



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

What is the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)?

The SPLC calls itself 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 as a small civil rights law firm that fought the Ku Klux Klan for financial damages for the victims of Klan violence. But despite its laudable origins, the SPLC has over time fashioned itself into a political referee while simultaneously engaging in progressive activism, using smear tactics, intimidation, and a knack for fundraising to silence its political opponents. As of October 2017, the SPLC boasts 291 employees, 640 contractors,² six national offices, and an endowment fund of more than \$319 million.

- Among its products³ are:
 - “Intelligence Report”: According to the SPLC, the “nation’s preeminent periodical monitoring the radical right in the U.S.” Each year, the spring edition of the Intelligence Report features annual totals for SPLC’s infamous “Hate List” and corresponding “Hate Map.” Among the 917 “Hate List” designees for 2016: 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.

In August 2012, Floyd Lee Corkins II entered the 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.

- “Hate Watch” blog: SPLC’s weekly “blog that monitors and exposes the activities of the American radical right.” “Hate Watch” 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.).

In June 2017, Rep. Scalise survived an assassination attempt by James T. Hodgkinson, who had “liked” the SPLC’s Facebook page.

- “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.) Jerry 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.”⁴

- “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 500,000 educators nationwide,⁵ and has partnered with the Human Rights Campaign (HRC)⁶ to provide products that indoctrinate school age children on “police violence,” Black Lives Matter, “whiteness,” sensitivity to Islam, homosexuality, gender “non-conformity,” and comprehensive sex education. The TT program also provides tips for responding to “family push back.”⁷
- SPLC’s founder, Alabama Attorney Morris Dees, made a fortune in direct mail marketing (and at 80, still collects a \$360,000 salary from the SPLC⁸). By using those same skills at SPLC, Dees has turned it into a powerful fundraising machine. In 2016, it received \$45.8 million in donations, and has a massive “endowment” of \$319 million,⁹ including \$69 million in bank accounts in the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and Bermuda.¹⁰ The SPLC’s coffers continue to bloat post-Charlottesville. In August 2017, the SPLC received an additional \$2.5 million in donations from George Clooney, Apple, and J.P. Morgan Chase,¹¹ and now boasts more than one million Facebook followers.
- 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.”¹²
- 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.’”¹³
- 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.”¹⁴

What does the SPLC consider a “hate group?”

- Logically, a “hate group” should be defined as one whose members 1) 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.
- However, the SPLC uses much broader criteria for defining “hate groups,” claiming “All hate groups have beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people.”¹⁵ SPLC lists 10 categories of “hate groups,” lumping all 917 designees together, whether Neo-Nazis and Klansmen, or think tanks, pro-family organizations, and law firms. Their 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). Nor are there any left-wing groups that foment or facilitate violence (e.g., Antifa, Black Lives Matter).¹⁶
- The SPLC’s rhetoric conflates “hate groups” with actual “hate crimes”¹⁷ by combining criminal violence with constitutionally protected activities, noting: “Hate group activities can include criminal acts, marches, rallies, speeches, meetings, leafleting or publishing.”¹⁸ By contrast, the FBI defines a hate crime as: “‘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.”¹⁹ The SPLC isn’t so mindful, and doesn’t distinguish between racist or violent groups and legitimate organizations that participate peacefully in the political process.
- The SPLC findings on “hate groups” are inconsistent with trends in the F.B.I. statistics on hate crimes. For example, FBI data indicates that from 1996 to 2015, there has been a decrease in total annual hate crime incidents by 33.2%.²⁰ However, the SPLC claims that from 1999-2015, the number of SPLC hate groups has more than doubled. 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 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 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.”²¹ He later stressed that the SPLC’s “hate group” criteria “have nothing to do with criminality or violence...It’s strictly ideological.”²²
- 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.”²³ Potok has also 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.”²⁴
- 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,”²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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."²⁷ 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).²⁸

The SPLC's lists are so politically transparent and its bank accounts so rich, that they have come under fire from media outlets from 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.

¹ "About Us," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/about>.

² SPLC Return, IRS Form 990 (2015), Part V, line 1a and line 2a.

³ "Resources," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources>.

⁴ 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_133377.html; see also: "Charles Murray," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 11, 2017,

<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/charles-murray>.

⁵ "About Teaching Tolerance," Teaching Tolerance, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.tolerance.org/about>.

⁶ "Partners," Teaching Tolerance, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.tolerance.org/about/partners>.

⁷ 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>.

⁸ "Southern Poverty Law Center," *Charity Navigator*, accessed October 11, 2017,

<https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=search.summary&orgid=4482>.

⁹ "2016 Annual Report," Southern Poverty Law Center,

https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/com_splc_annual_report_2016-2017web.pdf.

¹⁰ 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>.

¹¹ 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>.

¹² 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/>.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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>.

¹⁵ “Active Hate Groups 2016,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed October 11, 2017,

<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2017/active-hate-groups-2016>.

¹⁶ Not only does the SPLC refuse to label Black Lives Matter as a hate group, but they actively participate 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>.

¹⁷ 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>.

¹⁸ “Active Hate Groups 2016,” Southern Poverty Law Center.

¹⁹ “What We Investigate – Hate Crimes,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed October 11, 2017, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/civil-rights/hate-crimes>.

²⁰ 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>.

²¹ 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/>.

²² 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/>.

²³ Ben Schreckinger, “Has a Civil Rights Stalwart Lost Its Way?” *Politico Magazine*.

²⁴ 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>.

²⁵ 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/>.

²⁶ 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/>.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ 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/>.