



The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), Phony Lists, and Intimidation

What is the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)?

The SPLC touts itself as a nonprofit civil rights organization “dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry” by using “litigation, education, and other forms of advocacy.”¹ It was founded in 1971 in Montgomery, Alabama, as a civil rights litigation firm to fight the ongoing resistance to equal treatment for African-Americans. The SPLC’s main target early on was the Ku Klux Klan, which it successfully sued for financial damages for the victims of Klan violence. Despite its laudable origins, over time the SPLC has morphed into a bitterly partisan actor that tries to play the role of political referee while simultaneously engaging in progressive activism. It does this by using smear tactics, intimidation, ritualized defamation,² and a knack for fundraising to silence its political opponents. As of October 2017, the SPLC has 302 employees,³ four state offices, and an endowment fund of more than \$432.7 million.⁴

- Among its products⁵ are:
 - “Intelligence Report”: According to the SPLC, the Intelligence Report is the “nation’s preeminent periodical monitoring the radical right in the U.S.” Each year, the spring edition of the report features annual totals for SPLC’s infamous “Hate List” and corresponding “Hate Map.” Among the 954 “Hate List” designees for 2017: Alliance Defending Freedom, American Family Association, Center for Security Policy, D. James Kennedy Ministries, Center for Immigration Studies, the Center for Family and Human Rights (C-FAM), and Family Research Council.⁶

In August 2012, Floyd Lee Corkins II entered Family Research Council’s headquarters in Washington, D.C. intent on mass murder. He shot and badly wounded building manager Leo Johnson, who stopped his intended killing spree. Corkins admitted to investigators that he selected FRC from the SPLC’s Hate Map, and subsequently pleaded guilty to three felonies. He was the first person found guilty of violating the District of Columbia’s Anti-Terrorism Act of 2002.

- “Hatewatch” blog: SPLC’s weekly “blog that monitors and exposes the activities of the American radical right.” “Hatewatch” targets include: FRC President Tony Perkins, Ethics and Public Policy Center’s Ed Wheelan, Federalist Society Vice President Leonard Leo, Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Vice President Mike Pence, Focus on the Family’s Jim Daly, Dr. James Dobson, Dr. Ben Carson, Oklahoma Wesleyan University President Dr. Everett Piper, and Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.).
- “Extremist Files”: SPLC’s database of “[Va]rious prominent extremists and extremist organizations;” there is overlap between it and some of the SPLC’s “Hate List.” “Extremists” include: FRC Executive Vice President Lt. Gen. (Ret.) William Boykin, former Dutch Parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Quilliam Foundation founder Maajid

Nawaz, historian David Barton, former Senator and Governor George Allen, former Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell, and AEI scholar and social scientist Charles Murray.

In March 2017, Charles Murray's visit to Middlebury College for a lecture was cut violently short when a near-riot broke out, resulting in Murray and hosting Professor Allison Stanger being physically assaulted by an angry group of protestors. Professors and students who protested his appearance cited the SPLC as their sole source for various slanders against Murray, claiming he was a "racist" and a "white nationalist."⁷

- Some "Extremists" fight back. On June 18, 2018, the SPLC entered into a settlement with Islamic reformer and British citizen Maajid Nawaz and his Quilliam Foundation for a total of \$3.375 million. In this instance, the SPLC went beyond the legal boundary of its mud-slinging by calling Nawaz – a former Muslim extremist once imprisoned in Egypt – an anti-Muslim extremist. His demand letter from an Alexandria-based anti-defamation litigation firm caused the SPLC's immediate capitulation.
- "Teaching Tolerance" program: SPLC's "[A]nti-bias documentary films, books, lesson plans and other materials that reduce prejudice and promote educational equity in...schools." The SPLC claims the materials are used by over 450,000 educators nationwide,⁸ and has partnered with the "Welcoming Schools" project of the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, the nation's foremost LGBT group.⁹ Teaching Tolerance indoctrinates in the full range of the SPLC's hard-left political agenda, providing tips for responding to "family push back,"¹⁰ and a quarterly magazine addressing such issues as "white privilege," gender fluidity, and Black Lives Matter, among others.¹¹
- SPLC's founder, Alabama Attorney Morris Dees, made a fortune in direct mail marketing (and at 80, still collects a \$357,834 salary from the SPLC).¹² By using those same skills at SPLC, Dees has turned it into a powerful fundraising machine. SPLC's president and CEO, Richard Cohen, makes \$350,589.¹³
- In 2017, the SPLC received \$129.7 million in donations,¹⁴ adding to its already massive endowment fund of \$432.7 million.¹⁵ Of interest, in 2017 it was reported that the SPLC had amounts up to \$69 million in foreign bank accounts in the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and Bermuda.¹⁶ The SPLC's coffers grew considerably after the Charlottesville riots, which the SPLC heavily exploited for fundraising purposes.
- The SPLC has high-powered celebrity and corporate donors. For example, in August 2017 the SPLC received an additional \$2.5 million in donations from George Clooney, Apple, and J.P. Morgan Chase,¹⁷ has over 1.1 million Facebook followers, and maintains separate Twitter accounts for the SPLC and its Hatewatch blog.
- In 2010, expert on political extremism Laird Wilcox summed up the SPLC this way: "What they [the SPLC] do is a kind of bullying and stalking. They pick people who are vulnerable in terms of public opinion and simply destroy them. Their victims are usually ordinary people expressing their values, opinions, and beliefs – and they're up against a very talented and articulate defamation machine."¹⁸
- Philanthropy Roundtable's Karl Zinsmeister has rebuked the SPLC, saying "Though it styles itself as a public-interest law firm, the Southern Poverty Law Center does shockingly little

litigation, and only small amounts of that on behalf of any aggrieved individuals. Its two largest expenses are propaganda operations: creating its annual lists of 'haters' and 'extremists,' and running a big effort that pushes 'tolerance education.'"¹⁹

- Research fellow J. M. Berger with the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism at The Hague has said that a major problem with the SPLC is that it "wears two hats, as both an activist group and a source of information... There's no consensus academic definition of extremism, and the SPLC's methodology for making that call isn't clear... it's very subjective even within academia, and even more so for a motivated organization."²⁰

What does the SPLC consider a "hate group?"

- The SPLC uses broad criteria for defining "hate groups." This is how they define the term on their website: "The Southern Poverty Law Center defines a hate group as an organization that – based on its official statements or principles, the statements of its leaders, or its activities – has beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics. The organizations on our hate group list vilify others because of their race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity – prejudices that strike at the heart of our democratic values and fracture society along its most fragile fault lines."²¹
- The number of SPLC's hate group categories has exploded in recent years to 17, including "Radical Traditional Catholicism," "Male Supremacy," and "Hate Music." These 17 categories comprise all 954 designated "hate groups," whether Neo-Nazis and Klansmen, or think tanks, pro-family organizations, and public interest law firms. The SPLC's criteria are subjective and largely ideological. Yet there are no Islamic jihad or sharia-sympathizing groups on the SPLC list (e.g., CAIR, Muslim Brotherhood). In fact, Students for Justice in Palestine, a student group created to harass and marginalize Jews, Judaism, and Israel on universities and college campuses, is never discussed by the SPLC even though approximately 150 chapters have been established on college campuses nationwide.²² Also absent from the SPLC's hate group list are any left-wing groups that foment or facilitate violence (e.g., Antifa, Black Lives Matter).²³
- The SPLC's rhetoric deliberately conflates its pet term, "hate groups," with legally actionable "hate crimes."²⁴ It does this by grouping criminal violence together with constitutionally protected activities, noting: "Hate group activities can include criminal acts, marches, rallies, speeches, meetings, leafleting or publishing."²⁵ By contrast, the FBI describes how it conceptualizes and defines hate crimes:

A hate crime is a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism with an added element of bias. ...the FBI has defined a hate crime as a "criminal offense against a person or property motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, or gender identity." Hate itself is not a crime – and the FBI is mindful of protecting freedom of speech and other civil liberties.²⁶

The FBI does not merely allow unsavory, unpopular, or biased thought to form the basis for a "hate crime" – it requires a link to a physical act of traditional criminality. The SPLC's loose definition allows it to target and defame groups with whom it has political differences for political and social destruction.

- As noted above, the SPLC's definition of "hate groups" is inconsistent with definitional principles employed by the FBI when compiling its hate *crime* statistics. For example, FBI data indicates that

from 1996 to 2016, when the U.S. population increased by 20 percent, there has been a decrease in total annual hate crime incidents by 30.1 percent.²⁷ However, the SPLC claims that from 2000-2016, the number of SPLC hate groups has increased dramatically from 604 to 917 – growth of 51.8 percent. The SPLC is silent on the fact that its “hate group” numbers trend in the opposite direction from actual “hate crimes.”

- As genuine “hate groups” such as the Ku Klux Klan have dwindled, the SPLC has scrambled to broaden its target list so as 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 or orthodox positions on immigration, national security, or sexuality.
- In 2007, SPLC senior fellow Mark Potok spoke at the Michigan Alliance against Hate Crimes. In his address, Potok said the SPLC’s objective with respect to “hate groups” was simple: “Sometimes the press will describe us as monitoring hate crimes and so on.... I want to say plainly that our aim in life is to destroy these groups, to completely destroy them.”²⁸ He later stressed that the SPLC’s “hate group” criteria “have nothing to do with criminality or violence...It’s strictly ideological.”²⁹
- In June 2017, the SPLC’s Intelligence Project director, Heidi Beirich agreed: “We are focused, whether people like it or not, on the radical right.”³⁰ Potok has also publicly confessed that there was “an element of hypocrisy” in the SPLC attacking conservative groups while remaining silent about liberal groups that use “exactly the same kind of tactics.”³¹
- The SPLC’s obvious partisanship has caused federal agencies to back away. The FBI has removed the SPLC from its “trusted resources” page over a “number of concerns,”³² and in 2016, the Department of Justice issued a formal reprimand to the SPLC’s attorneys for calling the Federation for Immigration Reform (FAIR) “a discredited, extremist anti-immigrant organization espousing white supremacist, eugenicist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Catholic views” during the course of litigation.³³ In her letter, the DOJ’s disciplinary counsel said that the decision of the SPLC’s lawyers to “engage in derogatory name-calling exhibited a lack of professionalism” and “overstepped the bounds of zealous advocacy.”³⁴ In October 2017, the response to a FOIA request filed by the Immigration Reform Law Institute revealed that the Department of Defense (DOD) had removed any and all references to the SPLC in training materials used by the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI).³⁵

The SPLC’s lists are so politically transparent and its bank accounts so rich, that they have come under fire from media outlets across the political spectrum, including *Harper’s*, the *Daily Kos*, *The Weekly Standard*, *National Review*, *The Nation*, *Politico*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*. Yet mainstream television media and far-left activists continue to rely on the SPLC as an authoritative source on “hate” statistics, all while the SPLC’s endowment continues to grow.

For a comprehensive listing of articles and videos exposing the SPLC’s hypocrisy and defamatory claims, visit splcexposed.com.

NOTES

- ¹ "About Us," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/about>.
- ² Laird Wilcox, "The Practice of Ritual Defamation: How Values, Opinions and Beliefs are Controlled in Democratic Societies" (1990), <http://www.lairdwilcox.com/news/defame.html>.
- ³ SPLC IRS Form 990 (2016), Part V, line 2a.
- ⁴ "Annual Report 2017," Southern Poverty Law Center, https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/com_splc_annual_report_2017_web_final-1.pdf, 35.
- ⁵ "Resources," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources>.
- ⁶ SPLC listed hate groups in these categories: 72 Ku Klux Klan, 121 Neo-Nazi, 71 Racist Skinhead, and 100 White Nationalist. These four groups constituted 38.2% of the listings on the current "Hate Map."
- ⁷ Carl M. Cannon, "The Hate Group That Incited the Middlebury Melee," Real Clear Politics, March 19, 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2017/03/19/the_hate_group_that_incited_the_middlebury_melee_13377.html; see also: "Charles Murray," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/charles-murray>.
- ⁸ "About Teaching Tolerance," Teaching Tolerance, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.tolerance.org/about>. The figure of 450,000 appears in the SPLC's 2017 Annual Report, p. 10.
- ⁹ "Partners," Teaching Tolerance, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.tolerance.org/about/partners>.
- ¹⁰ Jey Ehrenhalt, "Being There for Nonbinary Youth," *Teaching Tolerance*, Summer 2016, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2016/being-there-for-nonbinary-youth>.
- ¹¹ Teaching Tolerance articles, <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/articles> (there is an archive of full editions of the magazine, <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/archive>
- ¹² "Southern Poverty Law Center," Charity Navigator, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=search.summary&orgid=4482>; see also, SPLC's IRS Form 990 (2016), Part VII, line 18.
- ¹³ SPLC's IRS Form 990 (2016), Part VII, line 18.
- ¹⁴ Southern Poverty Law Center, Annual Report 2017, Statement of Activities, Public Support, p. 36.
- ¹⁵ Southern Poverty Law Center, Annual Report 2017, Endowment Fund, p. 35.
- ¹⁶ Jeryl Bier, "The Southern Poverty Law Center Has \$69 Million Parked Overseas," *The Weekly Standard*, September 6, 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/the-southern-poverty-law-center-has-69-million-parked-overseas/article/2009553>.
- ¹⁷ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Why Is the Southern Poverty Law Center Targeting Liberals?" *The New York Times*, August 24, 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/24/opinion/southern-poverty-law-center-liberals-islam.html>.
- ¹⁸ Ken Blackwell, "The Hypocrisy Of The Black Lives Matter Movement & The Southern Poverty Law Center," *The Daily Caller*, August 22, 2016, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://dailycaller.com/2016/08/22/the-hypocrisy-of-the-black-lives-matter-movement-the-southern-poverty-law-center/>.
- ¹⁹ Karl Zinsmeister, "Some People Love to Call Names," Philanthropy Roundtable, accessed October 11, 2017, http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence_in_philanthropy/some_people_love_to_call_names.
- ²⁰ J.M. Berger, "The Hate List: Is America Really Being Overrun by Right-wing Militants?" *Foreign Policy* website, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/12/the-hate-list/>.
- ²¹ "Frequently asked questions about hate groups," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 15, 2018, <https://www.splcenter.org/20171004/frequently-asked-questions-about-hate-groups#hate%20group>.
- ²² Family Research Council, "Left-Wing Anti-Semitism: The Greatest Campus Threat Is Ignored by the SPLC" (March 2018), <https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF18C11.pdf>.
- ²³ Not only does the SPLC refuse to label Black Lives Matter as a hate group, but it actively participates with them, despite the FBI's revelation that anarchist groups like them present the newest threat to law enforcement officials. See Toni Airaksinen, "BLM, SPLC vow to protest Republican events at Columbia," *Campus Reform*, October 10, 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.campusreform.org/?ID=9933>; "Intelligence Assessment: Black Identity Extremists Likely Motivated to Target Law Enforcement Officers," Federal Bureau of Investigation, August 3, 2017, <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4067711/BIE-Redacted.pdf>.

²⁴ E.g., the SPLC boasts, "...we've crippled or destroyed some of the country's most notorious hate groups ... by suing them for murders and other violent acts committed by their members or by exposing their activities." From: "Hate & Extremism," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/hate-and-extremism>.

²⁵ "Active Hate Groups 2016," Southern Poverty Law Center.

²⁶ "What We Investigate – Hate Crimes," Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/civil-rights/hate-crimes>.

²⁷ In 1996, there were 8,759 total hate crime incidents; in 2015, there were 5,850 total incidents. See: Federal Bureau of Investigation, "FBI Releases 2015 Hate Crime Statistics," press release, November 14, 2016, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2015-hate-crime-statistics>.

²⁸ Robert Knight, "Silencing the silencers," *The Washington Times*, July 2, 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jul/2/lefts-inability-to-win-elections-leads-to-hatred-a/>.

²⁹ Tyler O'Neil, "Southern Poverty Law Center: 'Our Aim in Life Is to Destroy These Groups, Completely'," PJ Media, September 1, 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://pjmedia.com/trending/2017/09/01/southern-poverty-law-center-our-aim-in-life-is-to-destroy-these-groups-completely/>.

³⁰ Ben Schreckinger, "Has a Civil Rights Stalwart Lost Its Way?" *Politico Magazine*, July/August 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/28/morris-dees-splc-trump-southern-poverty-law-center-215312>.

³¹ David Schimke, "Why Words Can Hurt You: The editor of Intelligence Report on racists, militants, and their favorite pundits," *Utne Reader*, December 2009, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://www.utne.com/Politics/How-Hate-Speech-Can-Hurt-You-Intelligence-Report.aspx>.

³² Jonah Bennett, "FBI Removed SPLC, ADL From Resources Pages Over 'Number Of Concerns'," *The Daily Caller*, February 3, 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://dailycaller.com/2017/02/03/exclusive-fbi-removed-splc-and-adl-from-civil-rights-resources-pages-because-of-a-number-of-concerns/>. However, a year later Fox News reported that the FBI still maintained an "ongoing relationship" with the SPLC. In response, the Department of Justice issued a statement that "[A]ttorney General [Sessions] has directed the FBI to reevaluate their relationships with groups like this to ensure the FBI does not partner with any group that discriminates." As of the printing of this report, no further information is available as to the extent of collaboration that exists between the FBI and the SPLC. "Tucker Carlson Reports the FBI Collaborates With Southern Poverty Law Center," *Townhall*, July 28, 2018, accessed October 5, 2018, <https://townhall.com/tipsheet/timothymeads/2018/07/28/tucker-carlson-reports-the-fbi-collaborates-with-southern-poverty-law-center-n2504706>

³³ Alex Pfeiffer, "Obama's DOJ Reprimanded The SPLC For Accusing An Immigration Reductionist Group Of Being Racist," *The Daily Caller*, May 8, 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://dailycaller.com/2017/05/08/obamas-doj-reprimanded-the-splc-for-accusing-an-immigration-reductionist-group-of-being-racist/>.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jonah Bennett, "DOD Drops SPLC From Extremism Training Materials," *The Daily Caller*, October 2, 2017, accessed October 11, 2017, <http://dailycaller.com/2017/10/02/exclusive-dod-drops-splc-from-extremism-training-materials/>.