



The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and Its So-Called “Hate Groups”

What is the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)?

- The SPLC calls itself “a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry.”¹ It developed its reputation by monitoring the activities of racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan.²
- It was founded in 1971 by Morris Dees, who had made a fortune in direct mail marketing. He used the same skills at SPLC, turning it into a powerful fundraising machine.³ It has an annual budget of about \$30 million,⁴ but also a massive “endowment” of \$223 million as of 2010,⁵ including funds in bank accounts in the Cayman Islands and Bermuda.⁶ The American Institute of Philanthropy has given SPLC a grade of “F” for continuing to fundraise while sitting on such a massive pile of money.⁷
- Journalist Ken Silverstein wrote in *Harper’s* magazine in 2000, “Today, the SPLC spends most of its time – and money – on a relentless fund-raising campaign, peddling memberships in the church of tolerance with all the zeal of a circuit rider passing the collection plate.”⁸

What does the SPLC consider a “hate group?”

- Logically, a “hate group” should be defined as one whose members 1) actually say that they hate a particular group of people; and/or 2) engage in or condone violence or other illegal activity toward such a group.
- The SPLC, however, uses much broader criteria for defining “hate groups,” and criteria which can vary depending on which of fourteen categories of “hate groups” you are looking at – ranging from “Neo-Nazi” to “Black Separatist” to “Radical Traditional Catholicism.” These criteria are entirely subjective and largely ideological.⁹
- While their rhetoric ties “hate groups” with actual “hate crimes,”¹⁰ the SPLC acknowledges alleged “hate group” activities include constitutionally protected activities such as “marches, rallies, speeches, meetings, leafleting or publishing,” and that the “hate group” designation “does not imply a group advocates or engages in violence or other criminal activity.”¹¹ However, they do not distinguish between racist or violent groups and legitimate organizations that participate peacefully in the political process – tarring all with the same label.
- As genuine “hate groups” such as the Ku Klux Klan have dwindled, the SPLC has broadened its target list in order to justify its continued existence. In recent years, whole categories and new groups have been added not because of actual “hate” activities, but because they hold conservative positions on controversial political issues such as immigration¹² and homosexuality.¹³

- The SPLC claims that the number of “hate groups” in America increased by a staggering 66% from 2000 to 2010.¹⁴ Yet this is only as a result of their own expanding definition of what constitutes a “hate group.” Actual hate crimes, as measured by the FBI, fell nearly 25% between 1996¹⁵ and 2009.¹⁶
- The SPLC’s Mark Potok has publicly confessed that there is “an element of hypocrisy” in the SPLC attacking conservative groups while remaining silent about liberal groups that use “exactly the same kind of tactics.”¹⁷
- A liberal writer in *The Humanist* said, “The SPLC campaigns for laws that will effectively deny free speech and freedom of association to certain groups of Americans on the basis of their beliefs. . . . [T]hen, with no discernible irony, it goes on to justify its Big Brother methods in the name of tolerance.”¹⁸

¹ <http://splcenter.org/who-we-are>

² <http://splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/ideology/ku-klux-klan/the-ku-klux-klan-0>

³ Dan Morse and Greg Jaffe, “Critics Question \$52 Million Reserve, Tactics of Wealthiest Civil Rights Group,” *Montgomery Advertiser* (Feb. 13, 1994): 14A; “Highlights of the Southern Poverty Law Center,” *Montgomery Advertiser* (Feb. 13, 1994): 15A.

⁴ Southern Poverty Law Center, 2007 Form 990, Part 1, Page 1, Line 1e; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2008 Form 990, Part I, Page 1, Line 8; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009 Form 990, Part I, Page 1, Line 8.

⁵ Southern Poverty Law Center, 2010 Form 990, Schedule D, Part V, Page 2, Line 1g.

⁶ Southern Poverty Law Center, 2010 Form 990 Part V, #4b (“Cayman Islands, Bermuda”).

⁷ American Institute of Philanthropy. *Charity Rating Guide & Watchdog Report*. December 2008.

http://en.citizendium.org/wiki/Southern_Poverty_Law_Center

⁸ Ken Silverstein, “The Church of Morris Dees,” *Harper’s Magazine* Vol. 301, No. 1806 (November 1, 2000), pp. 54ff. Nexis. (Also reprinted online at: <http://www.americanpatrol.com/SPLC/ChurchofMorrisDees001100.html>)

⁹ <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/ideology>

¹⁰ E.g., the SPLC boasts, “We’ve crippled some of the country’s most notorious hate groups by suing them for murders and other violent acts committed by their members.”

<http://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/hate-and-extremism>

¹¹ <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/hate-map>

¹² Jerry Kammer, “Immigration and the SPLC: How the Southern Poverty Law Center Invented a Smear, Served La Raza, Manipulated the Press, and Duped its Donors,” *Backgrounder* (Washington: Center for Immigration Studies, March 2010). Online at: <http://www.cis.org/immigration-splc>

¹³ See pro-family response at: <http://www.startdebatingstophating.com/>

¹⁴ Southern Poverty Law Center, “U.S. Hate Groups Top 1,000” (02/23/2011) (Last accessed 06/30/11 at <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/news/us-hate-groups-top-1000>).

¹⁵ “Hate Crime Statistics 1996” *Uniform Crime Reports*, Table 1, Page 7 (Last accessed 06/30/11 at <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/hate-crime/1996>).

¹⁶ “Hate Crime Statistics 2009” *Uniform Crime Reports*, Table 1 (Last accessed 06/20/11 at http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/hc2009/data/table_01.html).

¹⁷ David Schimke, “Why Words Can Hurt You: The editor of Intelligence Report on racists, militants, and their favorite pundits,” *Utne Reader*, December 2009 (web exclusive); online at: <http://www.utne.com/Politics/How-Hate-Speech-Can-Hurt-You-Intelligence-Report.aspx>

¹⁸ Barbara Dority, “Is the extremist right entirely wrong?” *The Humanist*, Vol. 55, No. N6 (November 1, 1995), p. 12ff. Nexis. Online at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1374/is_n6_v55/ai_17529288/pg_3/