

# EQUAL JUSTICE SOCIETY

## The Big Money Behind Ward Connerly

In a decisive victory for progressive activist groups, on May 18<sup>th</sup> Ward Connerly was forced to divulge the names of the key financial backers of California's Proposition 54. Prop 54, which would have prevented the state of California from collecting vitally important racial data, would have devastated the state's ability to address disparities by race or ethnicity in health care, educational resources and academic achievement, and hate crimes and discrimination. Connerly, fronting for a wealthy all-white group of top funders, led the campaign to adopt it.

A critically important initiative in the right wing's decades-long strategy to roll back the gains of the racial justice movement, Prop 54 was massively rejected by California voters in 2003 after an intensive education and organizing campaign that successfully mobilized broad opposition across the state.

The disclosure of Connerly's financial backers was forced under a legal settlement with California's Fair Political Practices Commission. FPPC had sued Connerly's preposterously-named American Civil Rights Coalition in response to a complaint filed by California Common Cause, the League of Women Voters of California, the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Greenlining Institute, Californians for Justice and the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. Connerly, who raised \$1.6 million to wage the ballot fight, was fined \$95,000 for violating campaign finance disclosure laws. According to IRS documents, Connerly was paid \$1 million in compensation by his two organizations in 2003.

The victory demonstrates that progressives can win these kinds of legal battles to lift the veil on big right wing money if they are willing to fight them. The settlement and disclosures also provide hard evidence that the assault on racial justice is not, as Connerly would have it, the product of some groundswell of mass anger against equal opportunity measures in major institutions, but of political action by a small group of wealthy and powerful right wing corporate tycoons who are trying to turn back the clock on civil rights. 95% of Connerly's pro-Prop 54 campaign was paid for by seven individuals with powerful connections to the California and national right wings.

Some interesting names are on the list of contributors, including John Moores, Sr., University of California Regents board member and owner of the San Diego Padres (\$400,000); Rupert Murdoch, head of the Fox News empire (\$300,000); Joseph Coors, the late Colorado beer baron and longtime financial angel to the right wing, who in one of his last acts of reactionary activism weighed in with \$250,000; William J. Hume, head of the anti-labor San Francisco-based company Basic American Foods, who gave \$200,000; Kansas City businessman John Uhlmann, \$190,000; Harlan Crow, a Dallas financier \$140,000; and Peter Schaeffer, a Texas-based investor, who gave \$62,703.

Moores, a multimillionaire software businessman who served on the UC Board of Regents with Connerly before the latter stepped down earlier this year, ignited a firestorm of controversy in 2003 while, as a sitting Regent, he commissioned a private study criticizing UC admissions policies as favoring minorities. UC Chancellor Robert Berdahl wrote to Moores that his flawed report had done a "great disservice to the university" and that Moores had shown "shown open contempt for reasoned discourse about complex issues." Moores was censured by the Regents for his action.

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Two Texas software entrepreneurs who co-sponsored a \$500-per-head fundraiser in January 2002 at Moores' Santa Fe estate, Peter Schaeffer and James Woodhill, also contributed to Prop 54, according to the data Connerly was forced to release. Joseph Coors and former Governor Pete Wilson were also listed on the invitation as sponsors, according to the weekly *San Diego Reader*.

Though Moores has contributed to Democratic candidates, he apparently harbors a special animus towards racial justice programs, and was singled out by Connerly as "my primary ally" in the Prop 54 battle in a speech Connerly delivered when he received a \$250,000 prize from the right wing Bradley Foundation earlier this year. Bradley has funded the major right wing organizations that have led the decades-long battle to gut diversity programs and outlaw affirmative action, such as the Center for Individual Rights. Charles Murray, author of the infamous *The Bell Curve*, which tied educational performance to racial genetics, is a Bradley Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

Connerly had been nominated for the prize by Thomas L. Rhodes, the co-chair of Connerly's American Civil Rights Institute and chair of the board of the Bradley Foundation. At the awards banquet Connerly recalled that Rhodes told him after their victory in the 1996 battle for Prop 209 (which outlawed affirmative action in California), "Ward, our work is not yet done. Preferences need to be challenged nationally, and I believe you are the man to do it."

In his autobiography, Connerly writes that Rhodes accompanied him to a crucial meeting with Rupert Murdoch (the second largest contributor to the Prop 54 campaign) in the run-up to the vote for Prop 209, where Connerly was able to secure a \$1 million contribution to back the campaign. Rhodes is president of *National Review* and co-chairman of the Club for Growth, whose recently departed president Stephen Moore set up a nonprofit organization, the Free Enterprise Fund, to lead the political battle to privatize social security. "There are a lot of donors who don't want their names in the newspapers," Moore told the *Washington Post*.

Paul Singer, a New York businessman, contributed \$20,000 to Connerly's Prop 54 campaign and according to the *Wall Street Journal* has also donated \$500,000 to Progress for America, which has played a major part in the battle for social security privatization.

Rhodes was a board member of the Heritage Foundation, one of the premier think tanks of the far right, from 1993-1999. Heritage, which was co-founded by Richard Mellon Scaife, Paul Weyrich and Joseph Coors, hired former Reagan attorney general Edwin Meese, one of the "four horsemen" now overseeing the judicial nominations wars for Karl Rove (the other three are C. Boyden Gray of the Committee for Justice, Leonard Leo of the Federalist Society and Jay Sekulow of Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice).

William J. "Jerry" Hume, another of the major contributors to Connerly's Prop 54 campaign, serves on the board of trustees of the Jaqueline Hume Foundation. Hume's mother Jaquelin, who died in 1991, was one of the early major financial backers of the extensive infrastructure of right wing think tanks and organizations now attempting to drive the country to the far right. Her Jaqueline Hume Foundation, of which Jerry is treasurer, has pumped over \$20 million into this infrastructure *in just five years* according to [mediatransparency.org](http://mediatransparency.org). The Humes were major funders of California's defeated Prop 226, a major 1998 initiative to force unions to get permission from each member before contributing their dues to political campaigns. Jerry Hume has been on the board of trustees of the Heritage Foundation since 1993.

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John Uhlmann, whose name also appears on the documents disgorged by Connerly, gave \$100,000 to support Prop 209, and \$190,000 to support Prop 54. Uhlmann created the Access Communications Group of Kansas City along with Richard Nadler, who claims to have placed more than 11,000 pro-Republican issue ads on Black radio and BET-TV in 8 states. He was also a significant contributor to David Horowitz' now-defunct politicalwar.com, as was Harlan Crow, another major Prop 54 financial supporter. Susan Arcenaux, a staff member of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, was the custodian of records for politicalwar.com. Horowitz, who now runs the Scaife-funded Center for the Study of Popular Culture, has regularly published articles by James Lubinkas, a contributor of racially inflammatory articles to far right publications such as *Chronicles*, *The AIM Report*, *American Renaissance*, *The Social Contract*, *VDARE*, *The Nationalist Times*, and *American Patrol*. Horowitz was also listed as a sponsor of the early fundraiser for Prop 54 at the Moores estate.

With friends like these, Connerly's next moves bear watching. Hopefully the disclosure of his financial backers will give voters pause before supporting other well-heeled efforts to turn back the clock on racial and gender justice. As the late Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, whose life's work is now in the crosshairs of the right wing, once said, "sunlight is the best disinfectant."

-- Lee Cokorinos

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