxed at fifteen percent, rather than at the tax level that people making a living have to pay. Low state taxes. There was a statement that is not in my story but I read from David Koch somewhere, where he said that if the tax rate went up, it would be hard for him to keep giving to charity at the level that he was giving, which struck me as amazing because he's worth 25, 30 billion dollars, something like that. It's so hard to imagine that a couple points higher in income taxes would affect his lifestyle in any way. But he really argues that this would stop him from being able to be generous.

AG: This is a familiar argument. Let's call it the Ferrari-Hooker Argument, which is you have to keep the rich in Ferraris and hookers or else they will, you know leave.

00:12:46 JM: And take their Ferraris and hookers to other countries where the taxes are lower. The thing is, it has to be said, both David and Charles Koch have given away a lot of money. And David Koch in particular gives to science and to museums and the arts and all kinds of other things. Charles Koch mostly gives to think tanks and others sort of forms of idea promotion that push his own ideology, which in the end helps his own profits.

AG: The think tank theory is an interesting phenomenon. Were the Kochs early in supporting think tanks as a way of capturing popular opinion.

00:13:36 JM: They were pretty early. The think tanks really get going in a big way in Washington in the 1970s but what happened with the Koch Brothers is interesting. They tried first to win power at the ballot box in American. In 1980, David Koch actually ran for Vice President on the libertarian ticket. He was running against Ronald Reagan from the right. He did abysmally. The libertarian ticket got one percent of the vote in America in 1980. Of course, Reagan was elected. What the Koch Brothers learned from this, and Charles was pretty involved in the campaign too, was, their ideology was not going to popular at the ballot box. It was abstruse and extreme. They were being denounced even by conservatives like William F. Buckley who described them as Anarcho-Totalitarians at the time. So if they wanted to get power, it wasn't going to be through the democratic process of running for office. What they learned from that was they were going to have to try another way to get their ideas to become
influential. So after that they founded the Cato Institute. It had just begun but they poured money into it, which was the first libertarian think tank. The thought behind it from them was that they needed to manufacture a movement and it was going to take first, ideas from intellectuals. And then it was going to take foot soldiers. So soon after, they came up with Citizens for Sound Economy, which became a sort of phony grassroots movement that pushed for the ideas coming out of the Cato Institute. They began to slowly build up their own political movements so that they it could win influence that they couldn’t get from elections.

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00:16:58  AG: Their ability to kind of create these grassroots groups is pretty interesting. You mentioned one, but the one I observed more recently is Americans for Prosperity.

00:17:09  JM: Right, Americans for Prosperity is really the successor to Citizens for Sound Economy. It’s much the same kind of organization but it became the super structure, in some ways, behind the Tea Party movement. People were looking at the Tea Party movement as this spontaneous combustion, this grassroots thing that just exploded. What it really was, was this thing that was being fed by a libertarian billionaire.

AG: Who’s the guy who they tapped to run Americans for Prosperity?

00:17:53  JM: Tim Phillips. He was someone who came out of the religious right of politics. He’d been a partner of Ralph Reid’s. Ralph Reid had founded the Christian Coalition that was very important in getting the religious right organized in the 1980s and Phillips was right there. Because of that connection, Phillips had a very good sense of organizing and a good system for reaching voters through churches and other kinds of right wing organizations and so he became the leader of it. But the money came in large part from the Kochs and a couple of their friends. So what did Americans for Prosperity do for the Tea Party movement? They helped provide leaderships, they put up websites that planned organized rallies, they helped provide transportation to the rallies, they helped provide talking points to the leaders, they targeted law makers who they wanted their members to send letters of protests to. I mean they really helped turn it into a viable political movements.
AG: The idea of freedom. In terms of the war of ideas, they managed to infiltrate this notion of freedom very effectively. The idea that any kind of government intervention is interfering with your freedom.

00:19:27 JM: Yeah. It's been a very successful selling point for them that government equals slavery and free market equals total freedom. One of the old friends of Charles Koch, a guy named Gus diZerega, who became a political science professor said to me, he thought that somehow Charles Koch, who had been a very serious student of free market philosophy, as he got older and richer seemed to confuse making money with freedom. That is basically one equals the other in the way they look at the world.

AG: It really is interesting for a lot of libertarians, they seem to have a Pollyana-lish view about power when it comes to the corporations. If you do something that is damaging people as a business that's okay because sooner or later, the market will make it right.

00:20:27 JM: It's creative destruction. That's what is necessary as they see it. I've asked sometimes, when I've been interviewing some of the libertarian leaders, "What's the difference between what you're advocating and Thomas Hobbes and Hobbesianism?" And there really isn't an answer. Their notion, and there isn't really an example of a free market economy without any kind of government intervention. Sorry, it's too complicated.

AG: Just the very idea that somehow, if you're an energy company and you pollute the water in some neighborhoods and people die. How is that...

00:21:21 JM: I mean they don't really advocate a free market. What they want are plenty of laws. But they want laws that safeguard private property, that safeguard profits, and safeguard the ability to turn over one's inheritance to one's children. They keep the taxes low. There are a lot of laws that go with what they're advocating. They just don't like laws that get in the way of profits.

AG: I went to the Americans for Prosperity rally here in Washington during the Supreme Court hearings on Obamacare and there were a lot of signs promoting Atlas Shrugged by Ayn Rand. Are the Kochs Ayn Rand devotees, and if so, why?

00:22:28 JM: I can't really tell if you Ayn Rand was important to them, per se. What was very important to them was Hayek's work, "The Road to Serfdom." The thing about Charles Koch is one shouldn't estimate
his intelligence. He’s very well read in libertarian philosophy and economics and he takes it very seriously. He’s an incredibly bright man. Both Charles and David went to MIT and they are formidable.

AG: One of these things this film is about is growing income inequality and how more and more power goes to the top of the pyramid. How do libertarians like the Kochs reconcile with this idea that fewer and fewer get more power, how does this promote freedom? If you’re the only company standing, you enforce your rules in a rigid way, you can do whatever you want.

00:23:41 JM: They draw a distinction between freedom of outcome and freedom of opportunity and what they would say is just because one person with all of the chips, that doesn’t mean that this wasn’t a free chance. What they says is that they’re just working to make sure everyone has freedom of opportunity to get as rich as they are and that the way to do that is to get the government out of the way. That would be their argument. Who was it? I can’t remember which philosopher who said that poor man and the rich man have equal opportunity to be starving under the bridge. They’re not concerned with extreme poverty from what I’ve seen. If you look at where they put their money when they give it away, they’re not, as far as I know, giving it to soup kitchens. They’re giving it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Extreme poverty doesn’t seem to be on their radar.

AG: The idea that if you’re in that kind of extreme poverty there’s no rung of a ladder for you to grab up on…

00:24:53 JM: I haven’t really seen, to be honest, what they’ve said about this. I don’t think they’ve addressed the issue, one way or another. Much of what they say is about providing opportunity to make money to everybody equally. That’s what they would argue about. It doesn’t seem to accept the possibility that if you’re poor enough and your schooling is bad enough, then you don’t really have an opportunity to compete.

AG: You started this article because you were interested in who were the Kochs but did it lead you someplace broader in terms of the direction of this country? Are we in danger having the polity run by a smaller group of very wealthy people?

00:25:56 JM: It’s certainly something I worry about. One of the things that the Kochs and some of their allies have succeeded in is deregulating campaign finance. They’ve been working for a long time to get rid of limits on how much money can be spent in politics. This year, after
the Citizens United ruling by the Supreme Court, they're able to pour millions into politics in a way that's never been quite as open before. What one has to worry about is whether or not they're going to buy government that matches their ideology and use it to continue to promote their own interests. It hasn't come to that yet but I think anybody looking at Oligarchs in some place like Russia would have to be worried…

Interrupted by outside vehicle.

00:27:14 JM: What you'd have to be worried about is that maybe they would buy government that would match their ideology and use it to promote their own private interests and I don't think we've reached that point here but I think anybody who is familiar with Russia would certainly be worried that maybe there would be oligarchs here like there are there.

AG: It was really interesting to see the recent recall election in Wisconsin. The Kochs and I think, Americans for Prosperity, poured a lot into Walker's campaign.

00:27:56 JM: I think the Kochs have been, the New York Times had to eat something about this, that the Kochs have said they didn't put money directly into the recall. The money that came through the various Koch organizations came through from Americans for Prosperity. But yeah, millions were spent on that recall election and the right outspt the left by something like from 4 to 1 to 7 or 8 to 1, depending on which numbers you look at.

AG: Now let's talk about how, well, on one hand you have capital but on the other you have unions and they always balance each other out so why should we be so worried about money. Tom DeLay once said that the biggest problem in politics is that we don't have enough money. Why is money so influential in politics?

00:28:43 JM: Well I think it can completely dominate the airwaves. There's only a certain amount of TV time that can be bought and if you pour in enough money in, it can be yours. The whole message can be subsidized by one side if enough money is put into an election. That's all voters will hear.

AG: You and I have talked a little bit about the broader issues in terms of ideology. You were telling me, as you know I am very interested in how enduring is the influence of Ayn Rand…
00:29:25 JM: I just don’t know. The thing is I’m not really sure.

AG: You were telling me about that guy who was funded…

00:29:37 JM: Did you look him up? His name is Allison. Bill Allison, or something like that. He’s the BB&T banks, you know the banks are on every corner now. Ayn Rand is moving. I guess that the appeal of Ayn Rand is that it’s the Gordon Gecko message—greed is good. So you take something that is usually not considered a virtue, something that’s considered a vice and you turn it into a virtue and people think great, self-interest is fine. And they can be picky. I don’t know that it goes any deeper than that.

AG: They found a philosophy in which that becomes a virtue.

00:30:30 JM: Which is very comforting. Greed is good if you wanna be greedy. I’m not a big Ayn Rand expert. I’m probably the only person that hasn’t read Atlas Shrugged.

AG: I promised you I was gonna bring the movie.

00:30:51 JM: Yeah, I wanna see the movie. Darn. Now my daughter was in a carpool with some Ayn Rand right wing freaks where the parents played it in every drive they had. They had Atlas Shrugged being played out loud on the tape. So my daughter knows it very well. And she said said, “Oh god, that architect.” So I’m not really an expert on Ayn Rand.

AG: There’s a great scene at the end in the movie where this guy, John Galt, puts up a big sign on this property—I’ve taken my money and I’m leaving. I’m sick and tired of you people. And this woman who’s been his loyal assistant and she’s like No! No! No!

00:31:51 JM: I’m really sorry you didn’t bring it. Send it. It seems like a less painful way to get through it.

AG: That book is deeply impenetrable.

00:32:04 JM: You asked in your note about why does this, this free market fundamentalism appeal to middle class people. I think that the libertarian movement, the pro-corporate movement, I would say has been very successful in dividing and conquering the classes beneath it so that they’ve managed to take the resentment of the middle class, which actually has been quite economically squeezed over the last couple decades and turned their resentment against
the people beneath them. Behind that kind of anger at government is anger at taxes and about funding programs for poor people who they regards as not pulling their own weight. So if you can the resentment of the middle class and point it downward, rather than point upward to the people at the top one percent, who are walking away richer than ever, then you can succeed politically and I think they’ve a good job at that.

AG: It’s a very inventive kind of definition. People are absolutely furious at government and then they define things like Medicare like not government.

JM: Meanwhile many of the people in the middle class who are furious about government are absolutely dependent upon government programs like social security and Medicare and will admit if you push them to the wall on it. They’ve been very good at stirring resentment—a very old playbook in politics.

AG: How good and how effective do you think Americans for Prosperity have been. Do you think…

JM: I don’t really know. I went to a rally that Americans for Prosperity had in North Carolina. There’s couldn’t have been more than a dozen people there. It was a pathetic showing. I can’t really say that I see this as a building revolution or anything like that. It looked so much like a top down organization at that point. It was the organizers and a few stranded people in a field. I don't know that it’s been that successful as a mass movement. I think that the libertarian movement has been successful at in pushing it's ideology in the courts, in the academia, in politics.

AG: There’s some key politicians.

JM: Right, I think that they’ve gotten people elected who share their ideology but I don’t really see it still as spreading wildfire out there among the masses. Do you?

AG: No. But it is interesting and you get people like Paul Ryan who have come so much to the forefront and his message. He seems…

JM: I think what we’re seeing with the Tea Party, which is around 2009, it’s partly fury about Obama. A lot of people were uncomfortable with Obama for many reasons. I think also, behind that was fury at the economy. When you’ve got a lot of middle class people out work and under water on their mortgages and feeling
really stressed economically, it’s very combustible. What Americans for Prosperity and other organizations did was channel that anger in the direction of anti-government. It could’ve gone in another direction but they really helped make it go their way.

AG: Which is a mystifying thing to me. 2008, you would thought that if there was ever a time to be furious at how unregulated markets had…

00:36:18 JM: Completely, but one of the ideas that was shaped and payed for, subsidized by various Koch think thanks was that the collapse in 2008 did not come because of deregulation. They argued completely the opposite, that is was Fannie Mae and housing for poor people that had brought this collapse. They created a lot of confusion about the reasons for the collapse of the economy.

AG: That one was really a howler to me since Fannie Mae was chasing deregulation in the market.

00:36:59 JM: But that idea came straight out of the American Enterprise Institute, a corporate founded, right wing think tank. I think it got spare amount of traction.

AG: Think tanks have become quite powerful, have they not, in terms of shaping key ideas about the country? In the 70s, that was kind of a brilliant idea.

00:37:23 JM: I think it’s been terrifically influential. It was thought out in a very clear-headed way. If you look at what happened in 1971, Lewis Powell who right before he went onto the Supreme Court, he did a paper for the Chamber of Commerce in which he analyzed what could corporate America do to try to get its power back. The Anti-Vietnam movement and Ralph Nader were hitting corporate America. This whole consumer movement was pushing up against corporate America and giving it a black eye. So Powell wrote this memo and in this memo he said the real enemy of corporate America is not the kids out in the streets protesting, it’s not the new left. It’s elite opinion. It’s academics, it’s scientists, and it’s the press. From that report, a number of corporate leaders got together and decided to create think tanks that would create their own academic opinion, their own press, their own science. And that’s really what’s been built up over the past couple decades and I think it’s been very successful.

AG: Buying corporate opinion.
JM: Subsidizing corporate opinion. That many of these opinions are subsidized by corporate America, yet they compete with ideas that are just plain good ideas on their own right and they get a lot of currency.

AG: So what was the reaction to your piece when it came out in The New Yorker? Did you hear from the Kochs.

JM: Their lawyers sent a letter to The New Yorker complaining that they didn’t like the piece but they weren’t able to find anything that was incorrect. They just didn’t like the gist of it. So we wrote them back a note saying, you know we’re sorry that they didn’t like it but of course, we tried for months to try to get their help and get them to talk to us and they have absolutely refused. They even refused to participate in the fact checking process so it was kinda of a miracle that we had no mistakes. That was what we heard from them. That was a story that had impact. It spread throughout the country and the Kochs became shorthand for the one percent in politics basically.

AG: Suddenly it was taking the curtain back. You realized there were in fact people operating the levers.

JM: I think it was surprising to people and the Kochs had been quite secretive about their role up until then. Since then, it’s been interesting to me, they’ve become much more upfront about what they want and what they’re doing. They’re pouring money into the 2012 presidential campaign. They’re being written about all the time. They are much more open about it now.

AG: It’s also, I think, people, because of your article, focus on them now.

JM: Yeah, I think they’re having a harder time hiding.

AG: That was another key strategy in the last ten years. Creating these phony groups. It was very big right around the time, pharma did very effectively, of the Medicare Modernization Act. The big handout that Tom DeLay gave to big pharma. But creating these organizations.

JM: These Astroturf groups would pop up everywhere and were basically fronts and it was very hard to tell who was really behind them and that way they could pour money in and push an idea in without it being tied to them. They did that for a long time. Now,
people are paying a lot more attention. They've had these semi-annual confabss of some of the richest people of the country who get together with them and plot out what to do for the next election. At this point, even though they've held these meetings at places that are pretty hard to get to, the press finds a way and they count the private planes when they come in and get telephoto lenses and take a look at whose there so it's harder for them to hide.

AG: Were you amused by the prank call to Walker?

00:41:58 JM: You know, by someone pretending to be David Koch. I have a minority opinion on this one. I thought it was bad. Truthfully, I think that it makes me uncomfortable when people lie to get a story, no matter what side they're on. I don't think reporters should pretend they're someone else to interview someone.

AG: Was that a lawyer or a prankster?

00:42:26 JM: It was a prankster but I don't think they should lie. I don't think a reporter should lie. I don't like it when James O'Keefe does it, so I don't like it when someone else on the other side does it. I think it gives all press a bad reputation.

AG: The one rally I saw here from across the river was a real Anti-Obamacare rally. And it was all about don't take away my freedom. That to me seems to be particularly when it comes to healthcare seems like a bizarre idea. The idea that if everybody had healthcare, it would be antithetical to freedom, you know. That you would now be able to, you know, nobody could deny you because of pre-existing conditions, for example. That was the whole idea. That healthy people have pay into the system so that the sick could be taken care of.

00:43:38 JM: I understand what the problem was. I thought from the beginning it was gonna be a problem for Obama because of the mandate that requires everybody to buy something. It's an idea that's unappetizing to people. Nobody likes paying taxes. Nobody likes paying more for anything. So it was gonna be a hard sell. I fault the Obama administration for not making clear that everybody's paying for all of this already. You're paying for it when you go to the emergency room. You're paying the people who can't pay their own bills when they go to the emergency room. The reason your healthcare is so expensive is because you're all ready carrying that load. If they made it more clear, I think people would have stumped it better. I have to hand it to the opponents on the right.
They framed it in a way that really works. I don't think the democrats have done a good job in clarifying it and fighting it back.

AG: I just wanted to read you this quote from David Koch's interview to the Palm Beach Post. The one that he did with the Post a few months ago.

00:45:07 JM: About Walker?

AG: It was about his charity and how he was gonna cure cancer and it was all about that and then the reporter snuck in a question about Wisconsin. His response was, “We’re helping him, as we should, we’ve gotten pretty good at this over the years. There’s a lot of money in Wisconsin, we’re gonna spend more.” Two question. One, why does David Koch, who’s a New Yorker from Kansas care who the governor of Wisconsin is? And two, when he says, “we’ve gotten pretty at this over the years,” what is he talking about?

00:45:58 JM: When David Koch says, “We’ve gotten pretty good at this over the years.” Take a look, he and Charles have been involved in trying to manipulate and influence American politics since 1980. They’ve been at this a really long time and they’ve poured millions upon millions in American politics and at this point they’ve hired the best operatives money can buy. They built up dozens of organizations and front groups and they’ve funded ton of campaigns. They’re pros at this point. They’re a real force to contend with in American politics. More than ever. I suppose that’s what he means when he says we’ve gotten pretty good at this. And why would they be involved in Wisconsin, well Wisconsin was the ultimate showdown so far between labor and capital in some ways. It was the battle to test the power of public sector unions and if they could be broken there, they could be broken anywhere. The public sector unions are one of the last bastions of union strength of any kind in the country and they are also one of the greatest sources of democratic support so if you take a look at recent election spending, what you’ll see is that the public sector unions are among the greatest contributors to the American Democratic Party. So if you, like David Koch and Charles Koch, wanna take over American politics, you’re gonna wanna knock out whatever the other organized forces are on the other side. This is why that was so important to them.

AG: I’m going to have to ask you to, the first part, see if you can go at that again.

00:47:53 JM: They’ve been at this for a really long time. They’ve been
involved in politics in a big way since 1980 when David Koch ran as Vice President on the libertarian ticket. They’ve been pouring money into American politics, millions upon millions of dollars. They’ve hired the best consultants that money can buy. They’ve built up all kinds of front groups. They’ve been involved in all kinds of ways of organizing like-minded people and they’ve become a tremendous force in American politics and really good at it.

AG: Is there anyone comparable to them now or ever?

JM: There are rival groups and even some groups on the Republican side who don’t like the Kochs because they think they are hogging the power. I mean, until you’ve got a different group that’s a sort of constellation of people around Karl Rove and his American Crossroads groups is separate from the Kochs’ organizations. On the Democratic side, you’ve certainly got some unions and George Soros and a few other people that are major potential oligarchs on the democratic side but they haven’t been as systematic as the Kochs. Sometimes I think that because the Koch were trained as engineers, they have a very systematic approach to American politics, they’ve looked at it. I think there’s a quote from Charles Koch saying, “You need both a vertical and a horizontal system to deliver power.” They’ve looked at all the weak spots and how to exert power. They’ve been great at it.

AG: It’s funny you brought up the engineering thing. You know what Stalin’s term for the writer was?

JM: Which writer?

AG: Any writer. He called them the engineers of human souls.

JM: Is that right? I do think, not for your documentary, but just for by way of passing. Having interviewed our pope, who was maybe one of the tedious people I’ve ever talked to in my life. I just had to lie down after talking to him. It was so bad. It made me realize that he too, is a kind of engineer personality. He’s sorta on the Asperger’s spectrum. I really wonder sometimes, this is not for your documentary, about Charles and these guys. They look at the world in this, without empathy, or without compassion, much like Asperger’s people do. They’re not very human feeling but they’re incredibly good at system analysis. They’ve been fantastic at figuring out how you rig the system. I think they have Aspergers, that’s my final description of Libertarians.
AG: You had that Charles Lewis quote at the end of your piece. Which was that they did this on an unprecedented level. “I’ve never seen anything like it, they are the Standard Oil of our times.”

00:51:37 JM: As I interviewed for my piece, Chuck Lewis, who was former head of the Center for Public Integrity. He’s been watching the Kochs for a long time and what he said to me was, “They basically are unprecedented, they influenced American politics on a completely different dimension than anybody else.” They are as he put it, “the Standard Oil of our times.”

ROOM TONE

00:52:33 AG: What I didn’t ask you was, which I normally ask, was is there anything else you’d like to add?

00:52:37 JM: No, I think that’s fine. I can’t think of anything else. I just went back and read the story and I can’t think of anything else really. I think that was everything I can imagine saying about them right at this moment. I can’t think about how I’m going to turn them into a book. They’re a good subject. They’re only part of a book. They’re not the whole book. It’s about, somebody else is doing something similar, and it’s called “The Billionaire’s Club.” It’s looking at the…What I’m trying to do, is not just look at how they win the election here, or try to, but look at how they’ve won the conversation. They’ve subsidized this whole libertarian movement. There’s a good story. Did you see in today’s Times by Jim Stuart about how broccoli became the thing? It goes back to Cato and the recent magazine. They’re both Koch places. Again and again, they’ve really engineered it. I think it’s all Charles. I don’t think David is all that smart, but I think Charles is really smart. Too bad you can’t get them on film I guess. Are you gonna interview people on the other end of Park Avenue, the other Park Avenue?

AG: In the Bronx? Yeah

00:54:14 JM: That should be great. Alex, this is going to be so good. When are you doing the Bronx part? Are you getting good characters?

00:54:31 END OF INTERVIEW