

# Prophet with Honor

*The Enduring Relevance of Dr. John Tanton*

BY ALEXANDER HART

The recent Center for Immigration Studies report *Immigration and the SPLC*, by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jerry Kammer, contains useful criticism of the Southern Poverty Law Center's efforts to smear immigration control advocates.<sup>1</sup>

At a time when President Barack Obama is readying another drive to amnesty illegal aliens, defenders of an immigration policy that serves the national interest need to marshal every telling fact and cogent argument available against SPLC and its allies. Yet *Immigration and the SPLC*, and statements by CIS spokespersons at the press conference that accompanied its launch, offered at best a defensive response to the Montgomery, Alabama-based "watchdog" group's labeling of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a "hate group." Worse, that response included unwarranted criticism of FAIR founder John Tanton that can only damage the fight for immigration sanity.<sup>2</sup>

Given the aspirations of CIS and FAIR for policy impact amid the realities of today's political, media, and academic scene, answering SPLC's gutter smears with circumspection and restraint might seem reasonable. But by genuflecting, as the CIS responders did, before the shibboleths of political correctness, CIS courts suicide for its standing in the immigration control movement.

## Anointing a Scapegoat

*Immigration and the SPLC's* most fretful attempt to placate SPLC and its allies (principally the National Council of La Raza) is in its treatment of Dr. John Tanton, the publisher of *The Social Contract*, and also, as the CIS report justly calls him, "the father of the modern movement to restrict immigration."<sup>3</sup> After a few such requisite pieties, however, the report goes on to describe Tanton as having a "tin ear for the sensitivi-

ties of immigration" and to claim that his "openness to all points of view has shaped some decisions that are regarded as tactless and self-defeating even by some who admire him for his commitment to efforts to protect the environment and reduce immigration."<sup>4</sup>

Speaking at the press conference to mark the report's release, author Kammer sharpened his criticism of Tanton:

In an arena that requires the ability to frame issues in a way that broadens consensus, he sometimes speaks with a freewheeling bluntness that even those who admire him find upsetting. Some say that Tanton has shown a tendency to be unnecessarily provocative, a tendency that some have used to change the topic from immigration to Tanton himself. Tanton has become the great distraction, the great diversion.<sup>5</sup>

While acknowledging Tanton's central role in the immigration restriction movement, Kammer declares that "he has also helped to undermine that movement." Of SPLC's attacks on Tanton, he writes "Some of that criticism is merited"—yet failed to make clear which of SPLC's criticisms he agreed with.<sup>6</sup>

## Tanton in Fact

From these characterizations by an ostensibly sympathetic writer, a casual reader might imagine Dr. John Tanton as a bull romping through the immigration restriction china shop, and divine that the bull might be a "bigot" as well. Such a surmise would be unjustified, so it is worth remembering that John Tanton, the son of immigrants, has been a leading organizer and fundraiser for environmentalist, population limitation, and immigration groups for some forty years—a career that is simply incompatible with unnecessary provocation or tactlessness. Tanton started state and local chapters of Planned Parenthood, the Audubon Society, and the Sierra Club, chairing the Club's National Population Committee from 1971–1974, and served as national

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president of Zero Population Growth (1975–77). All this was in addition to his long career in northern Michigan as a successful ophthalmologist, and, of course, his leading roles in founding FAIR and other highly effective groups.<sup>7</sup>

The “openness to all points of view” and other sins of opinion and expression for which the CIS report would impeach Tanton is the result of a lifetime of thought, study, and endeavor that has frequently cut across the demarcation lines of party and ideological creed. There was a time in America when John Tanton’s

never voiced a question, in public or private, about America’s capacity to absorb an unlimited flow of immigration from the Third World, his role in establishing and supporting FAIR, the CIS, and NumbersUSA would have made him not just a likely target, but the open borders lobby’s public enemy number one. Furthermore, the above organizations are so indelibly linked to John Tanton through his work in founding, advising, and raising money for them that no disowning of Tanton will suffice to stay SPLC and its allies from linking him to them. Finally, so long as the opponents of out of control



Vanderbilt University Professor Carol Swain, CIS Director Mark Krikorian, *Harper’s* Washington Editor Ken Silverstein, and CIS Senior Research Fellow Jerry Kammer discuss *Immigration and the SPLC* at the National Press Club, March 18, 2010.

open-mindedness would have been judged the essence of tolerance. That, of course, was before the SPLC and its outriders were allowed to hijack that word and use it as a disguise for their own intolerance. And of course it was before Washington operatives across the political spectrum decreed that poker-faced silence on matters of interest to the “tolerance” police was not only obligatory for getting things accomplished in the capital, but trumped appealing to the American people over the heads of the talking heads.

**Reality Check**

Before examining the CIS report’s lukewarm defense of John Tanton from the slurs of the Southern Poverty Law Center, a little reality check: Had Tanton

immigration cringe before the charge of “racism,” then FAIR, the CIS, NumbersUSA, and all others who seek to defend America’s borders will be helpless to accomplish their mission. For, in the end, the only sure way to end the drumfire of excoriation from the commissars of ideological correctness is to disavow the cause of immigration restriction.

**Two Cheers for Tanton**

What was it that SPLC claimed John Tanton did or said that has the CIS so aflutter? It seems not to have been SPLC’s depiction of Tanton as “The Puppeteer,” the dastardly “racist” genius speaking through his marionettes from behind the curtain, in hands-on but invisible control of the entire movement. *Immigration and the*

SPLC demonstrates convincingly that Tanton has been no Morris Dees, who continues to maintain a personal stranglehold over the Southern Poverty Law Center, but rather has been content to let FAIR, the CIS, and NumbersUSA go their own way after ending his formal involvement with them.<sup>8</sup>

Refuting SPLC’s attacks involves fending off guilt by association charges of “[nativist] fellow traveler,” “hatesymp,” and other warmed-over borrowings from the so-called McCarthy era. Kammer does a creditable job of dismissing the significance of Tanton’s having obtained funding for FAIR from the Pioneer Fund, a group that decades ago promoted racial eugenics, an idea that has recently been diabolized but continues to have humane applications, as in recent efforts to eradicate inherited diseases from the Jewish community.<sup>9</sup>



Kammer properly dismisses a thrust at *Social Contract* editor Wayne Lutton for his serving, for a short time, on the editorial advisory board of the Council of Conservative Citizens’ (CCC) publication, *Citizens Informer*. (Lutton’s friend, syndicated columnist Sam Francis, served as editor of *Citizens Informer* and Lutton accepted Francis’s invitation to serve as an editorial advisor to the publication.) In the meantime, Kammer shows, the CCC has hosted numerous prominent mainstream politicians as speakers, including Jesse Helms, Trent Lott, Haley Barbour, Guy Hunt, Kirk Fordice, Roger Wicker, and even one-time Democratic presidential candidate Richard Gephardt had spoken before.<sup>10</sup>

*Immigration and the SPLC* capably defuses SPLC’s attacks on John Tanton’s opinions, though the report sees them as “unnecessarily provocative.” Many of Tanton’s freewheeling remarks, after all, were made decades ago, and had been confidential musings until Tanton made them accessible to the public by donating many of his papers to the University of Michigan’s

Bentley Historical Library. There SPLC sleuths combed zealously through his memoranda and letters in search of statements that wouldn’t have embarrassed a Hubert Humphrey in his day but could be deemed politically and ideologically incorrect today.<sup>11</sup>

Kammer provides context on questions Tanton raised about the social, economic, and ecological impact of Hispanic immigration to America to stimulate a private discussion a quarter of a century ago that SPLC and La Raza have seized on to depict him as “racist.” Kammer exposes another particularly seamy ploy by SPLC research chief Heidi Beirich, who claimed that a Tanton comparison of the effects of population increase by American immigrants and natives over the past four centuries to multiplication in a petri dish was meant to liken Mexican immigrants to bacteria!<sup>12</sup>

### An Inoffensive Offensive

If anything, Kammer’s ability to refute the specifics of the attacks by SPLC and its allies on attacks on Tanton and his associates makes his report’s general circumspection on SPLC all the more conspicuous. Kammer writes proudly of FAIR’s refusal to adopt SPLC’s tactics, to “probe for suspect motivation and association.”<sup>13</sup> Thus the CIS report restricts itself to the longstanding case that has been made against SPLC by liberal journalists, including Ken Silverstein, who was part of the panel CIS had on hand for the report’s media launch: SPLC founder Morris Dees is greedy and ambitious; SPLC doesn’t hire enough African Americans; SPLC has allowed its civil rights litigation to become secondary to courting media and donors with Klan and Nazi scares.

Yet Kammer and his colleagues at CIS shy from attacking SPLC where it is most vulnerable:

- in its virtually complete disregard for the Islamist terror threat;<sup>14</sup>
- in its advice to the U.S. government to target patriotic Americans, including active-duty GIs; supporters of Congressman Ron Paul; and the Tea Party movement, as the real terror threat;<sup>15</sup>
- in the fringe proclivities of some of its most prolific writers and experts, an extremism which not only helps to explain the SPLC’s ideological bias but also its increasing tendency to condemn dissent from its positions on immigration and other contentious issues as “hate.”<sup>16</sup>

By now, CIS, FAIR, and other targets of the South-



ern Poverty Law Center should grasp that SPLC does not fight according to the principles of fair play. Yet even the Marquess of Queensberry rules do not proscribe throwing a punch, letting alone counterpunching.

Instead of well-aimed thrusts at SPLC and its ally La Raza, Kammer and other CIS representatives sought sometimes even to curry favor. For example, at the press conference Kammer fairly gushed over La Raza's leader: "I believe that Janet Murguia is a wonderful person from a tremendous family that I regard as an all-American family from Kansas, with proud roots as Mexican Americans"—this after arguing, in his report, that Murguia and La Raza were behind SPLC's designation of FAIR as a "hate group," and after noting her smear of Tanton with Heidi Beirich's petri dish canard.<sup>17</sup>

### The "Racism" Incubus

One needn't read between the lines of the CIS report to supply the answer to the surface riddle of Kammer and CIS's half-hearted defense of John Tanton and their lukewarm opposition to his attackers. *Immigration and the SPLC* and the transcript from CIS's press conference pay tribute to the power of the "racism" taboo in tones that range from the deferential to the devout.

During the press conference, CIS director Mark Krikorian underlined the power of the taboo:

The accusation of racism is the most serious charge you can make against someone in modern America, comparable to accusations in the past of being a leper, a witch or a communist. The charge of racism is so incendiary that even mass murderer Jeffrey Dahmer felt it necessary to deny that his crimes were motivated by it. This man, a cannibalistic, necrophiliac killer, went to great lengths to assure a relative of one of his victims that, in her words, quote, "He was not a prejudiced person. It wasn't out of race that he killed these young men," unquote.<sup>18</sup>

Racial tolerance—the last refuge of a cannibal?

A quotation from and an enthusiastic gloss of former FAIR executive director Roger Conner's words appear at a strategic point in the CIS report:

Immigration touches so many sensitivities and stirs so many passions that it requires careful handling by those who seek to change policy, Conner said. "It is not enough to be racially inclusive in your heart," he said.

"You have to avoid even the appearance of bigotry."

Conner has a blunt message to those who complain of a double standard: "You're right — it isn't fair. Get over it." "Motives matter on immigration," he continues. "The risk of a big-tent philosophy was — and is — that if you don't explicitly exclude the fringe groups from your tent, you can ruin it for the majority of Americans — those of us who are just as opposed to intolerance or racism as we are to excessive immigration."<sup>19</sup>

Kammer, Krikorian, and Conner all try to burish their multi-culti pieties as political realism. While Conner effectively deflates his own attempts to pass for a pragmatist by his earnest grapplings with the energumens of "bigotry" and "racism"—as his forerunner in moralism, New England divine Cotton Mather, wrestled with the devil—Kammer and Krikorian's position deserves an answer.

### Realism on "Racism"

While full-throated in demonstrating that they can make a good case for controlling American borders, CIS's spokespersons risk becoming unglued whenever the SPLC and its allies conjure up the specters of "hate," "bigotry," "racism," and "nativism." As with most phantasms, the fact that these are undefined, imprecise, and insubstantial adds to rather than detracts from their ability to sow terror and induce surrender.

True, tarring persons with the charge of "racism" is often an effective way both to demonize them and to exclude them from access to the public forum. As Krikorian implies, white "racists" (significantly, nonwhites—despite racial attitudes and actions that often are far more robust than those of whites—are almost never charged with "racism") often seem to have worse press than white serial killers who devour their minority victims. And a white who points out, for instance, that cannibalism was common practice among the Aztecs makes her guiltier than Dahmer, guiltier than the Aztecs, and liable to wear SPLC's scarlet "hate" and "racism" brands.

The first step to dealing with the "hate" and "racism" ploy is to rationalize it. While currently a powerful gambit, accusing one's opposition of "racism" is a demonstrably political stratagem for impugning an opponent's motives. Truth is no defense. Not being a "racist" is no defense, either—as Krikorian reminds, "there is no significant critic of high levels of immigration who has not been significantly attacked as nativist, xenophobic, fill in the adjective du jour."<sup>20</sup> The fact is that crying "hate" and "racism" is the secure monopoly of an implacable enemy. Rather than trolling around

our ventricles for lack of racial inclusiveness, as Conner urges, the answer to SPLC and La Raza's race baiting is, yes, to "get over it"—and to fight back.

## How to Win

Without minimizing the successes of FAIR, the CIS, and Numbers USA in educating Americans to the need for immigration control, their aims and effort seem too much focused on winning over the nearest Washington insiders, "in an arena that requires the ability to frame issues in a way that broadens consensus."<sup>21</sup> Kammer faults John Tanton for his "provincial temperament,"<sup>22</sup> evidently forgetting that it was the outcry of great numbers of Americans from the provinces which defeated the Bush administration's proposed amnesty in 2007, not winning over Washington insiders. The mass fervor, and mass outrage, of the grass roots did not always observe the SPLC's prescribed pieties, nor did the exhortations of talk radio show hosts, bloggers, and cable news commentators, who often made arguments more "incendiary," "blunt," and "colorful" than Tanton's to galvanize their fellow citizens to action. And, without question, many of those opponents of amnesty who effectively opposed it were moved by the arguments of such explicit opponents of Third World immigration as Peter Brimelow and Pat Buchanan.

The fact is, the country is changing, but in ways not always discernible to the mandarins within the Beltway. As racial and ethnic minorities—immigrant or otherwise—become increasingly visible, powerful, and aggressive, they are less and less perceived as victims, and more as competitors, if not threats. As American whites' power shrinks, as they increasingly find themselves victims of racial discrimination at the same time they risk the "racist" label for demanding enforcement of nonracial laws, including those against discrimination, the power of "PC" and its repertory of insults must inevitably shrink.

The coming resurgence of the American majority in defense of its borders, laws, and nation poses no fascist, or even a racist, threat to anyone or anything—other than the scaremongers at SPLC and similar groups, who are dedicated to destroying America and its institutions and replacing them with unworkable leftist fantasies. The real threat lies in disregarding the real world experience that ineluctably demonstrates that multiplying and strengthening competing racial, ethnic, and religious groups endangers national unity and increases communal strife.

Unfortunately, thanks to pressure from business,

labor unions, and others who hope to profit from unchecked immigration, as well to the agitation of "universalist" ideologues, and, yes, to those who would reform immigration but only in conformance with the dogmas and shibboleths of their opponents, ethnic warfare is becoming a fact in America.

## Prophet with Honor

Few of John Tanton's warnings have been damned as vehemently as his apprehensions on the effect mass Hispanic immigration would have on Southern California. Tanton wondered about resegregation, the creation of a Hispanic underclass, and whether the area's African-American population would be overwhelmed economically and demographically by the immigrants.<sup>23</sup>



**Dr. John Tanton, publisher of the *Social Contract*, in his Petoskey, Michigan office, 1998.**

Several years ago, Tanton's fears were corroborated by an unlikely source. In 2006 the SPLC's *Intelligence Report* disclosed that Hispanic gangs, "acting on orders from the Mexican Mafia," had for some time been murdering African Americans in Southern California, on racial grounds alone. According to the SPLC's report, insensitively titled "L.A. Blackout," "gang experts inside and outside the government say that [Hispanic gangs] are now engaged in a campaign of 'ethnic cleansing'—racial terror that is directed solely at African Americans."<sup>24</sup> An accompanying story in SPLC's quarterly reported that "The Mexican Mafia derives inspiration and ethnic pride from the concept of 'La Raza' (Spanish, in this context, for 'The Race'), as well as from the Aztec, Aztlan movement"—an interesting admission in light of SPLC's efforts to argue that "La

Raza” means merely “the people” and to deny any substance to the Aztlan ideology.<sup>25</sup>

Now, whether ongoing strife between African Americans and Hispanics in Southern California qualifies as “ethnic cleansing”—just yet—is a question beyond the scope of this article. As is due consideration of SPLC’s motives in shrieking and shrilling its bogus “racism” smears of John Tanton and other humanitarians, while all but ignoring the implications of its own reports about real racism, hatred, and ethnic violence.

The point is that John Tanton was right, a quarter of a century ago, and he is right now. Not necessarily right in the sense of flawlessly noting every trend and predicting every outcome, or in sugarcoating every insight, but in pointing fearlessly to consequences of uncontrolled immigration often left unspoken by academia and media. The sorcerer’s apprentices of “diversity” would have done well to heed John Tanton, but they haven’t and won’t, so his prescience and rectitude will continue to be a beacon in the fight for America’s present, and future. ■

### Endnotes

1. 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* (Washington, DC: Center for Immigration Studies, 2010).
2. <http://www.cis.org/PanelTranscripts/Immigration-SPLC>
3. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, p. 16.
4. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, pp. 16, 17.
5. <http://www.cis.org/PanelTranscripts/Immigration-SPLC>
6. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, p. 10.
7. [http://www.johntanton.org/about\\_john\\_tanton/john\\_tanton\\_resume.html](http://www.johntanton.org/about_john_tanton/john_tanton_resume.html)
8. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, pp. 11, 17, 18.
9. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugenics#Israel>
10. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, p. 17.
11. <http://www.splcenter.org/publications/the-nativist-lobby-three-faces-of-intolerance/john-tanton-and-the-nativist-movement>
12. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, p. 18, 19.
13. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, p. 10.
14. Earlier this year, SPLC MP told *UTNE Reader*, “Well, the big hole, if it is a hole, is that we don’t really cover radical Islam.”  
<http://www.utne.com/Politics/How-Hate-Speech-Can-Hurt-You-Intelligence-Report.aspx?page=3>
15. SPLC admits having supplied information for an internal Missouri police reporter that lumped supporters of Paul with allegedly dangerous “militias”: <http://www.splcenter.org/blog/2009/04/01/nativist-leader-attacks-splc-over-missouri-report/>;  
SPLC has also pressured the Pentagon—unsuccessfully—to discharge alleged “extremists”:  
<http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2006/summer/a-few-bad-men/pentagon-in-denial>; and implied that Sarah Palin and the Tea Party seek to overthrow the government: <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/spring/they-say-they-want-a-revolution>
16. Longtime communists Leonard Zeskind, Daniel Levitas, and Chip Berlet frequently appear as authors or sources in SPLC’s publications or on its Website.
17. <http://www.cis.org/PanelTranscripts/Immigration-SPLC>
18. <http://www.cis.org/PanelTranscripts/Immigration-SPLC>
19. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, p. 16.
20. <http://www.cis.org/PanelTranscripts/Immigration-SPLC>
21. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, p. 16.
22. Kammer, *Immigration and the SPLC*, p. 16.
23. <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2002/summer/the-puppeteer/witan-memo-iii>
24. <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2006/winter/la-blackout?page=0,0>
25. The accompanying story: <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2006/winter/gauging-the-gangs?page=0,1>; on SPLC’s efforts to argue La Raza means “the people”: <http://www.splcenter.org/blog/page/2/?s=La+Raza&submit>; on SPLC’s dismissal of the Aztlan ideology as a nativist fantasy: <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2007/summer/paranoid-style-redux>