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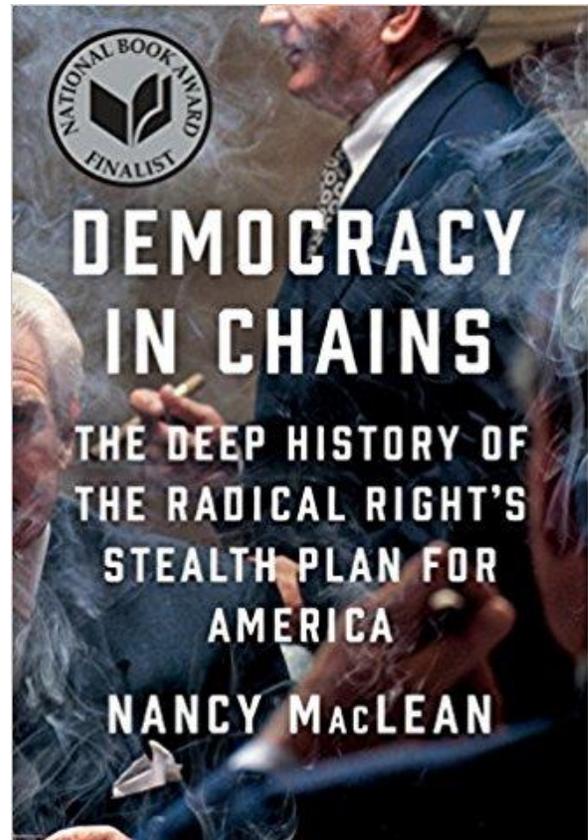
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(Un)Chaining democracy: An essay review of Nancy MacLean's *Democracy in chains: The deep history of the Radical Right's stealth plan for America*

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Introduction

Every September, the *New York Times Magazine* designates one of its Sunday editions as “The Education Issue.” Year to year, this issue delivers a predictable table of contents, say, a piece about a recent controversy in education (e.g., “The Board of Regents fired the chancellor!”), general commentary about broad trends (e.g., “What are we going to do about the rising costs of college?”), whether or not schools should have iPads. The magazine typically does not write about education issues in terms of political polemics. This year, however, the “education” stories did not shy away from searing political issues. The cover story describes the rise of education re-segregation movements in places like Gardendale, Alabama, where white families flee predominantly African American schools to create white school districts elsewhere. A few pages later, a reporter chronicles the bungled school choice movement in Betsy



DeVos' home state of Michigan. The ills of Michigan's school choice education experiment, the journalist states plainly, "isn't solely, or even primarily, an education story: It's a business story," (Binelli, 2017, p. 52). As the *New York Times Magazine* makes clear, contemporary racial segregation in education and educational privatization movements are urgent political issues in 2017. And as the magazine also makes clear, the stories are separate.

But what if they are part of the same story? What if the aggressive free-market education plans that DeVos has made infamous were rooted in racial segregation projects? Conversely, what if the commitment to racially segregated school systems drove the ideological project that propagated school privatization efforts like DeVos'? Nancy MacLean's (2017) book, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*, makes just this case. Through detailed historical research, MacLean provides a long-arching exposé of the intellectual architects and architecture of the radical right that have gained shocking political influence today, aspiring to privatize not only schools, but also health care, social security, the environment, and so much more. Her scholarship shows how the birth of free-market politics in the United States was steeped in white supremacist ideologies. While very disturbing, the grip of white supremacy in national political projects should not surprise us. All too many governmental policies and the intellectual/ideological positions that underpin them continuously document how a history of concerns about whiteness provides a key foundation and motivation for the legal, housing, health care, social security, public construction, and educational structures and realities of this society (see, for example, Apple, 2014; Berrey, 2015; Kruse, 2005; Lassiter, 2006; Mills, 1997; Rothstein, 2017).

Exposing the connections between racial projects of white supremacy and free-market capitalism is an important

contribution, since as the NYT Magazine "Education Issue" displays, racial and economic inequalities have a long tradition of being framed separately. This framing is particularly common in education, where concerns about growing racial disparities in education often become disconnected from the concerns over the increasingly privatized economy. Such a formulation has thwarted attempts to address both race and economic inequalities, much less their interconnections. Though education privatization movements portray "school choice" as a civil right previously denied to communities of color, they simultaneously disenfranchise many of the communities of color they aim to serve by diverting public money and offering little public accountability. MacLean's recent book provides an important intervention in this nexus. Her research documents the inseparable relationship between racial segregation, gross economic inequalities, and "school choice" movements. Furthermore, by historicizing the racialized nature of capitalism, MacLean exposes crucial contradictions embedded in conservative ideology. Her analysis offers instructive resources for scholars and activists committed to movements for quality and equitable public education and other institutions of democracy.

In the following pages, we aim to share MacLean's contributions with readers of this journal. Her work, we assert, provides crucial historical background to understanding the relationships between white supremacy and free-market economics, and the constraints both of these projects impose upon democracy. First, we situate MacLean's scholarship within a similar literature, and distinguish her unique contributions. Second, we provide an overview of MacLean's research on the role that educational policy has played in fusing white supremacy with free-market thinking, a task that will require that we go into some detail. Third, we highlight how ideas about "choice" in the public arena served as an important axis for a growing free-market

movement. Finally, we analyze some of the particular lessons MacLean's account provides, and suggest why they matter for understanding the politics of education today.

MacLean is hardly the first to document the intellectual architecture that scaffolds today's conservative movement. Her work resides alongside accounts such as Jane Mayer's *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (2016; see also Schirmer & Apple, 2016), Kim Phillips-Fein's *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement From the New Deal to Reagan* (2009), Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007), and Michael Apple's, *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality* (2006). This literature has helpfully articulated the rise of pro-free market forces in the machinery of politics, especially the role of Chicago's and Austria's economics schools and their intellectual champions, Milton Friedman and Friedrich A. Hayek. As a corpus, this literature unveils the political operations that turned these economic theories into a political dynamo, detailing the strategies developed by corporate billionaires to construct a political system that protected their interests. By exposing the concerted coordination, this literature denaturalizes the reigning interpretations that "there is no alternative" to today's political economy.

In *Democracy in Chains*, MacLean chronicles the rise of the "Virginia School" of economics, started by Nobel Prize winning economist James Buchanan. The Virginia School contributed important and heretofore unexamined elements to the growing free-market political project, notarized by the more famous Chicago and Austrian schools of economics. Whereas Friedman's Chicago School imported Hayek's free-market principles into state apparatuses to make government work according to the market's needs, Buchanan and the Virginia School's "public choice theory" aimed to change the apparatus of the state itself. As Buchanan saw

it, democracy's majority rule governance gave too much power to people, thus creating a leaky and illegitimate political system. Buchanan's great insight was to recognize that the political will of the majority need not be a pre-existing entity, but could be created through collective action. He understood this from watching workers combine their atomized labor power into unions, and racialized minorities develop social and political solidarities. For Buchanan, the malleability of consent generated by majority rule made it not only discreditable -- "merely one decision-making rule among many possibilities and rarely ideal" -- but also coercive for two reasons. First, it encouraged people to bind together to form collective power, unifying otherwise atomized groups. Second, and more importantly, these groups had the power to overrule the preferences of an individual or minority, who became unwillingly yoked together to others' goals (p. 79). Buchanan's particular distaste for the logics of collective action stemmed from his concerns about the burgeoning political movements, such as the civil rights movement's dissolution of white supremacy's key tenets and the labor movement's demands for strong government regulation and redistribution.

So Buchanan designed an alternative. Public choice theory, as he came to call it, framed government as yet another special interest group, capable of coercing unwilling individuals into projects they neither chose nor benefited from. "Freedom" has always been a deeply contested concept in the history of the United States (Foner, 1998), but Buchanan and his colleagues sought to cement one meaning of it into the public's consciousness. Freedom, public choice scholars asserted, meant freedom from government, from labor unions, and from civil rights demands for racial equity. For these thinkers, markets made freedom possible. Using race-neutral language, Buchanan framed white supremacists' concerns in the language of aspiration

(“freedom from constraint”), rather than refusal to participate. With considerable financial and political leverage from powerful, like-minded conservatives, Buchanan spent the next five decades nesting his theories inside academic research centers, think tanks, and political actors’ networks. As MacLean shows, Buchanan’s ideas built not only free-market apparatuses but also a tethered government, indeed, a democracy in chains.

White Supremacy, The Virginia School, and Public Education

Whereas other accounts of rising conservatism have identified the crucial importance of the war of ideas, MacLean’s scholarship takes us into these ideas themselves. Most saliently, MacLean exposes the central role white supremacy played in spurring free-market ideology, particularly in educational policy. Through her account of Buchanan’s Virginia School, MacLean documents how movements for the political rights of the Southern economic elite were rooted in a desire to maintain racial dominance over blacks. Yet, as MacLean shows, these beliefs were not restricted to the slave-owners of the South, and therefore not eradicated with slavery’s abolition. Nor do we have reason to believe that when Buchanan began articulating these ideas in the mid-20th century that he possessed extreme racial animus. In fact, Buchanan and his associates understood their position, white supremacist or otherwise, to be quite rational. They possessed the all-too-common mid-20th century belief that the political expropriation and economic exploitation of black people was a highly justifiable condition in order for white elites to maintain their dominance. Thus, the historical evidence that MacLean has gathered sketches important theoretical points: the political subjection of racialized populations is not an effect of capitalism’s unfolding; it is constitutive to its design.

As MacLean’s research uncovers, public education provided an especially

important site of this ideological struggle. Her account begins with in 1950, in Prince Edward County, Virginia, where the all-black schools were notorious for their poor conditions. Parents in the county had repeatedly pleaded to the school board for improvements. Yet the school board did nothing to address their concerns and community members had little power to hold the school board accountable for failing to do so, due to the state’s restrictive voting laws, such as poll taxes and gerrymandered districts. Frustrated by the terrible conditions, high school students organized a two-week strike demanding better conditions. When the principal threatened to expel all the students and jail their parents if the students did not return to school, the student organizers contacted the local NAACP. The NAACP took on the case, petitioning not only the conditions of the school, but the broader injustice of Jim Crow segregation. With the full backing of the black community in Prince Edward County, the lawsuit went forward to federal court as *Davis vs. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, becoming one of the five cases folded into *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1954, *Brown v. Board* held that racial segregation in schools was illegal under the law.

The student strike and the unanimity of the black community shook the white elite of Virginia. As the verdict of *Brown v. Board* came down, demanding schools provide not only equal but integrated facilities, the black residents of Prince Edward County braced themselves for retaliatory violence. In the end, no physical riots broke out; the middle-class whites in Virginia were more or less willing to accept the tenets of *Brown v. Board*. Instead, it was the governing elite that seethed in anger. Integration posed a problem for the ruling elite whose power chokehold depended on racial segregation. This account offers an important intervention against the all-too-common stereotype that white working class people constitute the major opposition to any integration.

Yet the Virginian elite, who considered their state “a place where gentleman ruled, and applauded themselves for well-managed relations,” (p. 18), were unwilling to pursue vigilante violence, such as the Ku Klux Klan-style lynchings and night rides common in other states, to maintain their racial and political dominance. Breaking the law was not part of their way of life. Manipulating the laws, however, was a different story.

This was the Virginia backdrop that the young James Buchanan encountered in 1956, when he arrived as new faculty member and chair of the economics department at University of Virginia. Buchanan, a Tennessee native, grew up with a homespun understanding of two types of people in the world: makers and takers. From an early age, Buchanan saw himself as an “ally of those who worked hard, only to be set upon by claims from grasping ‘special interests’” (p. 30), especially collectively organized forces and most of all, the government. These instincts matured into complex ideology as Buchanan pursued a doctoral degree in economics at the University of Chicago. Buchanan’s time at the University of Chicago shaped him in two important ways. First, it allowed Buchanan to work closely with the senior economist, Frank Hyneman Knight, a close associate of Austrian economist Friedrich A. Hayek and co-founder of the influential Mont Pelerin Society. The relationship with Knight helped facilitate Buchanan’s involvement with the elite and private society devoted to expanding free-market ideas. Secondly, Buchanan’s time at the University of Chicago exposed him to the work of the up-and-coming young faculty member, Milton Friedman.

Though Buchanan respected Friedman’s aims, he was not drawn to his style of hyper-technical, mathematical modeling that would come to characterize the Chicago school of economics. Buchanan preferred “the social contract and governance of the economy than with the mathematical derring-do” (p. 41) of Friedman. His exposure to

Friedman helped clarify his own ambitions and goals, which he set into motion upon assuming a faculty appointment at University of Virginia. At the helm of the economics department, Buchanan set to work developing a program that would provide the intellectual power necessary to break “the powerful grip that collectivist ideology already had on the minds of intellectuals” (p. 46).

Fortunately for Buchanan, Virginia offered a fertile home to incubate his budding vision. Indeed, some of the country’s most powerful men and fellow Southerners had bestowed on Buchanan not only a powerful ideological inheritance, but a political machine, revved-up and ready to put Buchanan’s theories into action. Perhaps no one better prepared the ground for Buchanan’s Virginia School than Virginia statesmen and former vice president, John C. Calhoun. The nation’s preeminent tax-revolt strategist and outspoken supporter of slavery in the mid-19th century, Calhoun set out to alter the constitutional understanding of liberty that James Madison and his colleagues developed. Whereas Madison aimed to protect the rights of the propertied through government, Calhoun believed such protections to be the exclusive function of government, no matter the harm it imposed on others’ rights. Calhoun realized the elite rule of the few over the many could not endure the force of democracy for long, particularly when the federal government stepped in. Thus, Calhoun worked tirelessly to invent “constitutional gadgets” capable of defending state’s rights in the face of federal pressure. “Central to his efforts,” writes MacLean, “was a self-serving yet astute interpretation of the Constitution that emphasized states’ rights, buttressed by a battery of other rules to subdue the people, black and white” (p. 11).

Although legally enshrining chattel slavery was central to Calhoun’s political program, the end of slavery in the US did not dispel Calhoun’s ideas. In the wake of *Brown v. Board*, Harry Byrd carried on his legacy.

Occasionally referred to as the “the ghost of Calhoun” due to his unabashed protections of white elites, Byrd served as governor of Virginia for nearly a decade, and one of its senators from 1933 to 1965, when he retired. Known as a fierce adversary of Roosevelt and his New Deal, Byrd amassed generations of political power by executing voter restrictions (such as poll taxes) and implementing flagrantly disproportionate voting districts.

The Struggle over Public Education

Public education sat at the center of the ideology inherited by Buchanan. In 1956, the federal government updated the Brown ruling. Not only was segregation deemed illegal, but the federal government ruled that states must integrate their public schools. This ruling outraged Byrd, who understood that the end of segregation and the advent of integration meant the end of his power chokehold. So he developed a plan, known as “massive resistance,” wherein the state of Virginia refused to comply with the federal orders to integrate, even if it meant shutting down local schools altogether, for black and white students alike. With the help of local media, Byrd persuaded the governor to shut off state aid to any local school district that planned to desegregate. To appease white citizens who preferred integrated public schools to no schools at all, Byrd proposed a tax-funded tuition grant to enable white parents to send their children to private schools – vouchers, in today’s language. This is a crucial point. While we should not fall into what is called the “genetic fallacy” logic, in which the origins of a theory always condition its meaning and use, in this case, we should not overlook how seemingly neutral mechanisms of school choice have roots in this white supremacist soil.

Byrd was crafty in his strategy. Rather than addressing school integration in terms of race and equal treatment under the law, Byrd and his associates framed the problem as an injustice of state’s rights. Such articulation

drew attention and support of Northern elites. “Virginia’s fight against federal power,” summarized MacLean, “excited those on the right who had come to feel they had no real home in the Democratic or Republican parties of the 1950s” (p. 53). Imbued with the spirit of Calhoun, Byrd’s resistance to public school integration provided a nexus of struggle for the inchoate libertarian movement.

Yet not all Virginians felt moved by Byrd’s “massive resistance.” In 1958, unwilling to violate federal mandates, three Virginia school districts declared their plans to admit several black students the coming fall. In response, Governor Lindsay Almond, Jr. announced he would close schools, leaving some 13,000 white students with no school to attend the coming year. This outraged parents across the state, perhaps most of all Louise Wensel. One week after the governor announced his plans to close the public schools, Wensel, a country doctor with no prior experience in politics, declared she would challenge Byrd, the long-reigning figurehead of the Virginia power-elite, in the upcoming elections. An underdog by almost all metrics, Wensel organized a forceful grassroots movement that attracted widespread parent and labor support. Though Wensel eventually lost to Byrd, her coalition posed a serious threat to the power bloc Byrd had rested upon for over 30 years. The forces she had organized would not go away: the people of Virginia wanted education for their children. And they wanted it more than segregation or immunity from federal government.

What’s more, neither federal nor Virginia courts found “state’s rights” to be a sufficient rationale to close public schools. In the fall of 1959, schools were ordered to re-open. However, all-black schools like those in Prince Edward County remained padlocked. From 1959-1964, nearly 1,800 black students in the county went without school. Meanwhile, thanks to Byrd’s tax-funded tuition grant, white families were able to open a private school for their children, often referred to as a

“segregation academy.” While the Prince Edward County situation struck many as racist and unjust, it mirrored the design Buchanan and his team at University of Virginia had been developing over the past three years.

Importantly, public education became the first arena in which Buchanan tested out his new ideas. When the federal courts struck down Virginia’s massive resistance plan, the governor immediately called Byrd and the Virginia conservative elite into a huddle to determine their next moves. Buchanan, an ally of Byrd’s, pounced, eager to offer their propositions as policy interventions. Although massive resistance had been struck down, Buchanan’s framing of “public choice” provided a means to maintain racial segregation while circumventing federal orders. Whereas Byrd framed his program as a refusal, Buchanan framed his as an aspiration.

Within weeks of the federal government’s intervention, Buchanan circulated a plan to Virginia lawmakers that proposed radical changes to the state’s education policy. This plan had two prongs. First, he proposed that the state provide a tax-subsidized voucher to any parent in the state to send their children to private schools, no matter the reason.

Avoiding the pitfalls of Byrd’s previous tuition credit scheme, Buchanan’s plan would not violate the civil rights mandate to provide equal treatment under the law; all students could receive vouchers. And secondly, Buchanan’s plan empowered counties to completely close the doors of their public schools, and only implement vouchers. As Buchanan and his allies wrote in an op-ed, the plan would “authorize any county, on a vote of its [enfranchised] people, to abandon public schools entirely and shift altogether to a scholarship [voucher] approach” (p. 70). When the plan failed to pass in the state’s House of Delegates, Buchanan became even more determined. As he saw it, his proposal lost not because its ideas and values were unpopular –

though, as Wensel’s invigorating campaign had illuminated, they were – but because the threshold of “popularity” had hamstrung government’s decision-making.

For Buchanan, the inevitability of school integration in Virginia deepened his belief that majority rule corroded governance. His voucher proposal failed because a majority of representatives did not support it. They did not support it because they, in turn, were beholden to a majority of their constituents in order to maintain their office. Buchanan knew intimately that Virginia legislators wanted to resist school integration. Yet they were not willing to lose the next election for doing so. For Buchanan, Virginia legislators’ rejection of his education privatization scheme was not a problem of the policy itself, but rather a problem of politics.

So Buchanan and his fellow UVA colleagues set to work to change the rules of politics. Withdrawing temporarily from the public arena of politics, they retreated to their academic research center, by now funded by one of Mont Pelerin’s major endowments, the Volker fund. Over the next few years, Buchanan and his colleague Gordon Tullock, a Volker-funded post-doc sent by the Mont Pelerin society to assist Buchanan, wrote *The Calculus of Consent* (1962). The work was a chronicle of political economy theory, for which Buchanan would earn a Nobel Prize. And it documented their hallmark theory of public choice. Inverting the justice claims that filled the air in the early 1960s, Buchanan’s theory developed the thesis that democratically run government of majority rule was, in fact, undemocratic. Adopting the rational point of view of an economist, Buchanan’s work sought to curb “the appetites of majority coalitions.” In particular, Buchanan sought to dampen the power harnessed by labor unions and civil rights organizations in 1960s that had engaged in collective action strategies to secure increased material redistribution, social recognition, and political representation. Politics, public choice theory asserted, must

flow from the near-sacred “individual freedom to consume, produce, save, and invest.” It revised the social contract of the New Deal and Keynesian social order, in which collective action spurred political results. Instead, public choice theory put individuals in a marketplace at the center of politics, free from the coercion of groups. Freedom, in this system, was defined as a negative capacity – freedom to exit a collective system. It is not accidental that we hear these arguments even more loudly today.

The Public Choice Theory and Free-Market Movements

Public choice theory provided a platform to bring a number of different conservative tendencies that had been forming at the margins of politics in the 1960s to the mainstream. It provided an ideological mechanism to link with growing free-market forces that, once combined, have powerfully shaped education privatization movements. Much of the second half of MacLean’s book documents the links Buchanan’s choice movement forged with other free-market projects. Members of the Virginia School, for example, lent their expertise to Barry Goldwater’s presidential campaign. Appealing to libertarians and ultra-conservatives within and beyond Virginia, public choice offered race-neutral language to restructure constitutional beliefs to expand free-market principles, and to issue “dog-whistles” to white supremacist ideology that lingered underground in the 1960s. Yet, as Barry Goldwater’s massive defeat made evident, many in the US were not eager to forfeit democracy’s institutions in order to protect the narrow projects of racial supremacy and economic oligarchy.

Here international contexts provided the needed laboratory. MacLean’s research shows Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet supplied the political zeal and possibility that Buchanan and his Virginia allies had hoped to find in the United States. MacLean devotes a

full chapter to exposing Buchanan’s role in helping the vicious military coup to craft a constitution that would lock their radically undemocratic project in place. Whereas history has tarnished the legacy of Milton Friedman and his Chicago school’s notorious leadership in Chile, Buchanan has been heretofore unassociated from the experiment, his contributions lingering in the shadows. Thanks to MacLean, his role in dismantling Chile’s democracy is now revealed. As one of us knows from his personal experiences with activists and educators in Chile, MacLean’s research offers new paths toward a richer understanding of the role U.S. economists played in providing ideological and “intellectual” support for the murderous military regime of Pinochet.

Over the next decades, Buchanan built up his national and international networks, migrating from university to university and leaving a trail of “public choice”-oriented centers in his wake. His efforts drew increasingly closer with other hard-lined libertarian efforts of the time, especially the budding political project of the Koch brothers. Buchanan’s impact on conservative politics grew particularly in the 1980s, as Buchanan built up his program at George Mason University, which the Wall Street Journal described as “the Pentagon of conservative academia” (p. 174). Buchanan’s post at George Mason, conveniently located just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C., offered ready resources to the Reagan administration’s libertarian conservatism. It also enabled Buchanan to prepare a stream of researchers to join the area’s conservative think tanks, such as the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Enterprise Institute

In the second half of the book, MacLean describes Buchanan’s close partnership with Charles Koch and his subsidiary groups, illuminating important dimensions of the “dark money” movement. In so doing she adds important elements to

the story told in Jane Mayer's analysis in *Dark Money*. Buchanan, MacLean makes evident, provided the intellectual strategy sought by the Kochs. According to MacLean, for Charles Koch, "only James Buchanan had also developed an operation strategy for how to get to that radically new society [envisioned by Hayek and von Mises], one that took as axiomatic what both Buchanan and Koch understood viscerally: that the enduring impediment to the enactment of their political vision was the ability of the American people, through the power of their numbers, to reject the program" (p. 193).

There was no time to spare. In 1993, the National Voter Registration policies eased voter registration processes, removed obstacles that had discouraged non-elites from voting. By 1997, millions of new voters joined the electorate. Charles Koch realized he had to double down on his efforts. With the goal of changing the democratic mechanism of "majority rule," in 1997 Koch gave \$10 million to start a James Buchanan Center for Political Economy at George Mason University, where Buchanan was employed. The center would combine Buchanan's scholarly strategy efforts with the Koch's capacity for political execution. As Koch forebodingly stated upon the Center's opening, "Since we are greatly outnumbered, the failure to use our superior technology insures failure" (p. 195). This center was to change the rules of the game, and James Buchanan and Charles Koch were to be the co-chairs. Yet, it soon became clear that Koch's vision for the center would dominate. Much to Buchanan's chagrin, the staff that Koch hired had little academic training; instead, they were political operatives. They carried none of the academic pretenses of objectivity that Buchanan was accustomed to, and they pursued the center's political aims without restraint. In fliers to potential donors, they boasted of their private influence with top-level political officials.

The Koch brothers' operations in the university did not sit well with Buchanan, who

believed as co-chair he should have some direction of the program. Nor did it sit well with the dean of George Mason University. Such close collaborations between the center—a nonpartisan 501-(c)(3) status entity legally obliged to abstain from partisan activity—and political activities were, after all, illegal. Nor did the Koch operatives' swagger appeal to Buchanan's academic colleagues in George Mason's economics department. The department climate soured as faculty members worried that association with the Koch operation would denigrate the academic legitimacy of their department. And perhaps most of all, Buchanan was personally incensed, understanding he had no authority over the center that bore his name. His initiative was being steamrolled by the Koch project. At Buchanan's insistence, the political activities of the center split into another entity in at GMU.

Yet even that did not abate Buchanan's concerns. As the new center continued to pursue political relationships with senior congressional staff, Buchanan warned the GMU administration about the unabashed political mission of the Koch's new center. Yet the provost shrugged, unwilling to disturb the university's cozy relationships with Koch, even if it meant "subordinating an academic department to the political project" (p. 203). Buchanan's days of running in stride with Koch brothers were over. When Buchanan died in 2013, none of the Koch brothers nor their operatives employed by the James Buchanan Center could be bothered to attend his memorial service. "Why should they?" MacLean concludes, "His days of usefulness to them had passed" (p. 204).

Understanding the Right

Though Buchanan's fractured alliance with Charles Koch comprises only a few pages of MacLean's account, it is an important—and arguably understated—contribution of her project. *Democracy in Chains* shows the elaborate coordination between academic economists, politicians, private billionaires and

think-tanks in the formation and popularization of influential ideological and political programs. MacLean exposes the enormous effort required to forge political projects. In doing so, she observes the indeterminate character of these alliances: certain historical conditions managed to align discrete interests, which combined with vigor. Yet, implicitly, she also shows the converse is true: just as these forces are not predestined to be separate, neither are they predestined to cohere into a unified movement. The balance of forces is contradictory; the balance of forces can change. These are important lessons for those of us who are involved in building and defending more critically democratic policies, institutions, and practices (see Apple, 2013; Apple, Gandin, Liu, Meshulam, & Schirmer, in press).

Within its first month of publication, *Democracy in Chains* caused a tremendous uproar. It received glowing reviews. It received scathing reviews. Its reviews have been reviewed. Not surprisingly, a massive volume of criticism comes from researchers and pundits funded by the Koch brothers, the Volker fund, or offshoot organizations. Their criticism highlights one of the significant dimensions of MacLean's research: the increasing creep of corporate agendas into public spaces, particularly where they concern the exchange of ideas. Academics and universities become a special target, as do the critical thinking that they germinate. This criticism makes one thing abundantly clear – the need for academic freedom and public exchange of ideas.

Although critics have charged that MacLean's exposé of these concerted efforts perpetuate a conspiracy theory narrative of the right, an astute reading of Maclean's thesis offers a different portrait. The free-market movement, especially as notarized by the political power of the Koch family, contains a number of tendencies, not all of which align. Buchanan's break with Koch provides just one stark example of this. As an intellectual

strategist within the academy, Buchanan's post positioned him as leader of the political movement for free-market expansion for a time. But it also generated friction. Buchanan's institutional associations both legitimized and constrained the growth of the political movement. Though his academic prestige provided him greater political influence, his professional role came in conflict with his political one. Whereas Koch saw the academic project as subservient to the political one, Buchanan understood them to be interdependent. Their respective beliefs about the relative autonomy of their political project contradicted each other; the seeming boundless movement hit a wall.

Of course, the friction between Buchanan and Koch did not stop the movement's expansion; it merely ricocheted its force in other directions, as MacLean makes clear in her final chapter about the radical right's recent advances. Yet her observation about contradictions within the movement highlights an important feature of the radical right's mechanics: its ideology coheres around contradictions that do not always prove to be stable. In fact, assembling disparate elements into a unified program not only cohered but also fueled the Virginia School and the growing free-market movement. As MacLean's research shows, the Virginia School offered a means to secure the economic interests of the wealthy minority against an ever-growing majority, particularly as Jim Crow segregation dissolved, thereby weakening racialized divisions of the social order. The race-neutral language of public choice appeased Southern elites, who sought to covertly maintain white supremacy in order to protect their social and economic dominance, while simultaneously avoiding detection from federal civil rights accusations. In other words, as the explicit racial domination project lost legal standing in the wake of the civil rights movement, Buchanan and his colleagues cunningly framed their racially discriminating policies in race-neutral

language. In order to earn popular support, Buchanan's ideas "had to be presented to the American public as the opposite of what they really were." (p. 194).

The movement leaders' sharp understanding of the incongruities in their ideas, in fact, bred the need for stealth. Unsurprisingly, critics read MacLean's emphasis on stealth as an embellishment of a conspiracy theory. This cursory reading, however, misses the point: stealth is merely a by-product made necessary by willful deceit. Buchanan and the leaders of the Virginia school were keenly aware of the duplicity embedded in their project. The very aim of public choice theory, after all, construes the political will of a majority as a niche special interest; the part gets projected as the whole. The leaders of this movement acted with stealth in order to shield their ideas from the public scrutiny that would surely destroy them. As MacLean notes, sunshine is the best disinfectant.

For those of us in education, MacLean's account dramatizes a previously uncovered history, showing the central role educational policy played in spurring the radical right. As MacLean documents, white Virginian elites' fierce commitment to racially segregated schools drove the first proposals for school vouchers. Yet the failure of these proposals to become politically viable spurred Buchanan's theoretical project of public choice. MacLean gives this history texture -- characters with personality, ambition, paranoia, faults, and greed. This texture is central to her methodology: she contextualizes these ideas in their time, showing the complicated and corrosive elements embedded in their formation. After all, stripping context from calculus is precisely what characterized Buchanan's school of thought, which attempted to divorce racial language from racist policies. His brand of economics developed theory without data, developing formulas to predict how the world works instead of reckoning with the truths about the

ways the world doesn't work. MacLean's book provides an important intervention by exposing the cunning thinking that generated Buchanan's calculus of consent

Her effective dramatization of this movement, however, may obscure what Gramsci would call the consensual nature of hegemony. For Gramsci, hegemony demands a degree of consent. No matter how tentative or impartial, people may comply with the conditions of their oppression. Yet MacLean's narrative does not illuminate the gray space around Buchanan's ideas. Why did Buchanan's notion of freedom within a marketplace speak to so many people, especially those lacking exceptional market assets? Buchanan observed that collective projects often contain vagaries. Multiple tendencies get bound together within a majority, suppressing some of its elements. Buchanan interpreted this observation as reason to eradicate the political weight assigned to collective will, elevating markets and the force of private wealth instead, what he saw as freeing the "makers" from the "takers." This rationale echoes in contemporary debates. For example, many people struggling to make ends meet in low-wage jobs resent paying taxes to provide premium health care for bureaucrats who sit at desks all day, teachers who get three months of vacation per year, or the handicapped person who does not work at all, while they themselves have minimal to non-existing health care provisions. They accurately recognize injustice in the collective system of distribution. With thanks to ideas like those proposed by Buchanan, they call for the elimination the collective system. But this "good sense" (for more discussion if the elements of good sense and bad sense in social consciousness, see Apple 2006; 2013; Gramsci, 1971,) could be interpreted in other directions -- for example, that the collective project needs more and better systems of redistribution, not less. While MacLean points out the limitations of Buchanan's thinking, her scholarship does not flesh out the good sense reasons why

people attached to it, and how those can be interpreted in more just directions. Yet this is absolutely crucial if we are to interrupt the possessive individualism that is produced by and underpins neoliberal identities (Apple, 2013). The point is not to abandon collectives because of the inequalities created by their very boundary and embedded within their ranks. It is to query constantly how these systems can be made more just, and how democracy can further unfurl.

MacLean's historical account provides us with a way of countering the collective amnesia that now permeates the ways many people look at the supposedly "neutral" public choice policies that now occupy so much of the terrain of education reform. But another element of this loss of memory needs to be countered. It is crucial to remember that at the

very same time Buchanan and his colleagues and allies were engaged in constructing their seemingly rational explanations and policies, a rich tradition of political and economic theories contested—and still contests—the entire artifice that was constructed. Just as importantly, powerful movements in education and other areas of social activism provide living evidence that resistance to the positions advanced by Buchanan, the Koch brothers, the American Legislative Council (ALEC), and others can create more truly thick models of democracy that are not perverted into excuses for elite (and white) dominance. Reading *Democracy in Chains* helps us understand how important elements of racial and economic dominance are stitched into political programs, especially public education. Such understanding is crucial and MacLean deserves our thanks for doing this.

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