

TIMELINE: The Koch Family, the John Birch Society, and Civil Rights

1958

Fred Koch attended the initial meeting of right-wing businessmen called by **Robert Welch**, who proposes creating the **John Birch Society** to fight the spread of communism in the U.S., *after* the ignominious death of **Senator Joe McCarthy**, who was censured. **Fred** joins the Executive Committee, which met monthly to plan Birch Society strategy.

1961

Charles Koch moved home to Wichita to work for his dad and joins the **John Birch Society**, which his father, **Fred**, co-founded. (According to *Sons of Wichita*, Charles joined the **Birch Society** when he moved home.)

That year, **Fred Koch** published and circulated his pamphlet, “**A Businessman Looks at Communism**,” which claimed the U.S. Supreme Court was pro-communist, that President **Dwight Eisenhower** (the former allied commander in WWII) was soft on communism, that the public schools used many communist books, and that many teachers were commies.

Also that year, **David Koch** – a student at MIT –helps incite an anti-communist, anti-Castro protest that turns into a riot where students are arrested.

Also that year, African American and white “**Freedom Riders**” began traveling between the Southern states to test the U.S. **Supreme Court**’s ruling in *Boyton v. Virginia* that the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment barred laws requiring **segregated travel** interstate. The buses were attacked by white mobs and the **Ku Klux Klan**.

The **John Birch Society** announced that its top priority that year was the launch of its “**Movement to Impeach Earl Warren**,” the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, appointed by **President Eisenhower**; Warren was previously a Republican governor.

One of the core documents promoted that year and for years afterward was by the founder of the John Birch Society, **Robert Henry Winborne Welch** (of the Junior Mints/Sugar Babies candy fortune). That document was titled “**A Letter to the South on Segregation**” (1956). It claimed that the “easy-going colored man” of the South will be “easily misled by agitators,” that the phrase “civil rights” is a communist slogan, and that the push for racial integration “embarrassed” good African Americans.

The John Birch Society’s **Movement to Impeach Earl Warren** also promoted Rosalie Gordon’s defense of segregated public schools “**Nine Men Against America**” and the right-wing Regnery publishing house’s book by James Kilpatrick (“**The Sovereign States**”) defending the Southern States’ “right” “to believe that they were proceeding

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constitutionally in erecting and maintaining a system of racially separate schools.” The Birch Society also promoted the extremist and segregationist “**Dan Smoot Report.**”

In 1961, **James Meredith**, who had served in the U.S. Air Force, asked **Medgar Evers** for help after he was denied admission to Ole Miss, the University of Mississippi. Evers asked **Thurgood Marshall** to take Meredith’s case and the **NAACP** filed a federal lawsuit.

Accordingly to a *Time* magazine profile that year, the **John Birch Society** launched reading rooms and book stores “manned ... by local members of our organization” promoting the 100 books approved by the Society to be sold, along with membership, posters, pamphlets, and Birch magazines. The approved material included the Bircher monthly magazine, “**American Opinion,**” and “**Dan Smoot’s Report,**” which ran numerous pieces attacking the integration of schools. The **John Birch Society** also pushed many right-wing radio shows.

According to *Time* magazine’s profile, Wichita was designated a “pilot” town for the **John Birch Society** and it mentioned **Fred Koch**’s leadership of the organization. Professors at the city college, Wichita University, reported being harassed by Birchers for their books and what they taught. At a major Birch event there, **Fred Koch** introduced the John Birch Society founder, **Bob Welch**, at a town hall meeting of 2,000 people. Friend of the Koch family and fellow Bircher, **Bob Love** of the **Love Box Company** shut down a news filming of the speech in which Welch was tape recorded claiming “The Protestant ministry is more heavily infiltrated by Communists than any other profession in America.” The *Wichita Eagle-Beacon* editorialized that “Welch is selling snake oil, and that a lot of people are buying it.”

1962

In 1962, based on the reasoning in the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, a federal appeals court ordered that the **University of Mississippi (Ole Miss)** admit African American student **James Meredith**. Mississippi’s segregationist governor, **Ross Barnett**, responded by trying to stop the integration of the state college.

When **James Meredith** sought to enroll in **Oxford, Mississippi**, Governor Barnett personally blocked his entrance and was joined by World War II veteran **Major General Edwin Walker**, who issued this statement: “I am in Mississippi beside Governor Ross Barnett. I call for a national protest against the conspiracy from within. Rally to the cause of freedom in righteous indignation, violent vocal protest, and bitter silence under the flag of Mississippi at the use of Federal troops....” Riots ensued and two people were killed. Only **President Kennedy**’s executive order for the **National Guard** to escort Meredith allowed him to enroll in the state university and he had to have ongoing protection from federal agents.

The **John Birch Society** hailed **General Walker** as a hero for standing up in **Oxford** to what it described as the communist creation of the civil rights movement. The **Dan Smoot Report** promoted by the John Birch Society claimed the desegregation order was illegal

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and equated the whites protesting Meredith's admission to the students protesting in Hungary in 1956. It also defended General Walker as standing up to American "tyranny."

The **John Birch Society** promoted a pamphlet by **Alan Stang** called "**It's Very Simple**" attacking the integration of Ole Miss. Among other things, Stang called **Martin Luther King** a communist and claimed that his goal was to pressure Congress "to install more collectivism." Stang, in **John Birch Society** publications, claimed **Rosa Parks** was trained by communists before she refused to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery in 1955.

The **John Birch Society** also announced that it had erected more than 100 billboards calling for the **impeachment of U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren**. Birch leader **Bob Welch** noted "We believe that the Warren Court is gradually destroying all the safeguards which made this a republic instead of a mobocracy."

1963

Martin Luther King helped organize demonstrations in Birmingham, Alabama, was arrested, and wrote on non-violence and injustice in "**Letter from a Birmingham Jail.**"

The **John Birch Society** claimed that its "detailed study of 'the life and lies' of **Martin Luther King** ... will convince any reasonable American that this man is not working for, *but against*, the real welfare and best interests of either the Negroes in the United States, or of the United States as a whole." (Robert Welch, "Two Revolutions at Once" published in 1965) [PHOTO from Birch Society] In its publications of **Alan Stang's** writings the John Birch Society claimed **Martin Luther King** was the "biggest" "liar in the country" and what "he really wants is to be a black plantation boss giving orders to 'his people.'"

Medgar Evers, the NAACP's Mississippi field staffer, is assassinated at his home.

Bull Connor directed Birmingham, Alabama, police to use attack dogs and high-pressure fire hoses on civil rights marchers, including children.

The **John Birch Society** claimed that "The truth is that the infamous picture of a dog attacking a Negro, while the dog was held in leash by a Birmingham police officer, was so carefully rehearsed until the 'civil rights' agitators got exactly the picture they wanted, that the leg of the Negro victim's trousers had even been cut with a razor in advance, so that it would fall apart more readily at the first touch by the dog. Yet this picture was shown on the front pages of newspapers all over the United States – most of which did not know it was a contrived phony – and became an extremely important part of the Communist propaganda about 'civil rights.'" (**Robert Welch**, "Two Revolutions at Once" published in 1965)

In July 1963, the **John Birch Society** launched the "**Support Your Local Police**" **Movement** providing bumper stickers, window stickers, and flyers through its bookstore and by mail. The posters often appeared with "Impeach Earl Warren" billboards and touted the need for "law and order" in Birmingham, Alabama, and other cities. (PHOTOS)

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Thousands travel to Washington, DC, for the **March on Washington for Jobs** where King delivers his **“I Have a Dream”** speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

As segregationist **Senator Strom Thurmond** spoke out against civil rights and the “collectivist” menace on the Senate floor, the **John Birch Society** invites him to join its council, but he declines to retain his “independence.”

Four little girls are murdered in a bombing at the **Sixteenth Street Baptist Church** in Birmingham, Alabama.

A **John Birch Society** front group runs advertisements in **Dallas** before **President Kennedy**’s arrival, depicting his head in mug shots with the word **“TREASON”** below, along with claims that Kennedy is guilty of treason for purportedly being soft on communism.

President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

Fred Koch then helped spearhead a national advertisement in the *New York Times* blaming Kennedy’s assassination on the communists.

1964

John Birch Society ads blaming communists for the assassination of President Kennedy run nationally. The Society also promotes material called “Marxmanship in Dallas.”

The **Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee** (SNCC) organizes voter registration drives in Mississippi and plans for **“Freedom Summer”** demonstrations.

James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, three civil rights workers investigating the firebombing of a church where they were organizing voter registration, were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan.

Congress passed the **Civil Rights Act of 1964** over the objections of South Carolina **Senator Strom Thurmond** and other racists.

That year, the Supreme Court also issued its ruling in *Reynolds v. Simms*, which is famous for its principle of **“one person, one vote.”**

The **John Birch Society** created a “scholarship” fund for anti-communist/capitalist African American students, and its first recipient received \$1000 in September 1964.

1965

The **John Birch Society** touts that 26 million Americans voted for a conservative, Barry Goldwater, even though Goldwater criticized the Society.

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Jimmy Lee Jackson, an unarmed African American who was protesting the arrest of civil rights worker **James Edward Orange**, was killed by police. Hundreds of SNCC activists, including **John Lewis**, marched from **Selma to Montgomery** in protest, and were stopped on the bridge by police wielding fire hoses, clubs, and tear gas. **Martin Luther King** joins them.

The **John Birch Society's** main publication claims that "the march from Selma to Montgomery led by **Martin Luther King**" was a "**sham and farce.**"

Congress passes the **Voting Rights Act of 1965.**

The **John Birch Society** claimed that the few "**handicaps to Negro voting**" "could be and were being corrected" without federal legislation and that "To tear a whole great nation to pieces, and to try to plunge a large part of it into civil war, over the few such injustices as do exist, is on a par with sinking a mighty ship in order to get a rat out of the scupper."
(**Robert Welch**, "**Two Revolutions at Once**" in *American Opinion* and then published as a stand-alone John Birch Society pamphlet in 1966.)

Among other things in 1965, **Charles Koch** helped promote the **John Birch Society** bookstore in Wichita, which was managed by **Bob Love**. The bookstore peddled **John Birch Society** pamphlets like **Earl Lively's "The Invasion of Mississippi,"** which claims the racial integration of Ole Miss was unlawful and sides with the white racist protestors. Other titles included **Robert Welch's** pamphlet, "**A Letter to the South on Segregation**" and a tract titled "**Is the Supreme Court Pro-Communist.**" It also offered "**Support Your Local Police**" stickers from the campaign begun in 1963.

Charles Koch's confidante and assistant **George Pearson** joined the **John Birch Society** and began volunteering at the **American Opinion Bookstore** in Wichita, too.

The **John Birch Society** also promoted its new "**What's Wrong with Civil Rights**" campaign in its bookstores and newspapers. The campaign claimed African Americans are better off in the U.S. than in other countries and have personal security on par with whites:

"The average American Negro has a tremendously higher *material standard* of living than Negroes anywhere else; and far higher, in fact, than at least four-fifths of the earth's population of all races combined."

"The average American Negro not only has a far higher *standard of literacy*, and better educational opportunities, than Negroes anywhere else; but a higher level of literacy, in fact, than at least four-fifths of the earth's population of all races combined."

More claims from the **John Birch Society's "What's Wrong with Civil Rights"** (1965-66):

"The average American Negro has complete freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and freedom to run his own life as he pleases."

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“His security of person, and assurance of honorable treatment by his fellow citizens in all of the utilitarian relationships of the living, have been exactly on par with those of his white neighbors.”

“[T]he agitators behind the civil rights movement demand complete and absolute disregard for those differences [‘in the economic, literate, and social level of the two races’ and ‘the natural or human-natural results of these differences’], and a pretense that they do not exist, must be forced by federal law upon the total population everywhere, and with respect to every activity of human life.”

“[T]he civil rights movement in the United States, with all of its growing agitation and riots and bitterness, and insidious steps towards the appearance of a civil war, has not been *infiltrated* by the Communists, as you frequently hear. It has been deliberately and almost wholly *created* by the Communists ...”

“[T]he American Negroes as a whole did not plan this, have not wanted any part of it, and are no bigger dupes on yielding to the propaganda and coercion of the comsymps among them, than are the white people of the United States in swallowing portions of that propaganda labeled idealism.”

The riots in **Watts** in Los Angeles over the treatment of an African American and his family by a police officer result in more than 30 deaths, primarily of African Americans.

1966

James Meredith is shot during the “**March against Fear**” to register African American voters.

The **John Birch Society** continued its campaign to **Impeach Earl Warren** and also pushed to raise \$12 million to take over Congress through launching political action in 325 districts.

Charles Koch sent out a **fundraising letter** with Bob Love to raise money for the **John Birch Society**. They said they had contributed \$3500 toward the goal of \$5000 (the average annual wages of an American worker that year).

The **John Birch Society** also promoted its “**Liberty Amendment**,” opposing graduated income taxes as a Marxist plot to impose collectivism. It also took out “**Support Police**” ads and opposed “**Civilian Review Boards**” that would impose citizen oversight against police brutality.

That year, with his father ill, **Charles Koch** took on the leadership of the family corporation that would become Koch Industries.

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1967

The Supreme Court struck down laws against inter-racial marriage in *Loving v. Virginia*.

Thurgood Marshall is appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Martin Luther King begins the “Poor People’s Campaign”

The **John Birch Society** calls **President Johnson’s “War on Poverty”** a scam to promote collectivism and promoted **Dan Smoot’s** claim that it would create a socialist dictatorship.

Fred Koch died on November 17, 1967. Donations in tribute were requested by the family in his name for Wichita’s **John Birch Society American Opinion Bookstore**.

Charles Koch became Chairman of the family business.

1968

Martin Luther King came to speak during the **Memphis sanitation workers strike**, and he was assassinated.

April 11, 1968, Congress passed the **Civil Rights Act of 1968** barring discrimination in housing.

The **John Birch Society** promoted opposition to anti-discrimination legislation, with publications like “**Open Occupancy v. Forced Housing**,” which extolled “freedom of choice” and property rights.

On May 19, 1968, **Charles Koch** and **Bob Love** ran a full-page ad in the *Wichita Eagle* headlined “**Let’s Get Out of Vietnam Now**,” calling for an unconditional pullout because it was too expensive. Love also stated that pulling out necessary to prevent the U.S. from adapting to communism philosophically through wage and price controls and taxes to pay for the war: “This country will surely vote for a dictator, if the chaos and confusion of inflation continue to mount.”

Charles Koch resigned his “**life membership**” in the **John Birch Society** and also withdrew his advertising from the John Birch Society’s “*American Opinion*” monthly magazine and from supporting its radio programs. **Robert Welch** wrote to ask him to reconsider, but he did not do so.

Charles Koch announced he was renaming the family company “**Koch Industries**.”