

A LIBERTY COUNSEL SPECIAL REPORT

THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER EXPOSED

***MAKING MILLIONS OF DOLLARS
FROM RADICAL PROPAGANDA***



LIBERTY

COUNSEL

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THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER EXPOSED

Speaking above the din of silverware on plates as his luncheon audience finished eating, Mark Potok cleared up any lingering confusion about the Southern Poverty Law Center's purpose. It's not what the media say it is, he told the crowd at a 2007 conference co-sponsored by the Michigan Alliance Against Hate Crimes.

"Sometimes the press will describe us as monitoring hate crimes and so on," said Potok, who then served as editor of the SPLC's *Intelligence Report*, a quarterly billed as "the nation's preeminent periodical monitoring the radical right in the U.S."

The SPLC's real goal is more than "monitoring," asserted Potok, now a senior fellow at the law center. "I want to say plainly that our aim in life is to destroy these groups, to completely destroy them."¹

And it's had some success, using crippling lawsuits to win huge judgments and bankrupt racist outfits. "We've put about 12 major hate groups out of business," says Morris Dees, who in 1971 cofounded the SPLC, a far-left legal and advocacy group. Among the groups listed by Dees, SPLC's chief trial attorney and the group's driving force are Aryan Nations, White Aryan Resistance, as well as assorted neo-Nazi and Ku Klux Klan groups.²

Now the SPLC is adding other targets, slapping the "hate" label on mainstream Christian ministries and leading pro-family organizations. The presumed goal is to take down groups that champion biblical values – enduring principles for social good which the SPLC somehow transmutes into "hate."

Based in Montgomery, Alabama, the SPLC proclaims its dedication to "fighting hate and bigotry and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable

members of our society.”³ The nation’s wealthiest civil rights group with net assets of \$315 million, as of 2014, the SPLC built its reputation, in part, from monitoring the activities of white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. Cofounded in 1971 by direct mail mogul and lawyer Morris Dees, the SPLC provides free educational resources to schools and churches promoting “tolerance,” and publishes an annual “Hate Map,” which in 2014 listed 784 groups nationwide.

Dotted with swastikas, clenched fists, Klan hoods, and other hate group symbols, the map is an odd amalgam of the good, the bad, and the ugly. These days, it mixes Liberty Counsel and other widely respected groups like the American College of Pediatricians, D. James Kennedy Ministries, Family Research Council, and the American Family Association with a motley assortment of KKK, neo-Nazi, skinhead, black separatist, and other fringe racist entities.

Lumping Christian social conservatives with groups like the Aryan Terror Brigade and the Confederate Hammerskins seems ludicrous at first blush. But on close inspection, it’s even more bizarre.

“I disagree with the Family Research Council’s views on gays and lesbians,” says *Washington Post* writer Dana Milbank, a reliable liberal. “But it’s absurd to put the group, as the law center does, in the same category as Aryan Nations, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Stormfront and the Westboro Baptist Church.”⁴

But Milbank is a lonely skeptic. Most reporters give the SPLC a free pass. Its “hate” determinations are adopted at face value and uncritically retailed to the public. Associated Press writer Claire Galofaro recently told readers the SPLC “lists the Liberty Counsel as an anti-gay hate group for spreading false information.”⁵ Her nationally distributed article didn’t help readers assess that stark and damning claim, not even telling her audience where SPLC sits on the ideological spectrum.

Here’s a list of what the AP reporter could have mentioned, but didn’t. Despite fawning treatment from most in the press, the Southern Poverty Law Center

- Is a creature of the left that only targets the right
- Uses the “hate” charge like a night stick to bludgeon its ideological foes

- Employs a vague and subjective definition of “hate”
- Inflates the threat posed by “hate” in America
- Earned a failing grade from a charity watchdog
- Ignores the peril posed by radical Islam while tarring Islam’s critics as “Islamophobes”
- Cherry-picks causes to vacuum up cash through breathless appeals
- Has been blasted by former black employees for poor race relations
- Labeled Ben Carson, America’s most prominent neurosurgeon, an “extremist,” later backtracking under heavy criticism.
- Was dropped from the FBI’s list of “hate crime resources”
- Is led by Morris Dees, a five-times married millionaire called the “arch-salesman of hate mongering” by left-wing writer Alexander Cockburn

In a letter to Associated Press Assistant General Counsel Brian Barrett, Liberty Counsel Founder and Chairman Mat Staver protested the “defamatory” article and said it “presents Liberty Counsel and me in a false light.”

“The words and the way the article is written as a whole present a clear and unmistakable message to a reasonable person — Mat Staver and Liberty Counsel are liars and haters, and the organization is a ‘hate group.’ These assertions are very damaging and place lives in danger.”

“By printing a story containing a false and dangerous ‘hate group’ label,” Staver charged, “...the AP has now painted a target on Liberty Counsel and me.”⁶

Staver’s concern is well grounded. The SPLC’s habit of smearing good organizations facilitated a near mass shooting August 15, 2012, at the nation’s leading pro-family policy organization. The shooter, Floyd Lee Corkins II, is now serving a 25-year federal sentence for domestic terrorism after he walked into the Family Research Council’s Washington, D.C. headquarters intending to gun down FRC staffers. A brave and alert security guard stopped him in the building lobby but not before 28-year-old Corkins declared words to the effect, “I don’t like your politics,” and then shot and seriously wounded him.

Corkins targeted FRC because of its opposition to redefining marriage and picked the pro-family group, he told the FBI, using the SPLC's online hate listing: "It was a, uh, Southern Poverty Law, lists, uh, anti-gay groups. I found them online. I did a little bit of research, went to the website, stuff like that."⁷

Corkins carried a backpack containing a handgun, almost 100 rounds of ammunition and 15 Chick-fil-A sandwiches, which he intended to smear in the face of his victims (the food chain's president had recently spoken out on behalf of marriage as God made it – one man and one woman). He carried the address of a second pro-family group, the Traditional Values Coalition, also listed on the SPLC's hate list.

Despite the role its Hate Map listing had in Corkins' selection of targets, the SPLC rejects any responsibility for the attack. "Having a group on our Hate Map doesn't cause anybody to attack them," Dees told CNSNews.com in 2013.⁸ And Mark Potok dismisses charges that his group factored into the FRC shooting. The SPLC's "perfectly legitimate criticism" can't be responsible, he suggests, "for any mentally ill or otherwise unhinged person who decides that the matter needs to be settled at the point of a gun."⁹

But the heavily politicized SPLC sees it different when the shooter is said to be inflamed by the right.

After Jared Loughner opened fire on Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, severely injuring her and killing six others, including a federal judge and a 9-year-old girl, Potok quickly associated Loughner with the right. One day after the shooting, Potok pronounced it "pretty clear that Loughner is taking ideas from Patriot conspiracy theorist David Wynn Miller."¹⁰ No evidence of a connection to Miller was offered—and none surfaced later. Nonetheless, Potok told the *Los Angeles Times*, "I think you can find clues to some of the ideas that have influenced him, and I think many of them are clearly coming from the extreme right."¹¹

Potok, a former *USA Today* reporter, drew a dotted line between Loughner's vicious shooting spree and his alleged right-wing leanings. "Ideology may not explain why he allegedly killed," Potok said, "but it could help explain how he selected his target."¹²

And 13 days after the shooting, the SPLC published the thoughts of Arizona political scientist James W. Clarke, under the headline: "Expert:

Political Rhetoric Likely a Factor in Arizona Shooting." Clarke termed it "pure nonsense to suggest, as some have, that the political environment has nothing to do with the actions of very disturbed individuals."

He referenced the "particularly toxic re-election campaign" Gifford faced in 2012 and listed Sarah Palin's electoral map, which had placed Giffords, a liberal Democrat, in "crosshairs" for defeat. Clarke declared it "easy to see how the threats and rancor of that time could have provided a facilitating context for an angry, depressed person to act out – someone like Jared Loughner..."¹³

Potok linked rhetoric to violence again when he asserted the vigorous opposition mounted by Pamela Geller, Karl Rove, and Newt Gingrich to the "Ground Zero Mosque" was associated with a 50% jump in anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2010. (The actual number of hate crime incidents against Muslims rose from 107 in 2009¹⁴ to 160 in 2010¹⁵ — an increase of 53 in a nation then of 309 million people.) "These kinds of statements make real demons out of their targets," Potok contends.

"We've seen time and time again how statements made in the public square demonizing certain minorities ultimately turn into criminal hate violence," Potok told Zack Ford, editor of Think Progress LGBT at the Center for American Progress Action Fund. "When these kinds of statements are made, especially by people who are very much in the public eye, they do ultimately translate into violence."¹⁶

But not, apparently, when the SPLC is brandishing the hate stick.

And that is what the SPLC does best (along with raising mountains of cash).

CALLING NAMES AND RAISING CASH

"When you get right down to it, all the SPLC does is call people names," says Laird Wilcox, a researcher of political fringe groups and co-author of *American Extremists: Militias, Supremacists, Klansmen, Communists & Others*.

A long-time member of the American Civil Liberties Union and, for a time, Students for a Democratic Society ("before they went crazy"), Wilcox released his annual "Guide to the American Left," and "Guide

to the American Right” through more than 20 editions. He says the SPLC has...

specialized a highly developed and ritualized form of defamation ... a way of harming and isolating people by denying their humanity and trying to convert them into something that deserves to be hated and eliminated. They accuse others of this but utilize their enormous resources to practice it on a mass scale themselves.¹⁷

The SPLC didn't start out that way. Co-founded in 1971 by Morris Dees, the Southern Poverty Law Center used the courts early on to open doors for black Americans. Dees, now 78, sued the Montgomery, Alabama YMCA to force it to integrate. He won a suit to redraw state legislature voting districts in Alabama, leading in 1974 to the election of 17 black legislators. And Dees became nationally known by taking on the Ku Klux Klan in civil court, holding it financially responsible for criminal acts of its members. His courtroom exploits and Klan attempts at revenge made him the subject of a 1991 made-for-TV movie, *Line of Fire*.

One of Dees' largest jury prizes came in 1987 when jurors awarded a \$7 million verdict to the mother of Michael Donald, who was lynched by two Klansmen. But little money came to Mrs. Donald. The United Klans of America's sole asset was a warehouse that yielded \$51,875 when sold. Meanwhile, as journalist Ken Silverstein reported in *Harper's* magazine, the SPLC raked in \$9 million from a stream of mailed appeals signed by Dees highlighting the case. One featured a gruesome photo of Michael Donald's corpse.¹⁸

Very good at lodging venomous accusations of hate, the SPLC under Dees is even better at raising money.

“He's the Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker of the civil rights movement, though I don't mean to malign Jim and Tammy Faye,” anti-death-penalty lawyer Millard Farmer said in 2000 of Dees,¹⁹ with whom he worked in the 1970s before a bitter split.

Left-wing journalist Alexander Cockburn called Dees the “arch-salesman of hate mongering.” Cockburn complained in 2009 that, “Ever since 1971, U.S. Postal Service mailbags have bulged with

his fundraising letters, scaring dollars out of the pockets of trembling liberals aghast at his lurid depictions of hate-sodden America, in dire need of legal confrontation by the SPLC.”²⁰

In one appeal sent out in the mid-1980s, Dees warned of “armed Klan paramilitary forces (that) freely roam our wooded hills from Texas to North Carolina practicing with military-like weapons to ‘kill niggers and Jews’ in a race war they are planning.”²¹

MORRIS DEES: EAGER FOR RICHES

Dees honed his direct mail talents while still in college, convincing parents of University of Alabama students to order birthday cakes for their kids. The business grew and by graduation, Dees and his partner Millard Fuller, had sales of almost a half million dollars by peddling cakes and other fundraising products for clubs and associations – “all by mail.” After the two completed law school in 1960, they branched out into selling cookbooks by mail, building what Dees called the “leading cookbook publisher in the United States,” with sales of \$6.5 million in 1967.²²

Fuller left the partnership in the mid-1960s “to serve God” and later formed Habitat for Humanity. He said the two “shared the overriding purpose of making a pile of money.... We were not particular about how we did it. We just wanted to be independently rich. During the eight years we worked together we never wavered in that resolve.”²³

“From a very early age,” Dees recalls in his biography, “I started doing anything and everything I could to make certain I'd have the financial security my parents never achieved.” He picked cotton and collected Coke bottles as a kid. Later, he raised hogs, chickens, and cattle on his father's farm, and had \$5,000 in the bank when he graduated high school.²⁴

Dimly aware of the civil rights revolution taking place in his backyard in Montgomery, Alabama, the young entrepreneur slowly warmed to racial equality in the 1960s. But not before he took \$5,000 in 1961 to successfully defend in court a Klansman²⁵ who assaulted an NBC cameraman accompanying Freedom Riders into Montgomery.²⁶

Married and a self-described “good Baptist” who prayed each night with his wife, Dees served as Sunday school superintendent for the Pike Road Baptist Church. He urged church members one Sunday in 1963 to

join him in sending money to a black church in Birmingham where four young girls died after a bomb tore through the church building. “Deathly silence” answered, as Dees tells it, and no one joined him and his wife in praying for the victims. Dees and his wife Beverly, the first of Dees’ five wives, later moved to a Unitarian Fellowship “because I couldn’t reconcile the moral stance of our church with the events of the day.”²⁷

In 1968 Dees took inspiration from the biography of ACLU attorney Clarence Darrow and decided “to speak out for my black friends,” sell his company and pursue civil rights law. “All the things in my life that had brought me to this point,” Dees writes in his biography, “all the pulls and tugs of my conscience, found a singular peace.”²⁸ Time Life purchased his business for \$6 million a year later, making Dees a wealthy man and opening a new season in his life.²⁹

Along with practicing civil rights law, Dees further established his fundraising reputation – and showcased his political loyalties – by raising money for George McGovern’s presidential campaign. He did so well as campaign finance director – helping McGovern take in \$24 million – that the South Dakota Democrat let him use the 700,000 name campaign list to grow the Southern Poverty Law Center. Dees played a similar fundraising role for Jimmy Carter in 1976 and later volunteered for Ted Kennedy’s short-lived 1980 presidential run and for Gary Hart in 1984.³⁰

MONEY MACHINE

Dees’ prowess for extracting dollars from alarmed liberals helped earn him a place in the Direct Marketing Association Hall of Fame – a unique honor for a civil liberties attorney. And it has made Southern Poverty Law Center the richest civil liberties legal group in the nation. The SPLC’s most recent 2014 tax filing reports a whopping \$315 million in net assets. The group took in \$54 million in 2014, \$10 million of which was investment income. But even with that hoard at its disposal, the SPLC, with 287 employees, including some 40 lawyers, spent just \$27 million on programs to advance its mission. Its docket is light, with just seven active cases as of October 2015, according to its website.³¹

The organization paid its 10 most well-compensated employees nearly \$2 million in 2013. Topping the list is Morris Dees with \$364,789 in

total compensation, followed by Richard Cohen, president and CEO, who earned \$359,300.³²

The law center has been growing its “endowment” for decades – and promised at least twice to reach the point where it will quit fundraising and live off interest. *Harper’s* magazine writer Ken Silverstein says Dees pledged in 1978 to stop fundraising when the endowment reached \$55 million. The promise was repeated in 1989 but only when the endowment hit \$100 million. When the cash pile touched that ceiling, the SPLC assured it could “cease the costly and often unreliable task of fund raising.”³³

It still hasn’t happened. And the endowment fund has now reached \$302.8 million, according to the SPLC’s 2014 tax filing.³⁴

The reserve is needed, Cohen explained in 2013, “because our fundraising is on a downward trend.” SPLC income from fundraising hit \$37.5 million that year and \$43.6 million the next.³⁵ Still, as Cohen told the *Weekly Standard*, “Those 1960s liberals—they’re getting older, and the post office is dying. We’re likely to be out of the fundraising business within 10 years.”³⁶

Dees well-heeled approach to civil rights law doesn’t sit well with some of his colleagues. Atlanta civil rights attorney Stephen Bright calls Dees a “con man and a fraud.” Bright sent a scathing note to the University of Alabama Law School Dean, declining to attend the 2007 presentation of the “Morris Dees Justice Award” – what he called “another Dees scam.” A nationally known death penalty opponent who earned \$39,208 in 2014 as president and general counsel of the Southern Center for Human Rights, Bright lashed out at his Alabama counterpart:

The positive contributions Dees has made to justice—most undertaken based upon calculations as to their publicity and fund raising potential—are far overshadowed by what *Harper’s* described as his “flagrantly misleading” solicitations for money. He has raised millions upon millions of dollars with various schemes, never mentioning that he does not need the money because he has \$175 million and two “poverty palace” buildings in Montgomery. He has taken advantage of naive, well-meaning people—some of moderate or low incomes—who

believe his pitches and give to his \$175-million operation. He has spent most of what they have sent him to raise still more millions, pay high salaries, and promote himself. Because he spends so much on fund raising, his operation spends \$30 million a year to accomplish less than what many other organizations accomplish on shoestring budgets.³⁷

Bright copied Dees on his letter, but SPLC keeps the presses rolling with fresh fundraising appeals announcing more urgent needs and grave threats. As it has for decades. In 1995, when the SPLC had more than \$60 million in reserves, Dees sent out a fundraising letter telling donors the “strain on our current operating budget is the greatest in our 25-year history.”³⁸

The SPLC’s long habit of raising money it doesn’t spend generated a negative review from nonprofit review site, SeriousGivers.org. “Given its very high reserve ratio (reserves greater than 7 times annual spending), Southern Poverty Law Center does not appear to need donated support at this time.”³⁹ And Charity Watch handed the SPLC a rating of F in 2000, 2008 and 2009 for its extremely high level of accumulated assets.⁴⁰

STAFF DISSENT

Critics charge Dees with choosing causes and lawsuits based on their capacity to excite donors and precipitate cash. His decision to chase the Klan in the 1980s brought in millions but generated dissent from SPLC attorneys. Most thought the “Klan was more bark than bite and that there were certainly bigger problems facing blacks and the poor,” said Randall Williams, who led the SPLC’s Klanwatch in the 1980s.⁴¹

Frustrated by Dees’ narrow focus on the Klan, the entire SPLC legal staff quit in protest in 1986.⁴²

“I felt that Morris was on the Klan kick because it was such an easy target – easy to beat in court, easy to raise big money on,” said Deborah Ellis, a former SPLC attorney who left in the 1980s. But Dees’ strategy generated a windfall. “The money poured in,” Williams told *The Progressive*. “Everybody, it seems, was against the Klan.... Our budget shot up tremendously – and still, we were sometimes able to raise as much as \$3 million a year more than we could spend.”⁴³

Dees said “the Klan thing is winding down”⁴⁴ in 1988, but 11 years later he opened a fundraising letter with frightening news: “The danger presented by the Klan is greater now than at any time in the past ten years.”⁴⁵ By that point, the Klan nationwide amounted to some 2,000 people, a shriveled remnant of the four million members it claimed in the 1920s.⁴⁶

As Gloria Browne, one of just two black attorneys hired by SPLC in its first 23 years, said, “The market is still wide open for the product, which is Black pain and white guilt.”⁴⁷

The SPLC’s KlanWatch, later HateWatch, fomented national alarm in 1996 over a supposed spree of black church fires planted by white racists. KlanWatch, created in 1981 “in response to a resurgence of Ku Klux Klan activity,” listed 22 black church fires from December 1995 to June 17, 1996.⁴⁸ And when a black church in Knoxville was firebombed with unidentified “racial slurs found in the rubble,” the SPLC’s Brian Levin quickly called it an “unmistakable act of terrorism.” As Levin saw it, “even if it was done without a racial motive, the fact of the matter is, it still sends shock waves throughout a community.”⁴⁹

SPLC cofounder Morris Dees called on the Southern Baptist Convention to help with rebuilding burned black churches to show the era when “white Southern churches stood silent in the face of blatant intolerance has long passed.”⁵⁰ It’s unknown if Dees lent his considerable fundraising acumen to help burned-out churches rebuild. Or if the SPLC reached into its endowment, then at about \$60 million, to boost the restoration.

It later turned out that just three of more than 70 church fires were linked to racial hatred, according to investigations by *USA Today* and the U.S. Department of Justice. A third of those arrested for setting fires were black.⁵¹

The SPLC was at it again in 2015 when a series of six fires hit black churches in the week after the heinous murder of nine people at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C. An article posted on the SPLC website announced that some of the fires were “suspicious and possible hate crimes.”⁵² Less than a week later, authorities determined racial prejudice had no part in the fires.⁵³

RACIAL DISCORD

The SPLC came into existence, the group says, “to ensure that the promise of the civil rights movement became a reality for all.” But its own record on race is suspect, as the *Montgomery Advertiser* newspaper revealed in a 1994 investigative series. Twelve of 13 black former staff members reached by the *Montgomery Advertiser* aired complaints about the treatment of blacks at the SPLC – problems “ranging from a paternalistic attitude to racial slurs.” Three former black employees compared the center to a plantation.⁵⁴

Dees joined a 1974 lawsuit accusing Alabama governor George Wallace of not appointing blacks to state boards or commissions,⁵⁵ but 20 years later there were no blacks in SPLC senior management. And there were no blacks on the eight-member staff of the law center’s Teaching Tolerance initiative, which supplies video and print materials to schools to promote better race relations.⁵⁶ Today, 44 years since the SPLC’s founding, just one of nine senior management staff is black.⁵⁷

“I would definitely say there was not a single black employee with whom I spoke who was happy to be working there,” said a black Harvard Law School graduate who was an SPLC intern in 1989.⁵⁸

The discontent may transcend race. Millard Fuller said his former business partner “does not know how to treat people. He leaves a trail of bodies behind him, of broken relationships. It’s just how he treats people.”⁵⁹

That trail includes four ex-wives, one of whom alleged in divorce papers that Dees committed multiple affairs during their marriage. Dees called the detailed and sensational charges “old fashioned ‘cheap shots.’” They were an attempt, he said, “to accuse the husband of every inflammatory act she could imagine, hoping that it would prejudice the court.”⁶⁰

Black Lives Matter in Montgomery, Alabama, blasted the Southern Poverty Law Center in 2015, posting a flyer declaring, “Support Social Justice, not profiteering millionaires.” The flyer protested, “SPLC claims to help poor black people, yet they are hoarding 280 million dollars in the bank.” And the SPLC, the flyer accused, “has never had a person of color in the upper leadership. They only give unpaid honorary positions to people of color to create a false illusion that the leadership is diverse.”⁶¹

Indeed, the role civil rights leader Julian Bond played as SPLC president (1971-79) was “largely honorary,” as Dees put it in his biography.⁶²

INFLATE THE HATE

“No one has been more assiduous in inflating the profile of [hate] groups than millionaire huckster, Morris Dees,” says JoAnn Wypijewski, a writer for the leftist *Nation* magazine. “Dees would have his donors believe” that “militia nuts” are “lurking around every corner.”⁶³ And one tool to project that false image is the SPLC’s “Hate Map,” an annual listing of “active hate groups in the United States.” The 2014 map lists 784 hate groups, down almost 20 percent from the year before—but still well up from the 537 groups said to be menacing America in 1998.

SPLC counts as “active” all hate groups that engage in First-Amendment protected conduct such as “marches, rallies, speeches, meetings, leafletting, and publishing literature.” Merely having a post office box may also get a group on the list, Potok said in 2009.⁶⁴ So will criminal conduct, but the SPLC provides no summary listing about which groups, if any, violated the law, making it hard to assess just how dangerous the groups are—or if they pose any threat at all.

The SPLC Hate Map counts each individual chapter of a hate group, rather than just the collective organization, a practice first implemented in 1997⁶⁵ and which sends the tally upwards. The National Socialist Movement, for example, is listed 49 times in the SPLC’s 2015 Hate Map, rather than just once since the count includes each one of the NSM’s individual chapters. A review of SPLC’s “Active U.S. Hate Groups” count for 2009 showed just four organizations accounted for 229 hate groups, as the SPLC counts them, and roughly 25 percent of the hate groups listed that year.⁶⁶ Unfortunately, the SPLC provides no detail about the size or activity of individual chapters to help gauge the “hate.” All that’s given is the group’s name and the city in which the chapter is located—no address is shown.

The result is a count utterly inconsistent with Federal Bureau of Investigation statistics. Hate crimes plummeted 24% between 1998 and 2013, according to the FBI. Yet the SPLC claims the number of hate groups in the U.S. shot up by 75% during this same period.⁶⁷

“The SPLC has listings I had never heard of and I know this area pretty well,” says Laird Wilcox who published his *Guide to the American Left and Guide to the American Right* annually from 1979 to 2000. “Even my own contacts in various movements had never heard of some on SPLC’s list,” he said in 2007.⁶⁸

The *Cleveland Scene* newspaper took a look in 2002 at the actual number of hate groups in Ohio after the SPLC claimed 40 active “hate or militia groups” in the state, and another group proposed an even higher number. “While a few groups on the monitors’ lists warrant attention,” the paper concluded, “most have dissolved or amount to little more than a guy with a copy of *Mein Kampf* and a Yahoo! account.” Reporter David Martin joked most “white-nationalist groups would have trouble staging a poker game, let alone a revolution.”⁶⁹

When the SPLC listed a Brotherhood of Klans chapter in Rutland, Vermont, in 2007 a local reporter started looking and found nothing. A police detective said he doubted the group was active in Rutland where no hate crimes had taken place in the recent past. “We’d have had some intel, we’d have some names of people if they were here,” said Detective Sgt. Kevin Stevens.

The SPLC’s Mark Potok told the *Rutland Herald* the listing stemmed from a post office box listed on a defunct web page for the Brotherhood of Klans Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. And he admitted his group’s due diligence does not include confirming the legitimacy of each listing. “When a group claims chapters in a given place, we list them unless we have a reason to believe it is false,” he told the newspaper.⁷⁰

Mark Pitcavage, director of investigative research at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), says the SPLC exaggerates the hate by counting single individuals as a group or chapter. “The Southern Poverty Law Center’s list is wildly inflated,” Pitcavage declared. Responding to the SPLC’s 2015 listing of 40 active hate groups in New Jersey, the fourth highest number in the nation, Pitcavage remarked, “They list skinhead groups in places where there are no organized groups, but instead it’s just a couple of individuals.”

“There definitely are white supremacists in New Jersey, but it’s overstated by the SPLC’s list,” Pitcavage told the *South Jersey Times*. “Most skinheads don’t belong to any group — they’re just part of the scene.”⁷¹

Potok admitted in 2011 that SPLC’s Hate Map is “a very rough measure” and the result of “an imperfect process.”⁷² Indeed, SPLC’s definition of hate groups is broad and imprecise. “We do not have a formal written criteria,” Heidi Beirich, then SPLC director of research and special projects, conceded in an email several years ago. The SPLC now says hate groups have “beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics.”

Beirich, now Intelligence Project director at SPLC, tried to shed more light in October 2015, telling a reporter, “I think there’s a common misunderstanding about the way you get on our Hate List. We post groups on the basis of ideology, not whether they’re violent or not.”⁷³ That gives the SPLC wiggle room to pick and choose its targets – and helps explain why almost none are liberal or leftist organizations.

“If the SPLC was actually going after racial violence they would go after the racial and ethnic gangs,” asserts extremist group expert Laird Wilcox. “In southern California, Hispanic gangs have been driving blacks out of some neighborhoods for years,” he said. “Imagine if whites tried to do that. ... The SPLC is very choosy in what it complains about. This kind of selective attention and biased reporting simply illustrates their unscrupulousness.”⁷⁴

At least one ex-donor took notice. Jack Feldman is a retired professor of psychology at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Feldman, who is Jewish, has faced anti-Semitic threats, including one KKK death threat. He appreciated the SPLC’s work and gave for several years until he began to see that...

all the nasties seemed to come from the “Far Right.” Anti-Semites, racial bigots, gay-haters, anti-government zealots, militias, all (bar a few “black separatists”) were right-wingers. The left, it seemed, was a flower-child dream world in which all you needed was love.

But while the progressives were busy imagining no possessions odd things were happening. Anti-Semitism was coming to universities, coddled and nurtured in “Mideast Studies” programs and elsewhere. Black “leaders” like Al Sharpton were actively attacking white people and promoting violence.

Anti-Semitism is part and parcel of the “Occupy” movement, too. Remember the TV interview with the Occupier who said that “Zionist bankers don’t belong in our country?” If any of this was ever in the SPLC “Intelligence Report” I don’t recall it.

NOT “SET UP” TO COVER LEFT

A search for “Occupy Wall Street” in the SPLC’s *Intelligence Report* turns up “No results found.” Nor is it on the SPLC Hate Map – even though five men linked to Occupy Wall Street were arrested in 2012 for plotting to blow up a bridge near Cleveland. Their plot was the opening gambit to widespread destruction in Cleveland. Future plans called for bombing the GOP national convention. But that wasn’t enough to trigger SPLC interest. “We’re not really set up to cover the extreme Left,” a man at the SPLC told a *National Review* reporter.⁷⁵

That may be why the SPLC has nothing to say about groups such as the Black Bloc – anarchists who don black clothing and wear masks to conceal their identity at protests. Black Bloc protesters vandalized businesses in Seattle at the 1999 anti-World Trade Organization protests.

Nor does it list MEChA, a Spanish acronym for Chicano Students of Aztlan, a radical student group which supports open borders, amnesty for illegal immigrants, and Spanish as an official U.S. language. With some 400 campus-based chapters nationwide, the group would like to take back “Aztlan,” what most Americans know as the southwestern U.S., and has been linked to several instances of violence. MEChA students vandalized the UCLA faculty center in 1993, causing some \$500,000 worth of damage after the university rejected a bid to give departmental status to the Chicano Studies Program.⁷⁶ *U.S. News and World Report* columnist John Leo wrote in 2003 about MEChA;

A MEChA...slogan translates as “For the race everything. For those outside the race, nothing.” El Plan de Aztlan, a founding document carried now on many MEChA Internet websites, talks of the need to reclaim the Southwest (Aztlan) from “the occupying forces of the oppressor.” As if the Nazi-like call to the power of the blood is not scary enough, Miguel Perez of Cal State MEChA raised the issue of ethnic cleansing. Once Aztlan has been taken over, he said, non-Chicanos “would

have to be expelled” and opposition groups quashed “because you have to keep the power.”⁷⁷

Those ambitions aren’t enough, however, for MEChA to make the SPLC hate list. That’s because, as Potok explained, “despite...characterization of it as ‘a hard-left Hispanic group,’ we have found no evidence to support charges that the organization is racist or anti-Semitic.”⁷⁸

Nor do radical Muslim groups show up on the SPLC Hate Map. Not listed, for instance, is Jumaat al-Fuqra, a group linked, the SPLC acknowledges, to “17 homicides and 13 fire bombings in the United States.”⁷⁹ A closely connected group, Muslims of America, is said to have at least 22 rural compounds around the nation. An MOA videotape obtained by the Clarion Project shows women marching in formation, practicing hand-to-hand combat, and other military maneuvers.⁸⁰ The U.S. Department of Justice issued a 2006 report which asserts that Jamaat ul-Fuqra “has more than 35 suspected communes and more than 3,000 members spread across the United States, all in support of one goal: the purification of Islam through violence.”⁸¹ Jamaat ul-Fuqra founder Sheikh Mubarak Gilani says his group provides “the most advanced training courses in Islamic military warfare.” Gilani proclaims his militant purposes in a video “Soldiers of Allah:” “We are fighting to destroy the enemy. We are dealing with evil at its roots and its roots are America.”⁸²

But they’re not a hate group in the eyes of America’s premier arbiter of hate.

RADICAL ISLAM UNTOUCHED

Nor is the Muslim Brotherhood, despite its stated ambition to dominate the U.S. and the world. In 2004, the FBI discovered the secret archive of the Muslim Brotherhood in North America stashed inside the hidden sub-basement of a home in Annandale, Virginia. One of the documents uncovered reveals the Muslim Brotherhood’s subversive mission in the U.S. Dated May 22, 1991, the memo outlines the Muslim Brotherhood’s plan to wage a “grand Jihad” against America:

The Ikhwan [Muslim Brotherhood] must understand that their work in America is a kind of grand Jihad in eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and

“sabotaging” its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers so that it is eliminated and God’s religion is made victorious over all other religions.⁸³

“We don’t really cover radical Islam,” Potok admitted in 2009. Why? Lack of expertise, he says. “Ultimately we’ve decided still to stick with the kind of narrow slice of that world—black nationalists, black Muslims, radical black Muslims—because there were so many other groups that had real expertise in groups in the radical Muslim world.”⁸⁴

Instead of scrutinizing radical Muslim groups, the SPLC fiercely attacks those who expose Islam. It tars Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller, Bill Warner, Frank Gaffney and others as anti-Muslim extremists because they document the machinations of stealth Islam in America.

With its typically over-the-top and super-charged rhetoric, the SPLC lambastes Frank Gaffney, the founder and president of the Center for Security Policy in Washington, D.C., as “one of America’s most notorious Islamophobes.” He is a man, the SPLC declares, “gripped by paranoid fantasies about Muslims destroying the West from within.”⁸⁵ In fact, Gaffney is a careful student of sharia-adherent Islam in the U.S. and has joined others in detailed documentation of the multiple threats posed to American democracy by the Muslim Brotherhood and its allied organizations.⁸⁶

Robert Spencer, the author of 14 books, has presented seminars on Islam and jihad for the FBI, U.S. Central Command, the Joint Terrorism Task Force, and the U.S. intelligence community. He calls SPLC’s hate group designation “a cudgel, a tool for the use of Leftist enemies of the freedom of speech.” The label is used by “Leftists and Islamic supremacists” to “to shut down honest discussion of jihad terror and Islamic supremacism.” They contact event organizers about the SPLC’s “hate group” classification and, Spencer says, “all too often, ignorant or cowardly officials, unaware of or indifferent to how they’re being played and anxious to avoid ‘controversy,’ cancel the event. It works like a charm, in just the way it was intended to work.”⁸⁷

TAKING AMERICA LEFTWARD

Instead of Islam, America’s “biggest domestic terror threat ... pretty clearly comes from the radical right in this country,” Potok declared in 2011. For evidence he listed one incident in which a father and son

belonging to the “sovereign citizens” movement opened fire and killed two police officers at a routine traffic stop.⁸⁸

The SPLC takes a dim view of the Tea Party, too. It’s one more manifestation, Potok declared in 2010, of the “anger seething across the American political landscape.” And while he generously admits the “tea parties ... cannot fairly be considered extremist groups ... they are shot through with rich veins of radical ideas, conspiracy theories and racism.”⁸⁹

The SPLC’s fixation on the right stems from the group’s ideological bias. “It’s pretty hard for them to deny that the SPLC is a political operation that is trying to tar right-wingers and conservative Republicans with a racist and extremist smear,” says Laird Wilcox. “Privately, they will admit this and leftist groups cheer them on.”⁹⁰

The SPLC has a broader political ambition, says Potok, to take the American public leftward. “That’s very much what we want to do is to, in a sense, drag the middle—which seems to me over the last 30 years has moved consistently to the right—back to somewhere closer to where we think it ought to be.”⁹¹ The political allegiances of Morris Dees – who served on the presidential campaigns of George McGovern, Jimmy Carter, Ted Kennedy, and Gary Hart – along with the political loyalties of some on the SPLC Board supply a strong hint to where the SPLC wants to “drag” America.

- The late Julian Bond served as the Southern Poverty Law Center’s first president (1971-79) and a board member for the rest of his life. A civil rights icon, Bond was a professor and longtime chairman of the NAACP. Bond visited Cuba in 1961 later recalled how he was “enchanted by the revolution.” After a later visit, Bond said his tour of the communist nation “simply reinforced my admiration for the Cuban people and the society they are building.”⁹² Bond charged in 2006 that Republicans’ “idea of equal rights is the American flag and the Confederate swastika flying side by side.”⁹³ And in 2013 he denounced the Tea Party as “overtly racist” and “the Taliban wing of American politics.”⁹⁴
- James Rucker is executive director of ColorOfChange.org, an online citizens’ lobby he cofounded with self-described communist Van Jones. Rucker formerly served as director of grassroots mobilization at the far left MoveOn.org.

- Marsha Levick served in the 1980s as legal director and then executive director of the National Organization for Women Legal Defense and Education Fund.

The SPLC's "Teaching Tolerance" project even puffed unrepentant domestic terrorist and former Weather Underground leader Bill Ayers. The *Teaching Tolerance* magazine published an interview with Ayers in 1998, calling him a "highly respected figure in the field of multicultural education" and someone with "a rich vision of teaching that interweaves passion, responsibility and self-reflection."⁹⁵ Readers weren't told that the Weather Underground claimed responsibility for 25 bombings targeting the U.S. Capitol, Pentagon and police stations in the early 1970s. Or that Ayers labeled the Weathered Underground an "American Red Army." Its mission, he said, was "Kill all the rich people. Break up their cars and apartments. Bring the revolution home, kill your parents."⁹⁶ But instead of castigating Ayers for his own rich heritage of hate and intolerance, the SPLC warmly praised him, lightly touching on his violent past.

EXPANDING MISSION

Long a scourge of white supremacists, the SPLC began launching salvos at immigration control groups in the 2000s, naming the Federation for American Immigration Reform a hate group in 2007, for its role as a key leader of the "furious nativist tide." SPLC listed FAIR, NumbersUSA, and the Center for Immigration Studies in 2009 as "three faces of intolerance."⁹⁷ And it has also classified VDARE, which calls itself an advocate of "patriotic immigration reform," as a hate group.

FAIR president Dan Stein rejected the hate charge, saying SPLC was engaging "in unsubstantiated, invidious name-calling, smearing millions of people in this movement who simply want to see the law enforced and, frankly, lower levels of immigration."⁹⁸

A coalition of immigration control opponents, including the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), used the hate charge as the centerpiece of its 2009 "Stop the Hate" campaign. The coalition placed an ad in a Capitol Hill newspaper telling lawmakers "Extremist groups, like FAIR, shouldn't write immigration policy."⁹⁹

But in a damning 16,000 word SPLC critique, Jerry Kammer, a — Pulitzer prize-winning investigative journalist and senior research fellow

for the Center for Immigration Studies, pointed out that the SPLC was an "active ally of the NCLR in the campaign" and served as its "propaganda arm."¹⁰⁰

"The 'Stop the Hate' campaign," Kammer countered, "would more accurately be labeled as a campaign to 'Stop the Debate.'"¹⁰¹

TARGETING PRO-FAMILY GROUPS

The SPLC is doing much the same in its efforts to smear pro-family organizations that support marriage and biblical sexuality. The SPLC opened this latest theater in its war on so-called "extremism" in 2010 when it identified 18 mostly evangelical organizations as "anti-gay," of which thirteen were named hate groups in 2011.

Indulging once more in its trademark custom of venomous caricature, the SPLC said the groups "pump out demonizing propaganda aimed at homosexuals." The list of alleged "anti-gay" groups included well-respected organizations such as American Family Association, Concerned Women for America, Coral Ridge Ministries, Family Research Council, Liberty Counsel, National Organization for Marriage, and Traditional Values Coalition.¹⁰²

The SPLC justified its action, saying the groups propagated "known falsehoods" about homosexual conduct but pro-family leaders saw the blacklisting as an attempt to shut down debate.

"What we're seeing now is the next phase of the gay rights movement," National Organization of Marriage chairman Maggie Gallagher said at the time. She referenced the recently expressed ambition of homosexual activist Dan Savage to place same-sex "marriage" beyond debate.

"This is part of the unfolding process of attempting to redefine Christian teaching on sex and marriage as the moral, legal and cultural equivalent of racism," said Gallagher, speaking five years before Kentucky County clerk Kim Davis spent six days in jail rather than betray her Christian conscience by issuing same-sex "marriage" licenses in her name.

"I do believe this is the goal of the architects of the gay marriage movement," Gallagher affirmed. "And they're making it very clear."¹⁰³

INFLUENCING MILITARY

In an ominous development, SPLC's vision of hate and extremism has invaded the U.S. military. Soldiers at Fort Hood were told in 2013 that evangelical Christians, along with Tea Party participants were a threat to America, according to a report from Todd Starnes at Fox News. At a pre-deployment briefing, the soldiers were reportedly told giving money to these pro-family groups would bring punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. One soldier at the briefing told Starnes a counter-intelligence agent took almost 30 minutes to detail how evangelicals and organizations such as the American Family Association were "tearing the country apart."¹⁰⁴

"I was very shocked and couldn't believe what I was hearing," another soldier said. "I felt like my religious liberties, that I risk my life and sacrifice time away from family to fight for, were being taken away."¹⁰⁵

Starnes listed two similar incidents. One at Camp Shelby in Mississippi where troops were told the American Family Association is a hate group due to its support for traditional values. And an Army Reserve briefing categorized evangelical Christianity and Catholicism as "religious extremism."¹⁰⁶

Army spokesmen described these events as isolated and not representative of Army policy but a Judicial Watch FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request turned up a 133-page Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) training document which includes a lesson on extremism and lists the Southern Poverty Law Center as a resource, along with the SPLC's Tolerance.org website.¹⁰⁷

And a lengthy email apparently sent in 2013 by a lieutenant colonel at Fort Campbell in Kentucky cautioned three dozen subordinates to be alert for extremism in the ranks – for "the groups out there that do not share our Army Values."¹⁰⁸ The email, reported by Fox News' Todd Starnes, told officers to beware of border and immigration control groups, critics of shariah-adherent Islam, and two pro-family organizations, the Family Research Council and the American Family Association. The latter two were listed, along with the malignant Westboro Baptist Church, as "Anti-Gay Groups."

The email repeated word for word, without attribution, an SPLC attack on the "religious right," telling officers:

The religious right in America has employed a variety of strategies in its efforts to beat back the increasingly confident gay rights movement. One of those has been defamation. Many of its leaders have engaged in the crudest type of name-calling, describing LGBT people as "perverts" with "filthy habits" who seek to snatch the children of straight parents and "convert" them to gay sex. They have disseminated disparaging "facts" about gays that are simply untrue – assertions that are remarkably reminiscent of the way white intellectuals and scientists once wrote about the "bestial" black man and his supposedly threatening sexuality.¹⁰⁹

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, expressed shock at the email.

"It's very disturbing to see where the Obama Administration is taking the military and using it as a laboratory for social experimentation – and also as an instrument to fundamentally change the culture," said Perkins, who served in the Marines. "The message is very clear – if you are a Christian who believes in the Bible, who believes in transcendent truth, there is no place for you in the military."¹¹⁰

Despite complaints about the SPLC's far-left agenda, a Pentagon spokesman said in February 2014 the SPLC is still a resource the Department of Defense relies on to "inform" its equal opportunity training. At the same time, the spokesman said the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) has purged SPLC references from its website. In addition, DEOMI does not refer to SPLC hate lists in its training, he told CNSNews.com.¹¹¹

The FBI deleted the SPLC as a resource listed on its Hate Crime web page in early 2014. It acted after 15 pro-family groups, including Liberty Counsel, sent a letter asking Attorney General Eric Holder and FBI Director James Comey to distance the FBI from the group. The letter cited SPLC's role in facilitating an act of domestic terrorism against the Family Research Council by listing FRC as a hate group. In so doing, it furnishes information on which Floyd Lee Corkins II relied in his 2012 attempt to stage a deadly attack on FRC headquarters.

"Thus, the FBI now directs the public to trust a group whose website played a significant part in bringing about an act of domestic terrorism,"

the letter stated. “These facts were developed by federal prosecutors – not FRC.”¹¹²

But the U.S. Justice Department — which flew Morris Dees up to Washington, D.C. to address its “Diversity Training Event” on July 31, 2012,¹¹³ two weeks before Corkins attacked the FRC—still holds the SPLC in high regard. Despite the SPLC’s role in the shooting and its far-left profile, assistant attorney general for national security John Carlin upgraded the SPLC to “critical” ally in October 2015. Speaking to an event co-sponsored by SPLC and George Washington University, the Justice Department official announced the creation of a new domestic terrorism counsel to take on the “real and present threat” of domestic extremism.¹¹⁴ The SPLC, he said, “has a long history of tracking and countering hate, and their efforts will continue to be critical.”

Carlin said he was “grateful to have the Southern Poverty Law Center and the George Washington Program on Extremism on our side, working with us to tackle some of today’s most pressing national security threats.”¹¹⁵

“The folks at SPLC are still useful to the DOJ, which is desperate to paint conservative Christians as a greater threat to our domestic tranquility than people who are determined to decapitate us in the name of Allah,” said American Family Association radio host Bryan Fisher.¹¹⁶

SILENCING DISSENT

The fear is that the Justice Department may, like the SPLC, focus not on the enemies of America, but the enemies of the left. It’s a strategy charted by Herbert Marcuse, a leftist icon with whom long-time SPLC board member Julian Bond was friendly. Marcuse, known as the Father of the New Left, was an advocate of cultural revolution. As noted by the Capital Research Institute, his 1965 essay, “Repressive Tolerance,” promoted the reinvention of “tolerance” to advance social change and give primacy to the Left:

This essay examines the idea of tolerance in our advanced industrial society. The conclusion reached is that the realization of the objective of tolerance would call for intolerance toward prevailing policies, attitudes, opinions, and the extension of tolerance to policies, attitudes, and opinions which are outlawed or suppressed....¹¹⁷

The solution he offered to the so-called “repressive tolerance” is to shut down dissent and subdue all voices but those on the left:

Liberating tolerance, then, would mean intolerance against movements from the Right and toleration of movements from the Left.... Not “equal” but more representation of the Left would be equalization of the prevailing inequality.¹¹⁸

That is the goal toward which the SPLC seeks to “drag” America, as noted above. A top-to-bottom creature of the left, the SPLC, with few exceptions, only sees hate on the right. And it employs snarling and inflammatory rhetoric to transform mainstream immigration control and pro-family groups into xenophobes, racists, homophobes and gay-haters. To reprise the flavor of the biting prose to which the law center is prone, consider this characterization of WND.com writers:

WND columnists comprise a cross-section of reactionaries and fringe wingnuts, including arch-conservative Alan Keyes; actor and mud-slinger Chuck Norris; failed presidential candidate Rick Santorum; race-baiting and homophobic ex-Major Leaguer John Rucker; radio hothead Rush Limbaugh; and white nationalist writer Pat Buchanan...¹¹⁹

But Bill Ayers, the SPLC tells us, is a “highly respected figure in the field of multicultural education.”

The use of jeering and derisive language is the native tongue of the left. One Leninist maxim instructs: “We can and must write ... in a language which sows among the masses hate, revulsion, scorn and the like toward those of differing opinion.”¹²⁰

And that’s what the SPLC does best. As Laird Wilcox noted, “When you get right down to it, all the SPLC does is call people names.”

By “casually labeling organizations as ‘hate groups,’” journalist Ken Silverstein observes, the SPLC “shuts down debate, stifles free speech, and most of all, raises a pile of money, very little of which is used on behalf of poor people.”¹²¹

But it does one more thing – it seeks to destroy, as Mark Potok made plain.

That may be what the SPLC had in mind in October 2014 when it labeled neurosurgeon and philanthropist Ben Carson an “extremist” for, as the SPLC alleged, “linking gays with pedophiles, comparing the U.S. to Nazi Germany and endorsing biblical economic practices for 21st century America.”

Public outrage poured in, forcing the SPLC to retreat four months later and issue a rare semi-apology. Under intense criticism, the group “reviewed” its posting on Carson and, laughably, “concluded that it did not meet our standards, so we have taken it down.”¹²²

No word, though, on what those standards are and how the SPLC failed to meet them.

“When embracing traditional Christian values is equated to hatred, we are approaching the stage where wrong is called right and right is called wrong,” said Carson after the SPLC attacked him.

“It is important for us to once again advocate true tolerance,” he added. “That means being respectful of those with whom we disagree and allowing people to live according to their values without harassment. It is nothing but projectionist when some groups label those who disagree with them as haters.”¹²³

But “true tolerance” is something the SPLC, with its millions, its mastery of the art of ridicule, and its strange hold on the mind and affection of most in the media, has no interest. If the SPLC has no interest, at least the media should take an interest and begin reporting the truth. Repeating the false propaganda of the SPLC is not only wrong and dishonest, it is dangerous.

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