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The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power

A secretive group known as The Fellowship, or "The Family," is one of the most powerful Christian fundamentalist movements in the United States. The Family's devoted membership includes congressmen, corporate leaders, generals and foreign heads of state. Author Jeff Sharlet profiles the group in his book *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*.

Reviews

From Publishers Weekly

Checking in on a friend's brother at Ivenwald, a Washington-based fundamentalist group living communally in Arlington, Va., religion and journalism scholar Sharlet finds a sect whose members refer to Manhattan's Ground Zero as "the ruins of secularism"; intrigued, Sharlet accepts on a whim an invitation to stay at Ivenwald. He's shocked to find himself in the stronghold of a widespread "invisible" network, organized into cells much like Ivenwald, and populated by elite, politically ambitious fundamentalists; Sharlet is present when a leader tells a dozen men living there, "You guys are here to learn how to rule the world." As it turns out, the Family was established in 1935 to oppose FDR's New Deal and the spread of trade unions; since then, it has organized well-attended weekly prayer meetings for members of Congress and annual National Prayer Breakfasts attended by every president since Eisenhower. Further, the Family's international reach ("almost impossible to overstate") has "forged relationships between the U.S. government and some of the most oppressive regimes in the world." In the years since his first encounter, Sharlet has done extensive research, and his thorough account of the Family's life and times is a chilling expose.

"One of the most compelling and brilliantly researched exposes you'll ever read—just don't read it alone at night!" -- *Barbara Ehrenreich, New York Times bestselling author of Nickel and Dimed and Bait and Switch*

"This is a gripping, utterly original narrative about an influential evangelical elite that few Americans even know exists. . . . The Christian Right will never look the same again." -- *Michael Kazin, author of A Godly Hero: the Life of William Jennings Bryan and The Populist Persuasion: An American History*

"Un-American theocrats can only fool patriotic American democrats when there aren't critics like Jeff Sharlet around—careful scholars and soulful writers who understand both the majesty of faith and the evil of its abuses. A remarkable accomplishment in the annals of writing about religion." -- *Rick Perlstein, author of Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*

"[Sharlet] has managed to infiltrate the most influential and secretive fundamentalist network in America, and ground his reporting in the most astute and original explanation of fundamentalism I've ever read. . . . Indispensable." -- *Hanna Rosin, former religion reporter for the Washington Post and author of God's Harvard: A Christian College on a Mission to Save the Nation*

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<http://www.democracynow.org/> radio program guest:

Jeff Sharlet, author of *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. He is a contributing editor for *Harper's* and *Rolling Stone* and a visiting research scholar at the New York University Center for Religion and Media.

AMY GOODMAN: We move on now closer to home. Senator John Ensign of Nevada, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford and former Mississippi Congress member Chip Pickering—what do they all have in common? Yes, all three are Republican. All three have been embroiled in recent sex scandals.

Senator Ensign, a member of a male evangelical group that promotes marital fidelity, recently admitted to having an affair with a campaign staffer. He later disclosed that his parents gave almost \$100,000 to the staffer and her family. Governor Sanford's wife recently moved out of the governor's mansion, weeks after Sanford admitted to visiting a woman in Argentina and committing infidelities with several other women. And last month, Congressman Pickering's estranged wife filed suit against his alleged mistress, claiming the woman had ruined their marriage.

But these Republicans' ties extend beyond their marital woes. All three have, at one time, lived in a former convent on Capitol Hill known as the C Street house, and all three are connected to a secretive group known as the Fellowship, or the Family. It's probably an organization you've never heard of, but it's one of the most powerful Christian fundamentalist movements in this country.

The Family's devoted membership includes Congress members, corporate leaders, generals, foreign heads of state, dictators. The longtime leader, Doug Coe, was included in *Time Magazine's* 2004 list of the twenty-five most influential evangelicals in America.

Well, Jeff Sharlet is the author of the bestseller, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. In 2002, he joined the Family's home for young men at an estate in Virginia, becoming a member of the Family's so-called "new chosen." He first wrote an article about his research in [Harpers](#) magazine.

Jeff Sharlet joins me today in our firehouse studio, contributing editor at *Harper's* and *Rolling Stone* and a visiting research scholar at the New York University Center for Religion and Media.

Jeff, welcome to *Democracy Now!*

JEFF SHARLET: Hi, Amy. Thanks for having me.

AMY GOODMAN: So, talk about these latest men in the news and exactly what it is they belong to.

JEFF SHARLET: Well, the three politicians that we're talking about, two of them lived at this C Street house, where this group provides below-market housing for congressmen. It's essentially like a lobby, working like a lobby, trying to influence these politicians.

What's really disturbing about this is not the sex scandals, but the agenda that they're pursuing beyond that. The Family, unlike most Christian right groups, is not so concerned with domestic issues as international affairs, foreign affairs, and a kind of approach to economics they call "biblical capitalism," an extreme deregulation, laissez-faire. They take the invisible hand very literally.

AMY GOODMAN: So, talk about how you discovered the Family.

JEFF SHARLET: You know, I just kind of stumbled upon the group. I was working on my first book, which is about religious communities around the United States, unusual religious communities. And a friend said she was worried that her brother had joined a cult. And would I speak with him? He had come to New York at the time, he said, "to survey the ruins of secularism." That caught my attention. And he said, "To understand what I'm involved in, you need to come and see it for yourself." So I went and I lived with these guys for about a month.

AMY GOODMAN: But what do you mean you lived with these guys? Where did you go? Explain how you got there.

JEFF SHARLET: Sure. Down in—the C Street house has been in the news. There's only one other property that the organization owns. The main headquarters is this beautiful mansion overlooking the Potomac River called the Cedars. It's worth about \$5 million. They bought it with money supplied for them in part by the former CEO of the defense contractor Raytheon,—

AMY GOODMAN: Who is that?

JEFF SHARLET: —oil executives. A guy named Tom Phillips. And around that house, there's a number of houses that are sort of support houses. One of those was called Ivanwald. That was where young men were being sort of groomed for leadership, men in their twenties. I was sort of pushing it at around thirty at the time. And so, I went and lived with these guys for about a month. And in that capacity, I got to visit the C Street house, I met Senator Ensign.

AMY GOODMAN: You met Senator Ensign.

JEFF SHARLET: Met Senator Ensign.

AMY GOODMAN: Explain your meeting.

JEFF SHARLET: I was at the C Street house for the day, and a pretty innocuous meeting. Senator Ensign had just come in from a run, and he was sort of boasting to everybody about his time. And the only thing that I remember being struck by was he's a very flirty man. And what was interesting about Senator Ensign was, within the Family, he wasn't taken very seriously. He was considered a guy with a sort of a bright future. He looks very presidential and so on. He wasn't considered a brilliant guy.

The Family always has a certain number of politicians who are associated with it who can go on to higher things. And then there are the guys who are really doing the political work, like Congressman Joe Pitts of Pennsylvania, Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas. These are the more ideological guys within the organization.

AMY GOODMAN: So Senator Ensign came on to be a powerful figure in the Senate. I mean—

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: —as he's been forced to resign from the Republican Policy Committee of the Senate.

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah, indeed, and, you know, had already visited Iowa as a possible presidential candidate. Governor Sanford was certainly, I think, a frontrunner for the GOP. And I think that's a sort of—there are sort of three levels of politicians that the Family is cultivating.

AMY GOODMAN: How do the affairs link with affairs of state within the house?

JEFF SHARLET: Well, I think we're going to find out more about that, because in Congressman Pickering's divorce proceedings, apparently he was keeping a diary of all his goings-on at the C Street house, and we're waiting for that to come out.

But what links this is the common sort of theological view of this organization. Unlike other Christian right groups, they don't really believe that you're in power because you're a good person. They have no illusions about these guys. They believe that they are, as you said in the beginning, the "new chosen," that you're chosen for power by God. You're not so much elected by the people as selected from above. And when

you're in that position, it doesn't matter what you do. You shouldn't do these things. They don't want you to do these things. But it doesn't matter what you do. Ensign is a powerful man, not because he's of good character, but because he's been chosen by God. In a similar vein, the foreign leaders with whom they work, the dictators, about whom they have no illusions, are chosen by God for their countries, regardless of how brutal they are.

AMY GOODMAN: And what does it mean to say they live at the C Street house? These are senators and congressmen.

JEFF SHARLET: They have rooms in the C Street house, maid service provided by a group of Christian college women. There's a cook. There's a nice kitchen with a prayer calendar in it that gives you guidance on how you're supposed to live your spiritual life. When I was visiting, the prayer issues at hand were to "pray down the demonic strongholds of Buddhism and Hinduism." I'm quoting, of course. It really is a very fundamentalist ministry, but doesn't look like the fundamentalists we're—I think we're used to seeing on TV, the Pat Robertsons and the Jerry Falwells.

AMY GOODMAN: But you're Jewish. How did you fit in?

JEFF SHARLET: In fact, that was part of what was interesting about me to them. They do believe only in sort of recruiting an elite. They're not interested the masses. They think that Christianity has been misunderstood, that Jesus only wanted to select a few key people. You can only get in by invitation. I was invited. But they also liked the idea of having Jews, of having Muslims around, because they believe that inasmuch as a Jew or a Muslim is willing to bow before Jesus, he is proving what they call the "universal inevitable" of Jesus' power.

AMY GOODMAN: You talked about foreign leaders, too. You have a fascinating section in your book, *The Family*, about Suharto—

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: —the long-reigning dictator of Indonesia, presided over I don't know how many deaths, both of his own people in Indonesia, up to a million people, and the people of East Timor, hundreds of thousands.

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: What does he have to do with C Street?

JEFF SHARLET: The Family began as this domestic organization way back in the 1930s, a union-busting organization. But by the '50s, they—

AMY GOODMAN: What do you mean, union-busting organization?

JEFF SHARLET: Oh, they—it's part of that invisible hand of the market. They believe that organized labor is ungodly, to put it mildly, perhaps Satanic. It began with this vision in 1935 that the New Deal and organized labor were literally a Satanic conspiracy they had to fight back.

In the 1950s, in the Cold War, they started moving overseas and identifying strongmen, dictators, who they thought were effective in the fight against communism, who they thought were effective in the fight for free markets. And Suharto was one of those men. You know, Suharto, who—even the CIA, which helped him orchestrate his coup, later said it was one of the worst mass killings of the twentieth century.

The Family leaders called it a spiritual revolution and began sending delegations of congressmen, oil executives, over to meet with Suharto. They then hosted Suharto, actually, in the United States Senate for a Senate prayer breakfast with their members, to which they invited the then-Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, then-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They have that kind of access. And they were able to arrange that kind of reach for Suharto. And they effectively became his most persuasive champions within the US Congress, as the United States funneled, as we know, just billions of dollars toward his military regime.

AMY GOODMAN: And Siad Barre of Somalia?

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah, dictator of Somalia. It's, to me, one of the scariest stories that I found in their archives. I was able to recreate this, because they dumped 600 boxes of papers in the Billy Graham archives. Siad Barre was a—not a likely candidate for Christian right recruitment, called himself a Koranic Marxist. But in the early '80s, the Soviets had abandoned him. There had been a power shift between Somalia and Ethiopia. He was in the market for a new patron. And working through Senator Chuck Grassley, Republican of Iowa, of course still in office—

AMY GOODMAN: Talk more about Chuck Grassley, who certainly is in the news now, who, together with Max Baucus, heads the Senate Finance Committee.

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: Baucus, Democrat; Grassley, Republican. Very powerful figure, especially around healthcare right now.

JEFF SHARLET: Indeed. And Grassley has been involved with the organization for quite some time, since the '80s, when he traveled to Somalia to join Barre, Siad Barre, in prayer to Jesus. And he brought with him a defense contractor named Bill Brehm.

And Barre was a kind of a cynical character, as you might expect for a dictator. He was very clear. He says, "I'm willing to pray to Jesus, and here's what I want in return." He says, "I want my defense budget doubled." He says, "I want meetings for my officials with the Reagan White House. And I want a sort of a hands-off policy while I crack down on some rebels." Doug Coe, the leader of the group, wrote back, in essence, "Done, done and done."

And when we look at history, so it was. And Barre used those weapons, supplied to him in part by the US, to wage a war of almost biblical proportion on his own people, from which Somalia has not recovered to this day. The Family doesn't consider that a failure; they consider that God's will for Somalia.

AMY GOODMAN: And more about Grassley? And again, we should say, this is not just a Republican organization. Democrats are also a part. In fact, you talk about Hillary Clinton—

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah, yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: —praying with them.

JEFF SHARLET: I think that's one of the most important aspects of this. I think, too often, progressives tend to see the Christian right as simply an auxiliary of the Republican Party, whereas the movement, especially through the Family, has recognized that you stay in power not by aligning yourself too closely with one faction, but by having lots of friends. So, Hillary Clinton, Senator Mark Pryor of Arkansas, who was, of course, instrumental in fighting against the Employee Free Choice Act, which would have made unionization much, much easier. He explained to me the Family's approach to Democratic bipartisanship.

He said, “Jesus didn’t come to take sides; He came to take over.” That’s a Democrat speaking. So, Republicans and Democrats working together.

Chuck Grassley, a guy who’s been involved for such a long time. Grassley was involved with the Somalia project throughout the 1980s. They recognize that Somalia, of course, is a nation of great strategic importance, right there on the Horn of Africa. So, even as they are pursuing what they say is a religious agenda, it’s also meshing very neatly with a certain kind of agenda of American expansionist power and oil, frankly.

AMY GOODMAN: And rarely is the devastation of the failed state of Somalia talked about in terms of its history, that the US, for decades, supported this dictator, Siad Barre.

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah, yeah, exactly. The story, for most Americans, begins with George Bush very nobly sending over these troops to fight the warlords. It begins with *Black Hawk Down*. And we don’t recognize that it was really—I mean, Somalia almost—is almost a purest case possible of US support for an absolutely murderous regime.

In the face of all odds, too. I mean, there’s nothing, it seemed, that Barre could do to dissuade the Family that he was worthy of support, even to the point of insulting Doug Coe, the leader of the group, who used a sad case, the death of his son, wrote to Barre and said, “My son has died today. And as he was dying, he was speaking of you and how important you are.” It was a strange, crass move. Barre didn’t play along. He said, “I never knew your son. But keep the money flowing.” And they did.

AMY GOODMAN: We’re talking to Jeff Sharlet. He’s author of *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. We’ll come back to talk about more of the members of this secretive group that some have called one of the most powerful organizations in America. Stay with us.

[break]

AMY GOODMAN: We’re continuing our discussion of the Family. Jeff Sharlet, I guess you could say, infiltrated or went undercover, or, actually, you said you were a writer—is that right?—as you were investigating the Family and wrote the book by that title, with the subtitle *The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*. I want to just go on, Congress member after senator after Congress member. I want to ask you about Congress member Tiahrt and his significance right now in Kansas, and then his relationship with the Family.

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah, Congressman Tiahrt is a very right-wing Republican from the Wichita area in Kansas. Senator Sam Brownback, who’s a member of the Family, also lived in the C Street house, is hoping to move on to governor’s office, and Tiahrt is the strong frontrunner to replace him.

Tiahrt, of course, was in the news a little while ago for speculating on the floor of the House what would have happened if Obama’s mother had aborted him. And a lot of people thought this was over-the-top language. I think what they didn’t recognize was that this was Todd Tiahrt’s—that’s his version of the soft approach. When I met him at the C Street house several years ago, he had gone there for a spiritual counseling session with Doug Coe, the leader of the group, and he had gone in, although he frames himself as a great foe of abortion, what he was really concerned about was the fact that, he said, the Muslims are having too many babies, and the Christians are killing too many of theirs, and how can we win the race with the Muslims? So, abortion, for him, is relative; probably, in his mind, good for Muslim nations.

Coe, the leader of the group, said, “I want you to think bigger.” He says, “I agree with all that. That’s fine. I want you to think bigger. We need to think not just about issues like abortion, but what does Jesus have to say about Social Security? What does Jesus have to say about building roads? What does Jesus have to say

about every aspect of governance?” The answer for them, by the way, is almost always the same, is privatize, put things in God’s hands.

He then goes on to say to Tiahrt, he says, “We need to have something called ‘Jesus plus nothing.’” The Family, at other times, has called it “the totalitarianism for Christ.” What they mean is that they believe that the New Testament is primarily about power, and he illustrates this by giving Congressman Tiahrt a list of historical figures he can look to for modeling power—this is a direct quote—“Hitler, Pol Pot, Osama bin Laden and Lenin.” And it just makes your jaw sort of drop. But—

AMY GOODMAN: I want to read the full quote of Doug Coe—

JEFF SHARLET: Please, yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: —counseling Congressman Tiahrt, which you quote. “You know Jesus said ‘You got to put Him before mother-father-brother sister’? Hitler, Lenin, Mao, that’s what they taught the kids. Mao even had the kids killing their own mother and father. But it wasn’t murder. It was for building the new nation. The new kingdom.” That’s Doug Coe. And where did you get this?

JEFF SHARLET: That is actually available on an audio sermon that you can find on the website of another Christian right group called the Navigators, with which the Family has always worked for decades.

You can also find online video of Coe talking about the model of fellowship that he wants politicians to follow. He says, “Look at Hitler, Goebbels and Himmler, these three nobodies who get together, and look at all they were able to accomplish.” Now, he’ll be quick to say they’re evil men. This is not some neo-Nazi, you know, kind of conspiracy. It’s a sort of a fetish for power and strength. That’s the model. That’s why he says Hitler, Lenin, Mao.

He’s also fond of saying to congressmen, “Who were the three men in the twentieth century who best understood the New Testament?” And it’s sort of a trick question, because maybe you say Martin Luther King, or maybe, if you’re conservative, you say Billy Graham. And again, it’s Hitler, Stalin and Mao. These are not aberrations in his speech. This is the core of his teaching, that the New Testament is about power and strength.

AMY GOODMAN: He talks about Pol Pot—

JEFF SHARLET: Pol Pot.

AMY GOODMAN: —and talks about Osama bin Laden.

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah, yeah. There’s nobody who is—you know, there is no sort of strongman killer that they’re not interested in. Going back to the group’s early roots, they began with the idea that democracy was done, that democracy couldn’t compete with fascism or communism. They didn’t want to be communists. Fascism was OK, except that it had this cult of personality: where Jesus was supposed to be, you’d find a Hitler, a Mussolini. And so, they came up with this idea of totalitarianism for Christ, but they illustrate it with these awful models from history.

AMY GOODMAN: Just talk about how significant this group is, for those who are saying, what, are you taking this little group, and you’re making a bigger deal of it than you should. According to David Kuo, former special assistant to President George W. Bush and deputy director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, he said, “The Fellowship’s reach into governments around the world is almost impossible to overstate or even grasp.”

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah. Kuo, who is a supporter of the group, admirer of the group, talks in his book about the group basically getting him to the White House, making his career, also says it's the most powerful group in Washington that nobody knows. And that's actually been quantified by a sort of conservative-leaning sociologist at Rice University, who—

AMY GOODMAN: Who is that?

JEFF SHARLET: A man named Michael David Lindsay—I'm sorry, D. Michael Lindsay. And he surveyed about 360 evangelical politicians and wanted to ask them which religious groups were really influential in Washington. The group that came out with more votes than any other, one in three, was the Family. And this is astonishing for a group that says it doesn't exist.

When you call—you know, when a reporter is trying to report on them, they'll say, "Ah, there's nothing here. It's just a group of friends." Well, it's a group of friends with 990s, with tax forms, with millions of dollars flowing through every year. It's a group of friends that organizes the National Prayer Breakfast, at which the President of the United States speaks every year, that has the money to bring over foreign heads of state, and they can get those people into the White House.

It's really on a scale that's, I think, unparalleled by the better-known groups like Focus on the Family or Family Research Council, those kind of more visible Christian right groups, which are, frankly, more democratic in nature. They're making their case in the public square. The Family believes in doing things behind closed doors.

AMY GOODMAN: Jeff, we last had you on when you did your *Harper's Magazine* piece called "Jesus Killed Mohammed: The Crusade for a Christian Military." Can you talk about any connections?

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah. In fact, working with Mikey Weinstein and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, his researcher Chris Rodda, since the C Street scandal has come out, we've been able to track down—to use that new information to track down some startling connections. First of all, that the men at C Street—Senator Ensign, Senator James Inhofe—have been traveling around the world on the Family's dime, so the group is acting like a lobby. What's more—

AMY GOODMAN: Traveling where?

JEFF SHARLET: Sudan, Belarus, Albania, great bastions of democracy. Lebanon, where Senator Tom Coburn went to try and set up Christian prayer cells in that country that's so long had religious strife. One of the things that they've been doing, though, is they've been traveling officially as representatives of the United States Senate, but then championing a group called Christian Embassy, which is a Pentagon ministry that I wrote about in that other article, focuses on the military. But the Family is paying for it. And so, what we've discovered is—

AMY GOODMAN: Do they have to list this, who pays for their trips?

JEFF SHARLET: Yes, yeah. I think there's some big questions that they're going to need to answer about whether this is legal or not.

What's most disturbing about it, though, is that we see that the sort of fundamentalist front within the military and the Family, in fact, are not two separate tracks, but very closely linked. Even the biggest and sort of most militant group within the military, called Officers' Christian Fellowship, 15,000 officers, when we traced it back and looked at their history, we discovered that some of their seed money, some of their early ideas, the organizing initiatives, all come from the Family. So you see, in effect, that the Family is working in all fronts, not just in Congress and in business and overseas, but also in the military. So you take those ideas, and you put guns next to them, and it becomes very frightening.

AMY GOODMAN: How does Erik Prince, or does he, fit into this picture? I mean, we've just had a major story with Jeremy Scahill, independent reporter, *Democracy Now!* correspondent, about this lawsuit against Prince by these two men who worked for what's formerly known as Blackwater, now called Xe, one of them alleging that Prince, quote, "views himself as a Christian crusader tasked with eliminating Muslims and the Islamic faith from the globe."

JEFF SHARLET: Well, I think that's something that we need to look more closely into. The Prince family has given money to Family initiatives in the past. The links aren't terribly strong. I think what you're really looking at there is almost sort of two different power bases within the American Christian right. The interesting thing about Prince is Prince is a certain kind of zealot. The Family doesn't want to eliminate Muslims; it wants to do business with Muslims. It wants to—you know, they've always cultivated the leaders of oil-rich nations. That's the kind of connection that they're interested in.

AMY GOODMAN: And talk more about the founder, Abraham Vereide.

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah, fascinating, a fascinating character. Vereide was a Norwegian immigrant, came to the United States because he saw it as the land of the Bible unchained. He was an early fundamentalist and sort of rose to influence, even met with FDR in 1932.

And it was at that meeting—it was Vereide, FDR and James Farrell, who was then head of US Steel—that Farrell, he claims, introduces to him this idea that all of America's economic problems are in direct correspondence to our failure to obey God's law and that the approach to the Great Depression should not be the New Deal, but through this sort of moral code imposed from on high by God's chosen men.

He then goes on to have this vision that God actually comes to him one night and says, "Christianity has gotten it wrong for 2,000 years—all this talk about the poor, the suffering, the down and out. I want you to focus on the up and out. I want you to be a missionary to and for the powerful. I will work through a few key men—Senator Ensign, Governor Sanford—and, through them, will help everybody else." The Family believes that they're helping the poor through a kind of trickle-down religion.

AMY GOODMAN: And his sympathy, the founder's sympathy, for European fascism?

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah, they were great admirers of European fascism. They were critical of the ways in which Hitler and Mussolini, in their minds, displaced the centrality of Jesus. But after the war, actually working with the US State Department, Vereide was given a charge to go into the Allied prisons for war criminals and interview men to determine who he felt could be used for the new German government. And really, the main question was, are you willing to switch out the Fuhrer for the Father?

Some of those guys—one, in particular, was a man named Hermann J. Abs, became the vice president of the Family's German organization, became known as "the wizard of the West German miracle," until the Simon Wiesenthal Center discovered that before he had been known as Germany's banker, he had been known as Hitler's banker, and he was forced to exit public life.

AMY GOODMAN: So, jumping forward to today, all of these men who are involved with this group, like Senator Sam Brownback, whose seat is being vied for by Congressman Tiahrt—

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: —and his opponent is also—

JEFF SHARLET: Yeah.

AMY GOODMAN: —living at C Street house.

JEFF SHARLET: Yes, yes. I think, you know, the Family—when we look at this, we start to have a different picture of Christian right group, is not, you know, picking candidates in an election. In that race for that Senate, you have two conservative Republicans: Jerry Moran, lives in the C Street House, representative from Kansas; and Todd Tiahrt, who also has these ties, which he’s now denying. But these guys are both trying to work through this very powerful network, which is, essentially, as one religious right leader, a guy named Rob Schenck, sort of doing—mixing his metaphors, he says, “Doug Coe is the kosher seal, if you’re going to do religion and politics in Washington.”

AMY GOODMAN: President Bush calling Doug Coe “the quiet diplomat.” In our last thirty seconds, what is most important to understand about Doug Coe and, ultimately, the Family?

JEFF SHARLET: This is a group that is explicitly opposed to democracy, explicitly opposed to doing things in public. They believe “the more invisible you can make your organization, the more influence you can have.” That’s a direct quote from Doug Coe. They’re acting like a lobby; they’re not registering like a lobby. There needs to be a way to hold them accountable, if they want do those—pursue those kinds of basic [inaudible]—

AMY GOODMAN: I want to thank you very much for being with us. Jeff Sharlet is author of *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*, contributing editor for *Harper’s* and *Rolling Stone*, a visiting research scholar at NYU Center for Religion and Media.