



Southern Poverty Law Center and Left-Wing Hate

In early September, 47 conservative leaders in the U.S. signed an open letter accusing the Southern Poverty Law Center of pursuing a political agenda of equating conservatives with neo-Nazis. There are good reasons for these accusations.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the self-proclaimed organizational conscience of the so-called anti-fascist left, should actually be called the Southern Profit Law Center. The left wing, with its instinctual condemnation of profit and wealth inequality, is exceptionally good at setting up non-profit organizations that milk corporate America for huge donations and grants to support their causes. Ready examples include the Clinton Foundation, the American Civil Liberties Union and Planned Parenthood, which raise millions of dollars to support highly paid administrators and political cronies. The Southern Poverty Law Center stands out from those other well-known leftist organizations in that it shamelessly fund-raises off of hate.¹

SPLC hit the donation jackpot following the Charlottesville, VA demonstrations in August. The violent clashes between white nationalists and counter-demonstrators culminated in an alleged neo-Nazi driving his car into a crowd of anti-white nationalist demonstrators, killing a woman. After Charlottesville, SPLC contributions soared. Apple CEO Tim Cook announced that Apple would donate \$1 million to SPLC to combat hate and was constructing an Apple iTunes app for direct contributions.

Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase, followed with an announcement of another \$1 million corporate gift. Dimon wrote a staff letter proclaiming, "I strongly disagree with President Trump's reaction to the events that took place in Charlottesville over the past several days," adding, "There is no room for equivocation here: the evil on display by these perpetrators of hate should be condemned. . . ." George and Amal Clooney's Foundation for Justice chipped in another \$1 million grant to SPLC.²

Standing against racism and violence makes for good headlines for corporations and Hollywood actors eager

to virtue-signal to an American public that they oppose "hate." These gestures, however, avoid basic questions as to whether white nationalist organizations are truly on the rise in America, as SPLC claims, and whether the SPLC list of "hate groups" is in any way accurate. SPLC from its origins in 1971 has been always about raising money. With Donald Trump's election to the presidency in 2016, SPLC's donations have soared, but the organization was immensely rich even before Trump's election. In 2016, Karl Zinsmeister of the Philanthropic Roundtable concluded, "The SPLC is a cash-collecting machine. In 2015 it vacuumed up \$50 million in contributions and foundation grants, a tidy addition to its \$335 million holdings in cash and securities and its headquarters worth \$34 million."³

Where is all this money going? In August, the *Washington Free Beacon* reported, based on 2015 tax filings, that SPLC held \$328 million in net assets and raised more than \$50 million in contributions in 2015, despite spending only \$61,000 on legal services. In 2014 the Alabama-based SPLC, a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, sent more than \$4 million to offshore entities incorporated in the Cayman Islands.⁴

SPLC's Partisan Agenda

So who gets placed on the SPLC's list of hate groups? SPLC's website monitors approximately 900 "hate groups and extremist activity in all 50 states."⁵ In its 2016 Annual Report, SPLC states that it seeks to have a major impact on "economic justice, children's rights, immigrant rights, LGBT rights, and criminal justice reform."⁶

The partisan nature of the report is revealing. The report opens by targeting Alabama's former chief justice, Roy Moore, for violating "the canons of judicial ethics as part of his personal crusade against marriage equality; an SPLC ethics complaint ousted him from office." SPLC involvement in prison reform includes a 2015 suit brought on behalf of Ashley Diamond, a transgender inmate, who was held in a prison with male inmates, where he was sexually assaulted. In addition, SPLC "won justice in Louisiana for a transgender man

who said a financial service company fired him in 2013 after he refused the company's demand to be treated as a woman." SPLC brought a "first-of-its-kind complaint with the Federal Trade Commission describing how a Virginia-based group, People Can Change, is committing consumer fraud by offering services it claims can convert people from gay to straight, despite a lack of scientific evidence supporting so-called conversion therapy."

SPLC is actively engaged in "Justice for Immigrant Rights." It has brought suit against the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Atlanta that "rounded up women and children from Central America"; a suit on behalf of Latinos with limited English proficiency who alleged they were "being treated more harshly for traffic offenses than others appearing before a parish court in Louisiana"; and various state suits against voter registration laws that supposedly denied immigrants their voting rights.

The SPLC report makes no bones about its political agenda. The 2016 election, the report asserts, "scarred the nation and emboldened far-right extremists who reject our country's highest ideals. At the same time, the new administration abandoned President Obama's efforts to root out discrimination against vulnerable populations in the criminal justice system and in other areas of great concern. And it has instituted new policies that are antithetical to the values of our nation." The report concludes with a dire warning of apocalypse: "As we look to 2017, we see a nation facing grave dangers. . . . Many of the most marginalized people in our country will be harmed. We're committed to defending their rights and providing them with a voice in the nation's courtrooms, classrooms, and halls of government in 2017 and beyond."

SPLC's Hit Lists

So who are the enemies of American justice? SPLC's list of extremist haters includes organizations and individuals. SPLC lists as its targets the "alternative right," anti-immigrant xenophobia, anti-LGBT, anti-Muslim, anti-government, general hate, Holocaust denial, KKK, neo-Confederate, neo-Nazi, racist skinhead, radical traditional Catholic, sovereign citizen, and white nationalist groups and individuals.⁷ SPLC claims all of these organizations are on the rise. SPLC is given to alarmist language intent on showing that right-wing extremism in its various guises is growing and is a direct threat to American democracy.

SPLC presents itself as standing between fascism and liberty. The "alternative right," SPLC declares on its website, is a "set of far right ideologies, grounds and individuals whose core belief is that 'white identity' is under attack by multicultural forces using 'political correctness' and 'social justice' to

undermine white America." Anti-immigrant "hate groups," SPLC finds, are "the most extreme of the hundreds of nativist and vigilante groups that have proliferated since the late 1990s, when anti-immigration xenophobia began to rise to levels not seen in the United States since the 1920s."

Similarly, anti-LGBT prejudice is a "central theme of Christian organizing and fundraising for the past three decades—a period that parallels the fundamentalist movement's rise to political power." Anti-Muslim hate groups are a relatively new phenomenon but "anti-Muslim legislation" has increased since 2010. The anti-government movement has experienced "a resurgence, growing quickly since 2008, when President Obama was elected to office." SPLC takes particular aim at what it describes as "radical traditionalist" Catholics, who may make up the largest single group of serious anti-Semites in America." These traditionalists subscribe to an "ideology that is rejected by the Vatican and some 70 million mainstream American Catholics."⁸

Lethal Consequences

SPLC's most notable target has been the Family Research Council (FRC), a pro-traditional family Christian organization. Being placed on the SPLC "extremist" list proved to have dire consequences: In August 2012, a 28-year-old gay-rights activist named Floyd Corkins entered the Washington, DC office building lobby of the FRC headquarters with a gun and fired three shots at the building manager, wounding him in the arm. Corkins was disarmed and arrested, later pleading guilty to three felonies including committing an act of terrorism while armed, interstate transportation of a firearm, and assault with the intent to kill.

Corkins told investigators that he intended to kill the building manager and other FRC employees. In the attack he carried 15 Chick-fil-A sandwiches, with which he planned to smear the faces of the dead FRC employees after killing them. (The founder of Chick-fil-A, S. Truett Cathy, contributed through his family foundation to organizations opposed to gay marriage, including FRC.) Corkins had found out about FRC from SPLC, which had listed FRC as a hate group.⁹ FRC discovered that being placed on SPLC's "hate" list has real life-or-death consequences. SPLC lists of extremist, anti-LGBT groups also include the Alliance Defending Freedom, an anti-abortion, pro-religious liberty organization.

SPLC's list of "extremists" goes beyond organizations to target individuals, such as libertarian author Charles Murray and television host Lou Dobbs. Murray, the well-known social scientist who has challenged many liberal shibboleths about the failure of government welfare and education

programs, is a favorite target of the left and found himself under violent attack at Middlebury College, where he was invited to speak on March 2. His most controversial book was *The Bell Curve*, published in 1994, which argued that human intelligence based on inherited and environmental factors is a better predictor of success than socioeconomic status. (A close reading of the book reveals that Murray argues that Asians on the whole perform better than whites, hardly a white nationalist perspective.) Murray has challenged SPLC's libel of him as an "extremist" and a "racist."¹⁰

In 2009, SPLC joined Media Matters and the George Soros-funded MoveOn.org in a campaign to get Lou Dobbs fired when he hosted a news program on CNN. Eventually, Lou Dobbs voluntarily left CNN, much to the relief of CNN management. Today Dobbs hosts a program on Fox Business News, but he continues to be vilified by left-wing activist groups such as La Raza for his pro-Trump stance and his views on controlling illegal immigration.¹¹

In 2014, SPLC placed Ben Carson, currently Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, on their extremist list. Dr. Carson was cited because he observed that the likelihood of Hitler accomplishing his goals would have been diminished if people had been armed. After public outcry, SPLC removed Dr. Carson's name from the list and apologized to him.¹²

SPLC's List of Anti-Islamists

Even more striking on SPLC's list of "haters" is Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who is accused of Islamophobia. SPLC joined with Media Matters (a Soros-funded group), the Center for New Community (another Soros group) and ReThink Media to prepare "A Journalist's Manual: Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremists," published in 2016. The 50-page manual lists 15 anti-Islamic extremists including the brave Hirsi Ali, a Somali-born activist, who "says she endured female genital mutilation and fled civil wars and arranged marriage in Africa." As a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, the former Muslim appears frequently on television and radio. SPLC describes her "anti-Muslim rhetoric as remarkably toxic." In 2007, she told *Reason* magazine that "we are at war with Islam." SPLC adds that the same year she said that Islam was "the new fascism" and "a destructive, nihilistic cult of death."

The SPLC's journalist field guide to anti-Islamic haters also tars Steve Emerson, head of the Investigative Project on Terrorism. SPLC finds evidence for Emerson's anti-Islamic views in his "baseless" claims about "no-go zones" in Europe where police cannot go into Muslim neighborhoods without encountering protests. SPLC brands Brigitte Gabriel, founder of ACT for America, as another Islamophobic extremist. For evidence, they quote the *New York Times*

Magazine describing her as a "radical Islamophobe" and a statement on her website that "tens of thousands of Islamic militants now reside in America, operating in sleeper cells, attending our colleges and universities." SPLC's list includes pro-Israel advocates such as Frank Gaffney, Jr., a former Reagan defense official; Daniel Pipes of Middle East Forum; David Horowitz, editor of FrontPage Magazine; and Maajid Nawaz, a former Islamist radical.

Arbitrary Targeting

SPLC's list of hate groups and extremist individuals is designed to play off the fears of liberals that fascism is here and growing. Which group lands on the SPLC hit list often appears arbitrary, if not totally fabricated. For example, of SPLC's list of 933 extremist organizations, 63 are IRS-approved charities.¹³ Among these IRS-approved charitable organizations are James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries, the Federation for Immigration Reform, the Center for Immigration Studies, the World Congress of Families, the National Organization for Marriage and many others. Eagle Forum, founded by the late Phyllis Schlafly, is described in SPLC's "Hatewatch" blog.

SPLC double-counts groups to claim that the Ku Klux Klan and white nationalist organizations are on the rise. For example, two large KKK groups that splintered into small groups were used to show that KKK organizations are proliferating. In addition, SPLC's list of fascist groups included the American Nazi Party six times and the Council of Conservative Citizens six times. The Georgia Militia is listed 14 times. SPLC overstates "lone wolf" terrorist attacks in 2015 by using a metric that included gangland slayings, domestic violence and other apolitical or ambiguous assaults.¹⁴ Finally, when 15 conservative groups protested the political nature and inaccuracies of SPLC's hit list, then-FBI director James Comey removed SPLC as a "resource" for the FBI's "hate crime" web page in 2014.¹⁵

Demons and Fundraising

SPLC is all about scaring people into giving the organization funds. This strategy is not new to fundraising. The right has used this fundraising strategy as well. The more important issue is the accuracy—indeed, the legitimacy—of its claims that extremist groups are growing to the extent that the nation is one step away from a fascist takeover. The mantra of the left since Trump won the election has been that American fascism has arrived. "Antifa" protests have been increasingly violent. Free speech on college campuses and in the public square is under assault by the left. SPLC has denounced the violence of Antifa protesters, but its own rhetoric has fostered an environment that has produced violence.

The problem with SPLC is not that it is a fundraising machine or that it exaggerates the growth of the KKK, white supremacist groups or the far, far right, but that it equates law-abiding, pro-traditional family, anti-abortion, pro-religious liberty organizations with extremism. SPLC is quick to list conservatives as extremists.

SPLC's rhetoric, loose definition of extremism, and political agenda ensure a polarized America. A sharply divided America is good for fundraising, but not so healthy for a democracy.

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Honoring Columbus on October 9

Recent decades have seen numerous shocking cases of iconoclasm by Islamic radicals in the Middle East, ranging from the Taliban's dynamiting of ancient Buddhist monumental statues in Afghanistan to the Islamic State's destruction of Christian, Shiite and Sufi religious buildings and artifacts in Iraq, Syria and Libya. Non-religious historic buildings and library collections have also been wantonly demolished by the Islamic State, which seems intent on erasing history.

A new iconoclasm is now infecting the United States with a loose movement to deface or remove statues and memorials to historical figures. The vandalism started with monuments to Confederate leaders and has since spread to statues of Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, St. Joan of Arc, St. Junipero Serra and Christopher Columbus, among others. The iconic statue in Manhattan's Columbus Circle of the Italian Catholic mariner who discovered the New World is currently under review by New York Mayor Bill DeBlasio's administration. (See photo above.)

The national holiday Columbus Day has been under attack for years, with several cities including Los Angeles having decided to rename the day Indigenous Peoples Day. With all due respect to indigenous peoples, let's keep Columbus Day for Columbus.

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