

THE NEOCON, **THE MESSIAH,**
AND **CORY BOOKER**



“The difference between a Jewish and a non-Jewish person stems from the common expression: ‘Let us differentiate’ ...between totally different species.”

—The Chabad-Lubavitcher Rebbe

BY YASHA
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Cory Booker, the Democratic candidate for New Jersey Senator, has been endorsed by the New York Times as the next progressive hope...a younger, more populist version of Barack Obama, a guy who's not afraid to get down and dirty. The Times' op-ed wizards described Booker as a “deeply unconventional politician,” known for “once rushing into a burning house before the fire department arrived—saving a woman and traumatizing his security detail,” and they predicted that he “will be able to use his political star status to fight for the neglected, the powerless, people who are working and people who need to work in New Jersey and nationally.”

Unconventional indeed. But there's one unconventional side to Booker's progressivism that has received much less recognition. His political career was launched with the help of the Chabad-Lubavitchers, a rabidly right-wing Hasidic cult that considers its dead Rebbe a messiah and that pushes a regressive right-wing worldview that would horrify Booker's prog supporters: deep-rooted racism, violent Islamophobia, medieval positions on everything from abortion to homosexuality and women's rights, and a nasty tendency to normalize sexual abuse and protect serial sexual predators

in its ranks. In the early 1990s, Chabad's passive-aggressive racism helped trigger a three-day race riot in Brooklyn. Earlier this year, a prominent Chabad rabbi mocked victims of childhood sexual abuse who went public, comparing their sexual abuse to “diarrhea” which is “embarrassing but it's nobody's business.”

Booker's relationship with the sect goes back to the early '90s, when he became an active member of Chabad outfits at Oxford and Yale. The connections he forged through Chabad have provided him with a wealthy and powerful right-wing donor network that helped seed his political career. But the relationship was more than a simple political alliance: Booker became mesmerized with Chabad's teachings and began studying with Chabad rabbis. He now reads Hebrew, recites portions of the Torah from memory, helps Chabad fundraise and—most disturbingly—genuinely shares the sect's messianic worldview. As Booker told a room full of wealthy Chabadnik funders in Morristown, New Jersey, back in 2000, when he was a just a lowly Newark council member:

“...the reason why I say that I am humbled to stand before you is that I am truly empowered by the Lubavitch movement, and specifically by a number of Lubavitcher rabbis I have come to know over the last few years. They helped me take seeds that were planted by my elders, my parents and

my grandparents, and nurture them in a way that allowed those seeds to flourish and blossom into the kind of work to which I have dedicated my life.

“Right now, I am on the streets of Newark, battling what I think is one of the most important battles in the city, in this nation, to try to make the spirit of God alive and well. As one of my rabbi friends told me—to try to truly bring about, through effort and sweat, or whatever necessary—the Messianic Era.”

Yes, you read that right. Cory Booker, progressive star and likely future Senator of New Jersey, is “humbled” and “empowered” by Chabad, and helping “make the spirit of God alive and well ... to truly bring about ... the Messianic Era.”

What the hell is going on? Why is Booker throwing in with a far-right apocalyptic Jewish cult? And what does it say about his politics? To understand why Booker's relationship with Chabad is so disturbing, you first have to understand what Chabad is all about.

The Chabad-Lubavitcher is a Hasidic Orthodox sect that originated in the late-18th century in a village on what is now the border between Russia and Belarus. One of many competing Hasidic right-wing biblical nonconformist sects, it differentiated itself by stressing the study of mystical Jewish texts. The sect expanded, battled other Jewish sects, opposed

“...this is what I believe the Rebbe had in mind. That you have to, in every single way, reach out and love the world, to be a light of goodness and love and a light of God's light, because this country of ours needs it, because this world of ours needs it.”

—Cory Booker

Napoleon, sucked up to the Czar, produced various religious texts and commentaries, and generally did what all Hasidic sects did at the time. Things started to go bad in the 20th century. Chabad nearly went extinct, first losing power to modernism and secularization, then getting booted out of the Soviet Union and finally being decimated by the Nazis in WWII. Joseph Isaac Schneerson—then-head of Chabad and the great-great-great-great-grandson of the guy who started the whole thing—escaped to Crown Heights in Brooklyn, where he began preaching that the end times were near.

Joseph Isaac's son-in-law Menachem Mendel Schneerson—MMS, for short—took over the family racket and became "the Rebbe." Rebbe took this messianism to a whole new level in that he saw himself as a messiah. The world was about to end, so it was imperative to prepare, which meant bringing secular Jews from America and around the world into the Chabad fold. The group began cobbling together a wide network of outreach centers, installing Chabad rabbis near college campuses and in remote communities, and making rabbis accessible and available for funerals, weddings and other Jewish rituals. Because Chabad's regressive

Judaism would scare away most secular Jews, these outreach efforts presented a softer, more tolerant and mainstream version of the faith. Chabad's emissaries/missionaries became amazingly good at putting a modern, inclusive face on Chabad, and began to aggressively steal marketshare from Reform and Conservative Judaism. Professor Marvin Schick, an expert on Jewish education, described Chabad as the "Walmart of Jewish life, a mega-phenomenon that keeps growing at a remarkable rate by entering new and underserved areas, and by exploiting the vulnerability of existing service providers. Growth provides the impetus and resources for additional growth."

But as it strengthened its mainstream credentials with the Jewish public, internally Chabadniks were hyper-radicalizing and becoming more and more messianic.

The Rebbe saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as a sign that apocalypse was at hand, that the old enemy of Chabad had finally been destroyed. It also meant that millions of secular Russian Jews were now available and ripe for conversion. For weird reasons, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War were also seen as a sure sign of the end days. Chabad began

to be associated more and more with evangelical Christians, right-wingers, Zionists and neocons.

By the '90s, just about every prominent Chabad rabbi believed that the Rebbe was the messiah. Menachem Friedman, a Chabad scholar and professor at Bar-Ilan University, wrote in 1993, "Today, virtually all Chabad hasidim recognize the Rebbe as the messiah and no longer hesitate to express their views in public." It was a view that took Chabad out of the orbit of traditional Orthodox Judaism and made it a heretical sect—sort of like Jews for Jesus.

But then, in 1994, the Rebbe died.

Apocalypse did not come, and most prominent Chabadnik rabbis began to publicly deny they ever believed the Rebbe was the messiah. But after his death, Chabad's messianic outreach and conversion activities only accelerated. Over the next two decades, the number of missionary Chabad families quadrupled. Something like 4,000 of them are now spread out in 1,000 cities around the world.

Chabad increased its presence most notably in the former Soviet Union.

I first learned about Chabad not long after my family immigrated to San Francisco from the Soviet Union



in 1990. Like most secular Bay Area Jews, all I ever really knew about the Chabad-Lubavitchers was surface stuff: they lit a huge menorah every year in Union Square, prowled the streets during Jewish holidays in outfitted RVs—“mitzvah tanks”—blasting Jewish techno music, and ran Shabbat dinners for UC Berkeley students, where I was told they pour plenty of wine and get everyone drunk. Oh and a Chabad rabbi in San Francisco managed to con a couple of my Soviet émigré buddies in San Francisco into getting circumcised when they were already in their late teens. From what they told me, it was painful as hell. But they did score a couple of Tower Records gift certificates in return.

But I really got up close and personal with the Chabadniks when I was just starting out as an earnest gumshoe reporter nearly a decade ago. I had moved back to my native city of St. Petersburg in the mid-2000s, and had a side-gig freelancing for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, a newswire service for mainstream American Jews. My gig put me in frequent contact with the Lubavitchers, and I was constantly weirded out and shocked by their right-wing and racist views, sleazy, unethical behavior and their aggressive attempts to convert secular Jews into born-again Chabadniks.

By the time I arrived, Chabad had become the biggest and most powerful Jewish organization in Russia. No other religious Jewish outfit even came close to competing with it in terms of funding, political connections and sheer organizational energy. Its emissaries—usually family groups consisting of a young rabbi, his wife and their kids—were spread throughout something like 40 cities. Yep, Chabad was the undisputed King of Russian Jews, but not because it had succeeded on its merits or had been embraced by the locals. Nope, Chabad owed its influence and power to a cynical and sleazy deal it worked out with Vladimir Putin—a deal that went back to Putin’s war with the original, and mostly Jewish, Yeltsin-era oligarchs: Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky and everyone’s

favorite oligarch-turned-political-prisoner Mikhail Khordorkovsky.

Back in the 1990s, in the Yeltsin era, a group of Jewish oligarchs led by Soviet-theater-director-turned-post-Soviet-media-baron Vladimir Gusinsky set up an umbrella organization to represent Russian Jews. Named the Russian Jewish Congress, it was created for one major purpose: to give Gusinsky and his fellow oligarchs a much-needed cloak of respectability. And it worked.



As the head of the RJC, Gusinsky was treated no longer just as a smart gangster and cut-throat businessman, but also as a respected leader of Russia’s Jewish community.

Gusinsky’s RJC revealed its usefulness in the early 2000s, when Putin began warring with the Yeltsin-era oligarchs who had initially put him in office. The fight was largely about political and economic power. Among other things, Putin wanted to put the state back in control of the main Russian resources: banking, media and energy... but that’s not how it was it was reported in the press. From the very beginning, newspapers framed it as an authoritarian struggle with heavy overtones of anti-Semitism. Putin wasn’t going after ruthless gangsters

with blood on their hands. He was targeting Jewish community leaders! He was coming after the Jews!

That was how the Western press played Putin’s fight with the oligarchs, beginning with his arrest of Gusinsky in 2000. “Gusinsky arrest raises fears for Russia’s Jews,” blared a Telegraph headline in 2000.

“The harassment of Vladimir Gusinsky, the Jewish media magnate charged with embezzlement, is being linked to attempts by the Russian government to exacerbate a split among the country’s Jews and curb their influence in public life.

“...The World Jewish Congress in New York said Mr. Gusinsky’s arrest was part of a disturbing pattern of pressure against Jewish interests in Russia. It said: ‘The Jewish community has noted with distress the ongoing attacks by government-owned and other media against Gusinsky and the Russian Jewish Congress.’

“Russian Jewish leaders believe that this is just the start of a general move against groups that dare to be independent of the government.’ ‘They’ve started with the Jews because we’re the most vulnerable,’ said Alexander Osovtsev, vice-president of the Russian Jewish Congress. ‘We’re the first to be attacked, but we certainly won’t be the last.’”

Similar stories ran in papers around the world, international Jewish organizations expressed concern, U.S. and Israeli politicians said they’d get involved. In short, it was a PR nightmare for Putin. He needed someone from the Jewish world in his corner, reassuring folks that anti-Semitism had nothing to do with his crackdown on Jewish oligarchs.

And that’s where Chabad came in. Not long after Putin took power, he worked out a deal with Chabad. The organization would have to publicly and loudly support Putin’s policies, and defend him against charges of anti-Semitism. In return, it would receive lavish funding from two Putin-friendly oligarchs, and get the full support of the Russian government to operate in the Russian Federation. In short,

Chabad would become Putin's third-party spokesman. Or, as some called them, Putin's Court Jews.

That deal was on full display in September 2000, a few months after Gusinsky was arrested on charges of embezzlement, when Putin showed up at a dedication ceremony for a brand-new Chabad community building in the center of Moscow. The facility was built with \$12 million, mostly with funds from Roman Abramovich and Lev Leviav, two Jewish Putin-aligned oligarchs who would become instrumental in Chabad's rise to dominance over the next few years. The ceremony, which was attended by American ambassador James Collin, was notable, *The New York Times* pointed out, "because Mr. Putin effectively gave a government blessing to the Chabad Lubavich movement."

And Chabad gave that blessing right back. Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz, executive director of Chabad's outfit in Russia, used his speech to praise Putin as a friend of the Jewish people and to dispel foolish talk about his anti-Semitism. *The New York Times* reported Berkowitz as saying, "We believe the government is not anti-Semitic, and we believe the government will help us to flourish and grow. The message here—to all minorities of all religions—is that they will be given the opportunity to grow in a new democratic Russia."

Chabad officials who had been shipped in from the U.S. to run the outfit in Russia stuck to their end of the deal. They continued to praise and support Putin while he systematically took down, exiled and jailed insubordinate Yeltsin-era oligarchs: first Vladimir Gusinsky, then Berezovsky, and finally Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his business partner Platon Lebedev, both of whom are now serving long jail terms for tax evasion and fraud.

With Putin providing the political backing and Jewish Putin-friendly oligarchs providing the cash, Chabad became an unstoppable force in Russia's ramshackle Jewish community. But success had a price. In 2005, *Haaretz* published a very detailed investigation

into Chabad's sudden rise in Russia. This revealed that the third-party advocacy deal Chabad officials had struck up with Putin wasn't restricted to protecting him from charges of anti-Semitism. Chabad had also promised to milk its D.C. connections and act as covert lobbyists on behalf of Russia:

"...another reason for the close ties between the Putin government and FEOR [Chabad's organization in Russia] lies in the promises made by Leviev and Lazar that they would make their connections available to Putin and assist the Kremlin to open doors in the corridors of power in Washington. Most importantly, they let Putin and his aides understand that their influence and lobbying would



bring about the abolition of a 1974 Congressional amendment to the Trade Reform Act sponsored by Senator Henry Jackson and Representative Charles Vanik, both Democrats. Putin is deeply distressed by this legislation, which stipulates that countries, such as the former Soviet Union, which restrict freedom of movement and prevent the free emigration of their citizens will not receive special trade benefits from the United States. Even though the Jews of the former Soviet Union, and

then Russia, were allowed to leave, the amendment has not been repealed."

And Chabad kept its promise. Just from the little information that's publicly available, we know that the organization directly lobbied members of Congress and the Obama administration on multiple occasions. Chabad members also did a whole lot of general flack work promoting favorable trade legislation for Russia. A 2007 *Wall Street Journal* investigation into links between Putin and Chabad characterized Chabad as little more than a lobby group: "On numerous trips to Washington, [Chabad's Chief Russia Rabbi Berl Lazar] lobbied members of Congress, made speeches and gave countless media interviews against the Jackson-Vanik amendment. That Cold War law, which curbed U.S. trade with nations restricting emigration, has long rankled the Kremlin," reported the *Wall Street Journal* in 2007. Chabad was still at it in 2009, directing its lobbying efforts at the Obama administration.

While Chabad reps were hitting the beltway lobbying circuit, their colleagues back in Russia were waging a war against the existing Jewish populace. In the course of my reporting, I met non-Chabad Jewish community leaders who were shocked and horrified by Chabad's aggressive, unethical and sometimes straight up illegal attempts to strip other Jewish organizations of assets and property.

Here in the States, Chabad approaches its missionary attempt to convert and steal marketshare from non-Orthodox Jewish groups in less aggressive ways. But in Russia, it simply took what it wanted, using its political connections to raid and seize synagogues and other communal property in cities across Russia. That happened in the Siberian city of Omsk, where local chinovniki seized a synagogue that had been operated by a Reform Jewish organization since the 1990s and handed it over to Chabad's FEOR. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that this was done at the suggestion of Abramovich, who promised to increase funding for the

community if it was handed over to Chabad, even though it was against the wishes of the community:

“Some congregants in Omsk were disappointed by the new direction. The town’s new rabbi, a Chabadnik from Israel, surprised them by organizing special celebrations in honor of the Rebbe, who died in 1994 but is still revered by Lubavitchers, who often hang portraits of him in their homes. ‘People here don’t really understand why we should have special prayers for the Rebbe’s birthday,’ says [Omsk’s Reform community leader] Mr. [Ilya] Edelshtein. ‘It feels like idolatry.’”

Chabad missionaries were just as unprincipled and sleazy in their fight for Russian Jewish souls as they were for Jewish property. Hell, they even tried to convert me into a born-again Chabadnik...

I remember one episode particularly well. I was in the southern Russian city of Volgograd—better known as Stalingrad—doing a human-interest story (well, more like a parody of a human-interest story) on a local Jewish kid who graduated from a local DJ school and now wanted to become the most famous techno DJ in the entire former Soviet Union. Yep, that was the hook. But hey, it wasn’t easy finding

a Jew in Russia, so my editors at the Jewish Telegraphic Agency took what they could get.

Because the budding star of my profile, one DJ Tiësto, had attended a local Chabad school for a few years, I scheduled a meeting with the local Chabad missionary. The guy invited me over to talk in his apartment, a dingy concrete-panel Khrushchev-era apartment building not far from Volga’s central district. The streets in the area were lined with beautiful stone Stalin-era buildings built by German prisoners of war.

The rabbi was somewhere in his late 30s, frumpy, wearing a black rumpled suit and a scraggly beard. After serving tea, we went out on the balcony to talk and smoke. I was planning on getting some intel on the city’s small Jewish community, on the local Jewish institutions and maybe on Chabad’s long-term plans in the area. But I didn’t get many questions answered. The young rabbi told me it was useless to explain anything to me about Chabad because my primitive mind wouldn’t understand. He, as a man whose mind was steeped in the Torah, operated on a higher spiritual plane; I—a mere secular Jew—was stuck in the mire like a filthy dumb animal. A cow or maybe

a rat. He was comically condescending. “We can talk about what to eat, what to drink, maybe even what to fuck,” he said “fuck” with a grin and chuckle. “But that’s about it.”

He wasn’t joking. He kept at it, saying this over and over in various different ways, trying to make me feel insecure and to work his cult voodoo on me... maybe in the hopes that I would break down and embrace the Rebbe, whose portrait hangs in every Chabad home and office. His kaballistic black magic might’ve worked better if he wasn’t such a fucking loser himself, and if we weren’t sitting there in a grimy apartment, chain-smoking Pall Malls and drinking shitty Lipton Tea while his wife sulked around without saying a word in the background, haggard and tired, taking care of a bunch of little brats.

I laughed it off, but the experience creeped me out enough to pique my interest in Chabad’s weird world view. As I learned, all that mumbo-jumbo about souls is very much in line with mainstream Chabadist dogma, which that holds that Jews are born with superior souls and generally exist on a holier and more exalted plain than non-Jews. Souls are separate and unequal—“totally different species,” is how the



Rebbe put it. As for Jews like me who turn their back on God, well, we're worse than animals, and can expect to be punished by God unless we get dipped in a mikvah and converted into proper born-again Chabadniks.

Some ridiculous corollaries emerge out of Chabad belief in the superiority of Jewish souls. For instance, they've worked out a theory that explains why non-Jews (who should logically have non-Jewish souls) can convert to Chabadism. Put simply: it's because non-Jews who fully convert might not have been born to Jewish parents, but they were born with Jewish souls. Converts are Jews who were formerly trapped in a goy's body, which is why they wanted to convert in the first place. It's the Chabad version of transgender—or, transjudener.

My interaction with Chabad in Russia left a bad impression, and I've always kept my experiences in the back of my mind, knowing that I'd probably have to revisit the Chabad thing sooner or later. But never did I expect it to be in connection with someone like Cory Booker.

Peter Beinart, *The Daily Beast's* squishy liberal Zionist, pointed out that Chabad's thinking on souls is "deeply primitively racist" and has led Chabadnik rabbis to take violent and racist positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including advocating for Jim Crow-style laws that would ban Israeli Arabs from renting or buying land in Israel. And plenty of Jews who've interacted with Chabad here in the States are also familiar with the cult's hardcore racism. Hell, I just got off the phone with a friend who attended a Chabad Shabbat dinner here in Los Angeles where table talk instantly turned to the need to exterminate Palestinians. Indeed, Chabad has become synonymous with the worst, most regressive elements of Israeli society.

In the '80s Chabad helped funnel tax-deductible donations from the U.S. to Meir Kahane's political outfit in Israel. Kahane is an ultra-right-wing Orthodox rabbi who emigrated from Brooklyn to Israel, became a politician and called for

the mass ethnic cleansing—"slaughter," as Kahane call it—of all Arabs living in Israel and the Occupied Territories. In 1980, Kahane was arrested in Israel on terrorist charges. He and his followers had been planning to go on a killing spree against Palestinians in the West Bank. In 1988, Kahane's political party was banned in Israel for being too racist—no easy feat in Israel's racist culture. Kahane developed his violent racist politics while still living in Brooklyn, where he founded the Jewish Defense League, an organization that recruited Jewish brownshirt squads to terrorize inner-city blacks, Muslims and Soviet officials on U.S. soil, and which was classified by the FBI and the U.S. State Department as a "right-wing terrorist group."

A number of Israeli Chabadniks were arrested and investigated for their involvement in the assassination Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995. As the *Jerusalem Post* reported, "it was a pair of Chabad yeshiva students from Gilo who printed up the infamous photomontage of Rabin as an SS officer, according to police who arrested them a few weeks after the assassination." The *Post* also reported that in 1997, a couple of Chabadniks in the town of Lod sacked a Jehovah's Witness temple and burned their bibles, dancing around the bonfire chanting "Long live our master. King Messiah for eternity." In the 2000s, Chabadniks violently opposed Israel's disengagement from Gaza, threatening to assassinate Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

"Overseas, people think the Chabad movement does nothing but mitzvot. All they hear about is Chabadniks bringing Yiddishkeit to the Jewish masses, handing out kiddush cups by the thousands and holding Pessah Seders for homesick Israeli travelers in Thailand. And this is true, in part: Abroad, the dominant personality traits of the movement really are mitzvot and outreach. But not in Israel," wrote Larry Derfner in the *Jerusalem Post*.

They might be bad in Israel, but Chabad also has serious tolerance problems right here in the United States. Even on their home turf in Brooklyn's

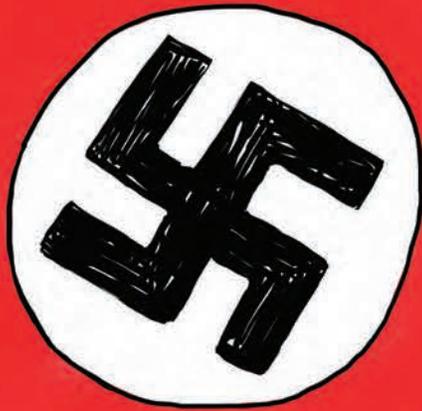
Crown Heights, Chabadniks have long been known for their bigoted and racist treatment of blacks in the community. In 1991, racial tensions that had been simmering for years finally boiled over. It happened when a car in the Rebbe's motorcade ran a red light, jumped a curb and ran over two seven-year-old black children, crushing one of them to death. The Rebbe made no attempt to help the injured and continued to his office a few blocks away. Nor did the driver—Yosef Lifsh—make any attempt to help. Instead, he denied that he had been driving the car and attempted to run away. After the accident, rumors spread through the African-American community that Chabad's own ambulance service arrived on the scene first, but refused to treat the dying child. The incident triggered a violent anti-Chabad riot that lasted three days and left hundreds injured. It was one of the worst race riots in New York, and perhaps the only one directed against Jews.

To add insult to injury, Chabad then shielded Yosef Lifsh and whisked him out of the country to avoid having him brought to trial. "With the assistance of the Chabad community, he fled from the United States and hid in various places around the world, as he feared for his life. A few years ago, he came to Israel, got married and settled in the Kiryat Eliezer quarter of Haifa. He lives in an old apartment building near the industrial area, and keeps a very low profile. To earn a living, he teaches Judaism at Chabad centers in Haifa and at nursing homes in the city," *Haaretz* reported in 2002.

But the racism and bigotry just scratch the surface of what's wrong with Chabad's worldview.

Take Rabbi Manis Friedman, a global emissary of Chabad-Lubavitch and a respected lecturer, author and biblical scholar, who even hosts his own television show, "Torah Forum with Manis Friedman."

Well, Friedman has been known to veer into Holocaust denial territory, claiming that Jews who perished in the Holocaust weren't killed by Germans, but by God, who punished them for



THEY DIDN'T
DO IT!



their secular lifestyle and lack of faith. “Who in fact died and who remained alive had nothing to do with the Nazis. ... Not a single Jewish child died because of the Nazis ... they died in their relationship with God,” he said during a lecture in Australia some years back. More recently, Friedman expounded on the proper ways for Israel to wage war against Palestinians, writing that it’s important to kill all “men, woman and children (and cattle)” because the “only way to fight a moral war is the Jewish way.” He added: “I don’t believe in Western morality ... Living by Torah values will make us a light unto the nations who suffer defeat because of a disastrous morality of human invention.”

Even more disturbing: Friedman recently mocked victims of pedophilia and sexual abuse, saying that it’s no big deal and that victims should just go on with their lives. In the lecture, which was taped and leaked on the internet, Friedman, a small man with a limp cotton-ball beard that hangs down to his chest, told the audience that a lot—if not most—children in Chabad yeshivas were sexually molested, but glibly dismisses the problem by comparing sexual abuse to diarrhea which is “embarrassing but it’s nobody’s business” and that the experience can be educational: “. . .if in fact you’ve learned that not every counselor is [holy] and not every uncle is your best friend, you’ve learned an important lesson.”

Friedman’s comments are shocking, deeply disturbing and worth quoting at length—and the thing to keep in mind as you read this is that Friedman founded a Chabad yeshiva for young women in Twin Cities, Minnesota, and still serves as the lead teacher there:

“I don’t know what the percentage is, and I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but, uh, there’s hardly a kid who comes to a yeshiva, to a program, that hasn’t been molested, sexually molested. . .

“I could open an office and be busy full time just telling people who’ve been molested, ‘So? Nobody’s allowed to touch you. What, are you, holy? So you were touched? That’s it.’ So I said to this girl, her family comes from Russia,

I said, ‘What do you think, you’re the only one who was molested? You think your mother and grandmother back in Russia made it through their teenage years without being molested by a shegetz [nasty gentile]? So what? They stopped life? They wouldn’t get married? They wouldn’t raise a family? What, are you so fragile? What happened to you?’”

Friedman’s comments are even more disgusting when you consider that Chabad communities have a serious problem with child abuse and molestation, shaming people into staying silent, hiding the crimes from authorities and moving suspected child abusers to different countries to help them escape investigation and prosecution. Manny Waks, a Chabad member from Australia and a victim of sexual abuse, told Australia’s SBS, “We were shocked and hurt deeply from his ignorant and offensive remarks, especially given that he is such a prominent global Rabbi that is considered to be enlightened and modern. You can only imagine the views of others in that community.”

Waks filed a police report against Velvel Serebryanski, the son of a prominent Chabad rabbi who is Chabad’s main “emissary” in Australia, claiming Serebryanski sexually assaulted him on multiple occasions. Australian police began an investigation, but it was too late: Serebryanski had been moved to Brooklyn, where he now lives as “Zev Sero.” He’s one of a few other suspected child molesters hiding out from Australian justice in America. At least one suspected Chabad molester from Australia was caught sexually abusing children here in the States. It just so happens that Friedman is connected to Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, Cory Booker’s longtime friend and the guy who introduced him to Chabad back in Oxford. Boteach studied under Friedman, and frequently cites and quotes the rabbi in his books, calling Friedman a “friend,” and a “great Jewish thinker” who “deepened my understanding of Jewish mystical thought.”

Where does Cory Booker fit in?

Cory Booker is 6'3", has a clean-shaven head, a big, white toothy smile and a slight case of strabismus in his right eye. He was born in Washington D.C. and grew up in Harrington Park, a mostly white upper-middle-class suburb in northern New Jersey. His parents were among IBM's first black employees hired for management level position. His father, Cary, worked in the sales department; his mother, Carolyn, was in marketing. His parents were overachievers, and the same was expected of Cory. In high school, Booker took all honors classes, played football and was president of his senior class. He got into Stanford, where he continued to overachieve, playing varsity football, serving as student-body president and volunteering as a crisis counselor, before graduating with a bachelor's degree in political science.

According to Cory Booker, he first became involved with Chabad at Oxford, where he was studying American history on a Rhodes Scholarship. There he became friends with Chabad Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, who ran L'Chaim, a Chabad house that served Oxford students. Booker was so enthralled with Chabad's version of Judaism that he began studying the Torah with Boteach, learned Hebrew and became involved with Chabad activities to the extent that Boteach asked him to serve as president of the L'Chaim club, which made Booker the first black leader of a Chabad house in history.

Booker's involvement with Chabad deepened after he was accepted into Yale Law School, where he became a founding member of a Chabad outfit called the Chai Society. Since renamed the Eliezer Society, Chai was headed by a right-wing Chabad named Shmully Hecht and was designed to attract a broader, more influential Jewish crowd. It was run like an exclusive Jewish society club, hosting social events, dinners, discussions and meet-and-great nights with luminaries of the Zionist right-wing Jewish world, including former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, former senator Joe Lieberman and Israel-first lawyer

Alan Dershowitz. Young, charismatic and African-American, Booker was described as the "golden boy on campus." He helped promote the club and gave it a mainstream, pluralistic credibility that it would never have been able to muster without him. "His thing was to focus on the Jews who weren't interested in Judaism at all. Cory was a feel-good guy, a schmoozer, and he was able to get anyone to come [to our events]; it was like a salon and he was one of the guys behind it," Ben Karp, Booker's friend from Yale, told Max Blumenthal, who interviewed people close to Booker at Yale.

Karp, who was also a founding member of Chai, told Blumenthal that Booker's intense study of the Torah, his interest in Judaism and his pro-Israel views were totally genuine. "The idea of Israel and the Jews as a people that wrestle with God is really appealing to [Booker]. And he's a Baptist with a fundamentalist belief that the Jews are the Chosen People. I really believe he thinks the Jews are the Chosen People."

Genuine or not, his Chabad connections—which provided access to a lot of wealthy, politically connected Jews from New Jersey, Connecticut and New York—came in very handy when he entered politics in 1998 by running for a seat on the Newark city council.

Indeed, people close to Booker say that his Chabad connections were vital in helping raise money for his first campaigns. Karp readily admitted this Chabad base became a "natural constituency" for Booker and that "it made sense that when he ran for office he would begin raising money from the people we knew." Booker admitted as much in 2000, two years after winning the spot on the Newark City Council. Speaking at a fundraiser dinner at Chabad's Rabbinical College of America in Morristown, New Jersey, Booker thanked Chabad's wealthy backers for helping him launch his political career and told the audience in clear, precise terms that he shared Chabad's mission of bringing in the "Messianic Era."

L'Chaim, a newsletter of the Lubavitch Youth Organization, published Booker's remarks:



“...the reason why I say that I am humbled to stand before you is that I am truly empowered by the Lubavitch movement, and specifically by a number of Lubavitcher rabbis I have come to know over the last few years. They helped me take seeds that were planted by my elders, my parents and my grandparents, and nurture them in a way that allowed those seeds to flourish and blossom into the kind of work to which I have dedicated my life.

“Right now, I am on the streets of Newark, battling what I think is one of the most important battles in the city, in this nation, to try to make the spirit of God alive and well. As one of my rabbi friends told me—to try to truly bring about, through effort and sweat, or whatever necessary—the Messianic Era.”

The New York Times noted that those connections provided a good chunk of his campaign war chest in 2002, when his sights were set on wresting Newark’s mayoralty from old school Newark politician James Sharp. “Unable to raise much money in Newark, where most donations go to the mayor, Booker has held fund-raising events in New York, Washington and the Jersey suburbs, many of these with Jewish donors.” Booker lost the race, but was able to tap this network for nearly \$3M in campaign cash. Even at that early stage of his career, Booker had a knack for attracting very powerful Jewish right-wing supporters, a knack he proved again in a more recent election.

The Wall Street Journal reported on July 28, 2013:

“He regularly reads verses from the Torah. He once addressed 700 congregants at a friend’s bar mitzvah. In 2011, he took his parents to Israel for a ‘trip of a lifetime.’ And he is a staple at seder meals during Passover.

“He is Cory Booker, the African-American, Christian mayor of Newark.

“The U.S. Senate candidate has immersed himself in Jewish culture and serious Judaic study for two decades, ever since he had an accidental meeting with an ultraorthodox Chabad-Lubavitch rabbi. And now, Mr. Booker

has tapped those Jewish connections in his campaign to fill the seat of the late U.S. Sen. Frank Lautenberg, who was Jewish and helped raise hundreds of millions of dollars for Jewish causes—and with a cancer-research center in Jerusalem bearing his name.

“Mr. Booker, 44 years old, has received tens of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from prominent New Jersey Jewish leaders, and nearly \$120,000 from the pro-Israel NORPAC political-action committee since January, campaign filings show.”

Other wealthy Jewish backers of Booker’s current campaign include the Tisch family, who control the Loews Corporation, a massive media, energy and insurance company. The Tisches gave \$75,000 to a Booker-connected PAC called the Mobilization Project. Seth Klarman, a right-wing Jewish financier and founder of the *The Israel Times*, which he recently launched to combat the “global campaign on many fronts to delegitimize the Jewish State,” gave the PAC \$100,000. As for non-Jews, Ravenel B. Curry III and his son, Ravenel B. Curry IV, gave the PAC \$100,000. Curry III, who’s into asset and wealth management, sits on the board of trustees of the American Enterprise Institute and Manhattan Institute. Curry IV’s brother, Marshal, made a pro-Booker documentary called “Street Fight” about Booker’s run for Newark mayor in 2002.

Speaking of which...Back when Booker was just beginning his political career in 2002, one of his big early supporters was Roger Hertog, a neocon moneybag and Jewish philanthropist associated with Chabad. Among his many neocon ventures, Hertog is the Chairman Emeritus of the Manhattan Institute, and funds the American Enterprise Institute as well as the Club For Growth. He also was one of the main owners of neoconservative rag *The New York Sun*. When American Prospect profiled Hertog in 2002, he baffled the reporter by naming Cory Booker—who was then just a lowly unknown Newark council member—as the only politician he had any respect for. “When I ask him to cite a contemporary

politician he admires, the first name he produces is Democrat Cory Booker, the African-American Newark City Councilman who is running for mayor against incumbent Sharpe James. He invokes Booker with an air of grave solemnity...” Michael Steinhardt, Hertog’s partner in the *New York Sun* and co-founder of the Birthright Israel program, also called Booker his “favorite politician” back in 2002.

The *New York Observer* reported that a guy named Mark Gerson was one of Booker’s biggest campaign fundraisers in 2002. Gerson, a finance guy and close friend of Booker since his Yale law days, sat on the board of the Yale Chabad Elzizer Society and was deeply connected to the neocon establishment. Various described as a “right-wing networker,” a “neoconservative” and “boutique investment researcher,” he was buddies with trust fund neocon Bill Kristol, wrote a suck-up book about the history of the neoconservative movement, was on the board of directors of *The Project for the New American Century* and is a trustee at the Manhattan Institute.

Yep, Booker’s name was a byword among the highest right-wing Jewish circles. In Newark, Booker became so closely associated with that community that he responded defensively to questions about the relationship by saying that people were simply “perpetuating a bigoted perception of the African-American community. We are a diverse community with a diverse experience,” he told NBC.

Sure, the African-American community may be diverse, but his campaign fundraising seemed to be somewhat biased. Booker tapped his Chabad connections every time an election rolled around. Let’s take a look at some of his fundraising activities.

His Chabad buddies came through once again in 2010 to help raise money for his Newark mayor reelection campaign. Among them was Booker’s old pal from Oxford, Rabbi Boteach.

Boteach, a dwarf of a man with a shovel-shaped beard, is a pathological publicity whore. He wormed his way into serving as Michael Jackson’s spiritual advisor, landed his own TV

show on The Learning Channel called Shalom in the Home in which he puttered around in an RV (Chabadniks love RVs for some reason) dispensing Torah-based relationship advice to clueless goy families. During the Bush years, Boteach shamelessly sucked up to Evangelical Christians, publishing columns on the bagger conspiracy site WorldNetDaily with stuff like, “I am a Jew who is deeply in love with evangelical Christians” because they have “enabled George W. Bush to pursue a foreign policy based not on expediency or realpolitik, but on a deep-seated morality wherein tyrants are punished and the oppressed liberated.” And in 2012, Boteach unsuccessfully ran for a New Jersey Congressional seat as a Republican. His campaign was backed by Sheldon Adelson, and he ran on school privatization, Islamophobia and intervention in Syria and the Middle East.

But that was still all in the future. Back in April 2010, New York Post’s Page Six reported that Rabbi Boteach had hosted a fundraiser for Booker at “the soon-to-open PrimeKo kosher sushi restaurant on the Upper West Side.” Among those in attendance was Ronn Torossian, a deranged Likudnik PR whiz who has run campaigns for Coca-

Cola, Benyamin Netanyahu and various Chabad tycoons, and who has been a big, vocal fan of Chabad’s marketing strategies, even holding Chabad up as an example for other PR professionals to follow.

Perhaps Torossian is best known in the Chabad world as the guy who was hired to run cover for Agriprocessors, a kosher slaughterhouse/meat processing operation in Postville, Iowa, that was owned by the Chabadnik Rubashkin family. Starting in the mid-2000s, Agriprocessors—which had expanded rapidly into the largest kosher meat processor in the United States—became involved in a rolling series of scandals: undercover videos showing inhumane slaughter practices and gruesome torture of cows that violated every kashrut law on the books, illegal dumping of raw toxic waste into a local river, monopolistic business practices in the kosher meats market, illegal union busting, use of child labor and recruitment of illegal immigrants. Agriprocessors was one giant clusterfuck that lost millions of dollars in criminal penalties and in 2009, sent Sholom Rubashkin, the devout Chabadnik butcher who ran the family business, to jail for 27 years.

In 2008, Torossian was outed by

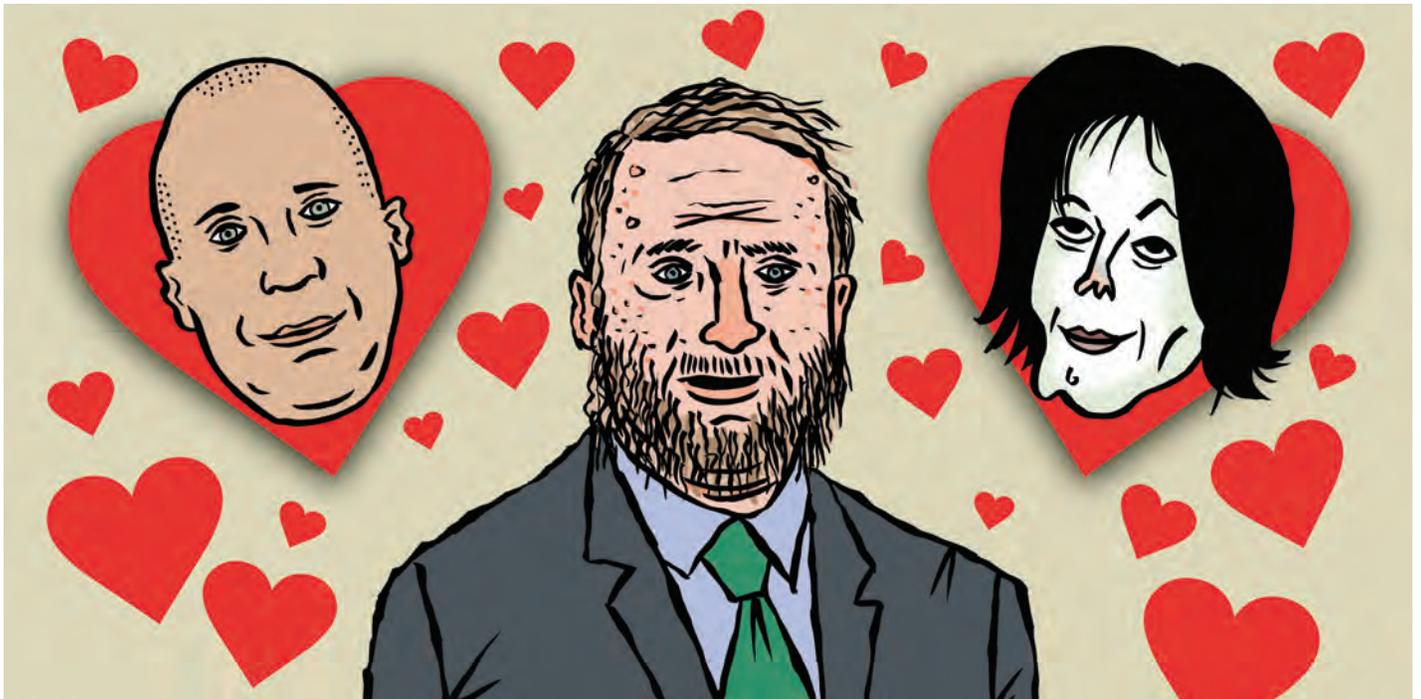
the blog FailedMessiah as the author of comments defending Agriprocessors on various blogs. Torossian had posted the comments using false names, fraudulently impersonating well known rabbis and kosher certification officials. But two years later, he was at a kosher sushi restaurant supporting Booker...

That’s not surprising, given the kosher stamp of approval that Booker got from Chabad.

In 2007, Chabad’s Rabbinical College awarded Booker an honorary degree. Past recipients include George H. W. Bush & Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of State Alexander Haig. Booker was praised by Rabbinical College Dean Rabbi Moshe Herson, who is described by Shmarya Rosenberg of the FailedMessiah blog as “one of the most senior (and wealthiest) shluchim worldwide, controlling a territory rich with mega-donors.”

Chabad connections helped rake in the cash for Booker’s campaigns, and he returned the favor, regularly speaking at Chabad fundraisers and working the crowd to everyone’s delight. “Who do you think is the person most in demand as a speaker to Jewish groups in this country?” Boteach asked New Yorker Peter J. Boyer in 2008. “Cory Booker.”

In 2008, Booker tag-teamed



an AIPAC conference in Chicago, wowing the audience with Torah quotes and pledging his commitment to protecting Israel and not giving up any land...

You can watch at least a dozen videos on YouTube of Booker working Chabad events, telling Chabadniks how much he loves them and what a big role they've played in his life, all while peppering his speech with biblical quotes, yiddish slang and

shrink from its duties. It stands up like Abraham and says onto the Lord: Hineni—Behold, here I am.”

When Peter Beinart criticized Chabad's “deeply primitively racist” worldview a few months ago and pointed out that it counters Booker's supposedly progressive values, Booker doubled down on his Chabadnik ties. He dismissed Beinart's criticism and in an interview with Bloomberg's Jeffrey Goldberg justified his

and their rabid neocons pals? And even more important: Why the hell are all these Jewish neocons so keen on backing Cory Booker's political rise?

It all makes a lot more sense if you stop thinking about Cory Booker as a progressive Democrat—or a Democrat at all.

See, Booker might be running on the Democratic ticket, but he has been seen for a long time in certain African-American circles as a covert weapon of the White Right—a “Black Trojan Horse for the Republican rightwing,” to quote retired Harvard professor Martin Kilson, the first African-American to receive full tenure at that institution. Professor Kilson wrote that back in 2002, when the young Booker was running for mayor of Newark. What set Kilson off was getting his hands on a copy of a talk Cory Booker gave at the Manhattan Institute luncheon in 2000. Booker was much more candid about his political values and policy positions back then, but that day he laid them out in very clear terms: bullshit “third-way” politics, small government, hacking away at medical and retirement benefits of public employees, privatizing public education and infrastructure:

“The old paradigm was an entitlement paradigm, in which large big city mayors controlled race-based machines. What that was really about was capturing big entitlements from the state and federal governments and divvying them up among their cronies or among the people within their organizations to protect and preserve their organizations. It was about distributing wealth.

“The new paradigm is about quick thinkers, people who are trying to make their governments engines of economic opportunity and judge them not by how many jobs they can provide but by how much wealth they can create and how efficiently they can deliver services within their own city.

“...charter schools made me a little uncomfortable when I first heard about them.

“But after four or five years of working in inner-city Newark, I



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biblical messianism. He spoke at a Chabad “fundraising dinner” just last year, boasting about being “the first black Christian head of a Chabad house in the history of humanity” and then going on a weird biblical rant about why he supports Chabad:

“Lubavitch is connecting the world. It is preserving Judaism. Not for cultural reasons. Not for food. Not so we could get together. But so that people can stand up and tell the world their truth. ... We are born for a reason, we are born to tell our truth onto the world. And in times of injustice, and we are in times of injustice. In times when wrongs must be righted, when God calls to humanity to answer. What makes me proud of Lubavitch is that it does not

relationship with Chabad by invoking the spirit of Malcolm X:

“You know, Alex Haley once told the story of how a conservatively dressed white businessman came up to Malcolm X and said that he disagreed with him but respected his style, and Malcolm X gets really close to the guy and says, ‘You know something? You can search the world two times over and you'll never find two people who agree on everything.’”

Not sure whether Booker's comparing himself or Boteach to Malcolm X. Either way, it doesn't make any sense. None of it seems to make any sense. I mean, how could Booker—a supposed progressive to the populist left of Obama—be running around with a tribe of Jewish Taliban

began to rethink my situation, rethink my philosophy, rethink my views on public education, simply because of the realities I saw around me. Being outcome-focused started to change my view in favor of options like charter schools, contract schools and, yes, vouchers...

“Public education is the use of public dollars to educate our children at the schools that are best equipped to do so—public schools, magnet schools, charter schools, Baptist schools, Jewish schools, or other innovations in education. That is where public dollars should go.”

Booker’s was a far-right vision straight outta the Koch-Walton-Bradley freemarket-thinktank industrial complex. That’s what set off professor Kilson’s right-wing radar and why he went on to describe Booker as “an errand boy Black politician for conservative Republican power-class penetration of governing control of Black Newark.”

Kilson wasn’t the only one who noticed it. In 2000, right around the time Booker gave his Manhattan Institute speech, a reporter from the Moonie Washington Times followed Booker around and was genuinely surprised by his politics: “He’s not even a Democrat, if anyone wants to get technical about it. The majority of his views are either Libertarian or the opposite of what the national, state or even local party bosses say is the Democratic platform.” Booker even had the movie taste of libertarian: a DVD collection restricted to sci-fi films and biblical epics. In 2003, Booker’s neocon buddy/fundraiser Mark Gerson didn’t attempt to hide or pretty up Booker freemarket views, telling the New Yorker: “He is pro-capitalist, pro-business. He’s pro-school vouchers.”

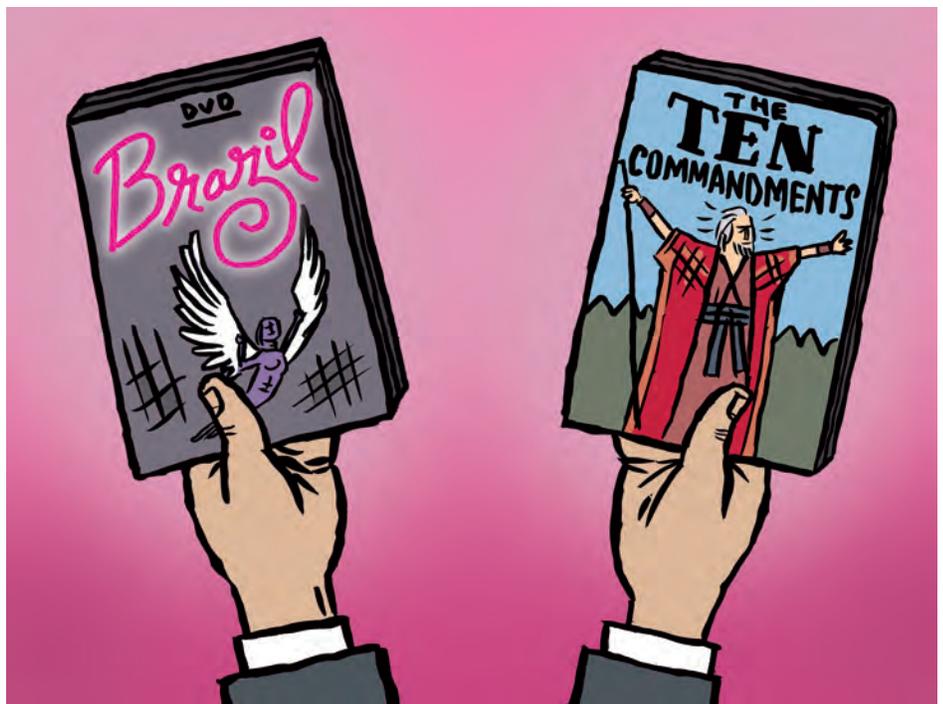
Indeed, if you ignore the progressive halo that’s been planted on Booker’s head by mainstream progressives and go back to the beginning of his rise, his right-wing politics pop right out. Booker’s early political career got a big push from neocon and right-wing thinktank machines, specifically

the Walton family, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation and the Manhattan Institute—the same folks who once backed crypto-eugenicist Charles Murray.

As soon as he was elected to Newark’s city council in 1998, Booker started making the rounds, networking and beefing up his school privatization credentials. In 1999, Booker started a “school choice” outfit called E3 with two partners: a Republican politician and a wealthy conservative businessman from New Jersey. A year after that, Booker was taken on as a board member by the Black Alliance for Education Options (BAEO), an influential new school privatization astroturf outfit created with Walton and Bradley money to put a minority

But a closer look reveals that BAEO is bankrolled by a small number of right-wing foundations better known for supporting education privatization and affirmative action rollbacks than empowering African-Americans or low-income families.

“Four groups that BAEO lists as benefactors are major players in the right-wing voucher movement. In fact, the Walton Foundation and the Bradley Foundation have financed much of the movement. The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation and the American Education Reform Council are pro-voucher advocacy groups that—while also receiving significant funding from the Walton and Bradley Foundations—are lending their own early financial support to BAEO, the



face on a school privatization agenda. According to Diane Ravitch, “The group is politically important because it provides cover for the conservative white men (and they are mostly men) who are pushing privatization.”

In 2001, People for the American Way investigated BAEO and found that:

“BAEO bills itself as a coalition of up-and-coming leaders working within the African-American community.

relative newcomer.”

When Booker announced his run for Newark mayor in 2002, the Free Congress Foundation proclaimed Booker as one of the nation’s top four “New Black Leaders,” reported the Black Commentator. It was a clear signal to right-wing foundations all across the country: Cory Booker is our kind of guy.

Booker was so good on the issues that Wall Street Journal’s Koch poodle

John Fund gave him an unqualified endorsement, calling him a “potent national symbol for a new generation of black leaders who reject Al Sharpton-style racial polarization” and noted Booker’s support for “charter schools” and “school choice” (aka breaking teachers unions and turning public education over to private contractors)—because clearly that’s what black people need, and anyone who disagrees is speaking from a position of white privilege!

Reagan’s supply-side groupie Jack Kemp also endorsed Booker in 2002, telling *New York Magazine*, “I don’t think there could be a finer young rising star in urban politics than Cory Booker. His policies go far beyond Democratic-Republican. There has to be a new way of thinking about poverty. Cory understands that private enterprise is not the enemy of the urban poor.” You have to remember that this was coming from a man who blamed government anti-poverty programs for creating poverty and said welfare was worse for blacks than Jim Crow.

Booker lost the 2002 election for Newark mayor, but he came back four years later and rolled the opposition. Once in power, he quickly put Newark

on the Rudy Giuliani/Manhattan Institute diet. He brought in NYPD brass to run a “broken windows” policing program that prioritized citing and jailing people for minor offenses, downsized the number of city employees, raised taxes, pushed school vouchers programs funded by Walton and aimed to privatize Newark’s water system, all while battling public sector unions and giving corporation tax breaks. *News & World Report*, owned by rabid neocon Zionist Mort Zuckerman, praised Booker’s efforts to reform Newark, writing in 2009:

“That moment can’t come fast enough for impoverished and drug-plagued Newark, which never recovered from the deadly 1967 riots that sent middle-class whites packing. Having assembled a team of experienced technocrats—McCarthy is a veteran of New York City’s Rudy Giuliani-era police force, while Booker’s deputy mayor for economics led the Lower Manhattan Development Corp. after the 9/11 attacks—Booker has already made big changes. Police department reforms and the installation of hundreds of security cameras around the city have helped cut the murder rate by a third, and shootings have dropped even more sharply.

“Beyond dealing with crime, Booker has personally raised \$25 million from private donors for Newark’s charter schools fund—much of it from well-known philanthropists like John Walton, the son of Walmart’s founder—fighting the teachers union every step of the way.”

In an unscripted moment on “Meet the Press” during the 2012 Presidential Election campaign, Booker lashed out at President Obama for daring to criticize private capital and Wall Street: “I have to just say from a very personal level, I’m not about to sit here and indict private equity. To me, it’s just this—we’re getting to a ridiculous point in America, especially that I know. I live in a state where pension funds, unions and other people are investing in companies like Bain Capital. If you look at the totality of Bain Capital’s record, it ain’t—they’ve done a lot to support businesses, to grow businesses.” Coincidentally, ThinkProgress found out that Bain Capital and the private equity industry were major donors to Booker’s campaigns in Newark.

But the *New York Times* must have missed all that when it officially endorsed Booker for New Jersey Senator in early August, and lionized him as a progressive. 🍌

