

# The Left's Funding Network Is Its Power

by Ian Oxnevad

*Arabella: The Dark Network of Leftist Billionaires Secretly Transforming America*, Scott Walter, Encounter Books, 2024, pp. 281, \$21.99 softcover.

Scott Walter's *Arabella: the Dark Network of Leftist Billionaires Secretly Transforming America*, is one of those books that gets too little attention. Dripping with detail, *Arabella* fills a gap in American civil discourse between theory and fact, and between narrative and the headlines. Many Americans over the past decade have sensed a nefarious movement in the realm of activist politics, be it in the advancement of transgender rights and men in women's sports, the erosion of the border and the meaning of citizenship, and in costly environmentalism. For readers looking to connect the dots, Walter's book offers a treasure trove of investigative insight into how the Left has become a social and political powerhouse through funding networks and nonprofits in the form "dark money."

Uncovering and dissecting is part of Walter's expertise. Prior to his work as the president of the Capital Research

Center, Walter worked in the George W. Bush administration specializing in domestic policy. As the Vice President at the Philanthropy Roundtable and editor of the magazine *Philanthropy*, Walter developed a body of work and experience in tracking and testifying on policy and leftwing dark money networks that shape the progressive political landscape. Beyond the book's investigative detail and depth, which is impressive in its own right, Walter offers the troubling thesis that leftwing donors are not only neo-aristocratic in their mobilization, but are motivated to "control others" who violate their ideological moral structure (xxiii-xxv). In this, Walter's book offers readers an explanation and demonstration of why leftwing elites do what they do.

The book flows as an organizational biography and anatomy of the leftwing "dark money" network run out of the for-profit Arabella Advisors in

Washington DC. Chapter 1 outlines the beginnings of the Arabella network, and how it emerged out of environmental activism in the mid-2000s. Chapter 2 maps the Arabella network's constellation of nonprofits and the activist groups they support, along with a profile of the various billionaire megadonors who support them. As the bulk and heart of the book, chapters 3-10 consist of in-depth case studies of these different groups and the causes they advance. Here, readers are treated to how Arabella pushes various agendas ranging from expanding Obamacare, abortion, environmentalism, education, and transgender rights. The final three chapters examine how Arabella's operations came to widespread public awareness via media exposure, and ultimately the question of whether the problem presented by leftwing dark money networks can be solved.

Walter's book blows up the narrative that secretive groups of sociopolitical elites attempting to promote a progressive agenda are little more than a rightwing conspiracy theory. Walter describes how Arabella Advisors LLC was founded by Eric Kessler, a veteran of the Clinton administration who served in the Department of the Interior, as a for-profit consultancy for philanthropic initiatives. Those initiatives include five separate nonprofits: the New Venture Fund, the Sixteen Thirty Fund, the Windward Fund, the Hopewell Fund, and the North Fund (16). Not only do these innocuous-sounding organiza-

tions share the same officers, but all but one are housed at the same address.

Through his investigative acumen, Walter dissipates the fog around politicized leftwing philanthropy by linking what would otherwise be a list of bland-sounding organizations to dollar amounts and individuals. Readers will be shocked at the neo-aristocratic nature of this network, which brought in \$6.5 billion between 2006 and 2021 (18). The Sixteen-Thirty Fund not only offers its donors a tax-deductible option for giving, but its board members have included operatives from the Hillary Clinton campaign and advisors from a consultancy founded by former Secretary of State, Madaleine Albright. Seed funding for the Hopewell Fund came from the wife of Warren Buffett, Susan Buffett, of the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation. Hopewell's board includes veterans from the Barack Obama presidential campaign. The Windward Fund's environmental work is funded by household foundation names like Rockefeller, Kellogg, and Walton (21). George Soros and his Open Society Foundation, a favorite villain to the Right, is included among fixtures in Arabella's apparatus. For readers wondering where elites from government, politics, finance, and activism collide, Walter's investigation provides clarity.

The strongest aspects of the book are its lucidity and detail. Books that function as pieces of investigative journalism are easy to write badly. Far too often, investigative works rely on narrative or assumption to fill in gaps in

factual detail. Often, this mistake allows for greater readability, but sacrifices the explosive illuminating power that good research-driven writing can offer. Walter avoids this particular pitfall common in this nonfiction genre by amply demonstrating links between progressive causes and the monied organizations behind them. The examples are numerous.

For Americans shocked or in disbelief about the Biden administration's attempts to restrict gas-powered cars and stoves, Walter demonstrates how Arabella undermined the Department of the Interior during the first Trump term and laid the groundwork for the Biden administration's environmental radicalism. In order to curtail the first Trump team's efforts to expand energy extraction on public lands, a goal endorsed across the Democratic establishment, Arabella began attacking Trump's Department of the Interior via two of its "pop-up" organizations: Western Values Project and Western Values Project Action (94-96). Neither group was an organic activist effort, but rather were respective extensions of Arabella through the New Venture Fund and Sixteen Thirty Fund (96). From 2017-2018, both organizations ran a harassment campaign against then-Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke, his staff, and his wife. Once the Biden administration came into office, Arabella's extensions worked to promote and influence its environmental policies aimed at limiting energy independence and liberty (106-112).

Walter's book does have its weaknesses, though they are not found in the investigative quality that makes up its core. Rather, the weakness comes in the book's recommendations for how to stop Arabella-esque influence and the neo-aristocratic Marxism it promotes. Walter notes that the assumptions that today's Left is animated by a motivation to control others, or at least to prevent them from violating the Left's ideological purity, is correct. Walter argues at the book's conclusion that countering "Arabella's style of Big Philanthropy ganging up with Big Government" involves a renewal of localized civic activism at the level of "public-spirited citizens" and in families and communities. Here, Walter's prescription is not only naïve, but dangerous.

Big government in its various forms, whether the aristocracies in the past, the statist nightmares of the twentieth century, or in the globalist authoritarianism that currently threatens sovereignty across the West, is adept at steamrolling individual civic activists and local communities. This is true not only for the metrics of money and people, but in terms of coordination. If anything, Arabella is a model of coordination between ostensibly separate vehicles of corporate structure, non-profit activism, and an ability to bridge divides between the private sector and government bureaucracy. No network of genuine communities will be able to collaborate at such a scale to defeat that kind of coordination, no matter how passionate, right, or idealistic it may be.

Walter's insinuation that this is possible is not only bad policy, but bad political science. Power counters power, and Walter misses the mark on how to counter the power of groups like Arabella.

One does not need to look far to see the expansive fusion of leftwing activist groups and captured state power, as recent revelations from the Trump administration's "Department of Government Efficiency" (DOGE) bring to light. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) offers a damning picture of how Arabella is part of a broader ecosystem in which leftwing activists use Americans' tax dollars against them. George Soros' Open Society worked with USAID to jointly fund the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project to silence conservatives.<sup>1</sup> USAID funded \$27 million to the Tides Center, which has helped groups like Palestine Legal to help foment anti-Semitic campus activism.<sup>2</sup> Staffers have rotated jobs between USAID, Arabella Advisors, and other groups like it.<sup>3</sup> Best of luck to civic activists seeking to coordinate and counter this kind of networking and scale at a local level.

Walter's investigative depth does, however, mitigate some of this criticism. Without books like *Arabella*, of which there are few, Americans who seek to counter monied progressivism would lack the full picture of what they face while facing sustained ridicule from fellow citizens who seek to dismiss their concerns as mere conspiracy-mongering. Indeed, Walter notes

that his work and that of the Capital Research Center were crucial to de-mystifying the dark-money universe that Arabella inhabits. It is groups like the Capital Research Center that demonstrated how Arabella animated the Left's activism, campaigns like "Medicare for All," and the use of fake "local news" sites to advance its agenda. When mainstream media outlets like *The Atlantic*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times* also began illuminating Arabella Advisors, it offers proof that conspiracies are not always figments of the imagination, but are often real in the world of politics (xx-xxiii). Back in 2021, Emma Green, a writer at *The Atlantic*, called Arabella the "mothership" of "Democratic dark money," effectively vindicating Walter and his efforts to verify conservative narratives about big money masquerading as democracy. The single key takeaway from the book is that concerned citizens, conservatives, and anyone worried about the integrity of American civic life have their work cut out for them.

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1. Virginia Allen, Tim Kennedy, "Unmasking How 'Foreign Aid Undermined US Interests,'" *Daily Signal*, Feb. 26, 2025.
  2. *Ibid.*
  3. *Ibid.*