

# Let the Good Times Roll

*The Southern Poverty Law Center and the lucrative politics of hate*

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According to attorney Gloria Browne, a former employee of the Southern Poverty Law Center, “SPLC’s programs are calculated to cash in on black pain and white guilt.” On the other hand, the group describes its mission as, “standing up for the powerless, the exploited and other victims of discrimination and hate.” Fox-TV Commentator Tucker Carlson calls SPLC, “a completely phony leftwing lobbying group posing as a human rights organization ... they hide behind this shield of righteousness but in fact are utterly corrupt.”

On June 21, the *Wall Street Journal* reported: “Aided by a veneer of objectivity, the SPLC rightly condemns groups like the Ku Klux Klan and New Black Panther Party, but it has managed to blur the lines, besmirching mainstream groups like the [Christian advocacy group] Family Research Council, as well as people such as social scientist Charles Murray and Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a critic of Islamic extremism.” Ali, indignant by the charge, wrote in a *New York Times* editorial on August 24: “I am a black woman, a feminist, and a former Muslim who has consistently opposed political violence, yet the SPLC has the audacity to label me an ‘extremist.’”

“The SPLC is the primary source for the protesters at my events,” Dr. Charles Murray, a political scientist and co-author of *The Bell Curve*, points out. A March riot at Middlebury College, where Murray had been invited to speak, resulted in his talk being cancelled. “It is quotes from the SPLC — assertions by the SPLC — that drove the whole thing.” Murray’s politics are libertarian, but the SPLC labels him a “white nationalist.”

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*Peter Gemma, a contributing editor to the Social Contract, has been published in a variety of venues, including USA Today (where more than 100 of his commentaries have appeared), Military History, the Daily Caller.com, and the Washington Examiner.*

Among those branded as “haters” by the SPLC are: *World Net Daily* journalist Joseph Farah; former Cincinnati Mayor and Ohio Secretary of State Kenneth Blackwell (who is black); best-selling author Dinesh D’Souza; former Senator and now U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions; and former Congressman and presidential candidate Ron Paul — all listed right alongside the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>1</sup>

The SPLC has yet to classify the leftist, violent organization Black Lives Matter as a hate group.

## HATE TURNED GREEN

Charlottesville. Boston. Robert E. Lee. Alt Right. As newspaper headlines continuously run sensationalized stories “exposing” political “hate” groups, the SPLC cashes in. They have a “hate map” of organizations around the country that makes a good graphic in print. However, in an interview with this writer, Laird Wilcox, founder of the Wilcox Collection on Contemporary Political Movements at the University of Kansas, notes: “A single person with web page skills can create a very impressive ‘hate’ operation that exists nowhere except in cyberspace. The whole issue of ‘lists’ is full of smoke and mirrors.”

Wilcox went on to assert:

The dirty little secret behind the SPLC is that they actually *need* racial violence, growing “hate groups,” and more racial crime to justify their existence and promote their agenda. With each violent act, additional “hate” group, and racial incident, the SPLC’s status improves: fundraising goes up, they get more media exposure, their credibility increases, and their political usefulness to the far left surges.

*Laissez les bons temps rouler!* Business is good these days. The SPLC receives millions of dollars from scores of charitable foundations, including the Ford Foundation, the J.M. Kaplan Fund, Ploughshares Fund, the Public Welfare Fund, the Vanguard Public Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and George Soros’ Open Society Foundation.

Recently, actor George Clooney donated \$1 million to the SPLC. The multinational banking and financial services company, J.P. Morgan, announced they will give a million dollars. Not to be unmatched, Apple CEO Tim Cook informed employees that his company is giving \$1 million to the SPLC and matching employee donations.

The SPLC's IRS Form 990 reported \$50.3 million in contributions and grants in 2015. Its 2015 IRS filings revealed \$10 million in fundraising expenses, but with a staff of 75 lawyers, it spent only \$61,000 on legal services. The SPLC's \$50 million in donations two years ago was in addition to its \$328 million holdings of cash and securities. Their 2015 business tax return shows that the SPLC has "financial interests" in the Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, and Bermuda, and has ownership in several foreign corporations. Charity Watch, an independent organization that monitors and rates leading nonprofits for their fundraising efficiency, has consistently given the SPLC its lowest grade of "F" for its stockpiling of assets far beyond what Charity Watch deems a reasonable reserve.

"They've never spent more than 31 percent of the money they were bringing in on programs, and sometimes they spent as little as 18 percent. Most nonprofits spend about 75 percent on programs," notes Jim Tharpe, managing editor of the SPLC's hometown newspaper, the *Montgomery Advertiser*.

### SPLC AT WORK

SPLC leader Mark Potok has stated, "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."

Former Congressman Tom Tancredo knows this to be true. He says, "As a vocal opponent of uncontrolled immigration, I am a frequent target of the Southern Poverty Law Center. Their website contains over 60 articles that attack me . . . I am still shocked to see myself quoted as saying, 'illegal immigrants were coming to kill you and kill me and our families.'"

William Jacobson, a law professor at Cornell and critic of the SPLC, says the group has wrapped itself in the mantle of the civil rights struggle to engage in partisan political crusading. "Time and again, I see the SPLC using the reputation it gained decades ago fighting the Klan as a tool to bludgeon mainstream politically conservative opponents," he says. "For groups that do not threaten violence, the use of SPLC 'hate group' or 'extremist' designations frequently are exploited as an excuse to silence speech and speakers," Jacobson adds. "It taints not only the group or person, but others who associate with them."

Laird Wilcox of the University of Kansas warns, "Anyone attacked by the SPLC is basically up against

a contest of resources, from the ability to engage legal counsel, to the access to fairness in media treatment, to the ability to survive the financial destruction of a reputation or a career. What they 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."

Writing in the *Christian Post*, author and radio host Dr. Michael Brown has observed that the SPLC "knowingly disseminates false information and demonizes people and groups. This describes the SPLC to a tee when it comes to their defamation of Christian conservatives."

An example: The Family Research Council (FRC) "advances faith, family, and freedom in government and culture from a Christian worldview," according to its profile on the website of GuideStar, the philanthropic rating agency. GuideStar gives the FRC a "silver" rating for demonstrating a "commitment to transparency." But the profile page also declares: "This organization was flagged as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center."

GuideStar announced this month that it would classify 46 (mostly conservative and Christian) nonprofits as hate groups based on the SPLC's *imprimatur*. GuideStar CEO Jacob Harold told the Associated Press the move was justified by an increase in "hateful rhetoric" across the country.

Family Research Council President Tony Perkins wrote in a recent column, "For years, the anti-Christian Southern Poverty Law Center bragged about its work with the FBI. Their partnership on issues like 'hate crimes' helped fuel the Obama administration's fierce targeting of mainstream pro-family groups. That abruptly ended in 2014, when the agency distanced itself from the controversial organization."

According to emails obtained via a Freedom of Information Act request by the Immigration Reform Law Institute, the FBI made the decision almost immediately after meeting with congressional staffers regarding concerns expressed by the head of the Family Research Council. The FRC's head complained in February 2014 that its presence on the SPLC's "hate-watch" list inspired a terrorist attack against the organization. Floyd Corkins, the shooter, explicitly targeted the FRC in August 2012 and wanted to kill as many employees as possible precisely because the FRC had been listed as an "anti-gay" group on the SPLC's website since 2010.

The FBI email requesting the SPLC's removal from the resources page came March 18, 2014, just days after agents met with congressional staffers to communicate FRC concerns about the SPLC.

*The Washington Times* reported “that the FBI, which has included SPLC data as ‘a resource,’ has finally severed its link with the organization and dumped SPLC from the bureau’s Hate Crime Web page. The FBI offered no explanation of why now, but the dumping follows appeals of 15 family groups to Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. and FBI Director James B. Comey to sever the connection.”

Perkins commented, “The concerns we expressed to our friends in Congress was not just about FRC and our safety, it was about the dozens of pro-family groups and Christian organizations that the SPLC has targeted because of their biblical view of human sexuality. Just how outside the mainstream are the claims of SPLC? This was the *Obama* FBI that distanced itself from SPLC.”

### **SPLC IS IN THE DOCKET**

Coral Ridge Ministries Media (CRMM) has filed a lawsuit against the SPLC for defamation, religious discrimination, and trafficking in falsehood. The SPLC listed CRMM as a “hate group” for its opposition to same-sex marriage. “These false and illegal characterizations have a chilling effect on the free exercise of religion and on religious free speech for all people of faith” contends Dr. Frank Wright, president of Coral Ridge Ministries Media. Wright declared that the SPLC arbitrarily “calls ‘hate’ anything that departs from a progressive liberal socialist ideology. If you support traditional marriage, you’re a hater. If you support immigration reform, you’re a hater. If you’re concerned about Islamic radicalism, you’re a hater.”

CRMM brought the suit via the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for religious discrimination, under the Lanham Act for trafficking in false or misleading descriptions of the services offered under the ministry’s trademarked name, and for defamation under Alabama common law arising from “the publication and distribution of information that libels the Ministry’s reputation and subjects the Ministry to disgrace, ridicule, odium, and contempt in the estimation of the public.”

The SPLC has labeled Coral Ridge Ministries Media an “anti-LGBT hate group” for its opposition to same-sex marriage and transgenderism. “These false and illegal characterizations have a chilling effect on the free exercise of religion and on religious free speech for all people of faith,” Wright declared.

The SPLC also faces a federal complaint from the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). Their filing alleges that the organization repeatedly violated its non-profit tax status nearly 50 times during the 2016 presidential election.

The SPLC is an IRS-designated nonprofit organization and therefore prohibited from engaging in partisan politics. Even a cursory review of its website belies

its nonpartisan status. During the 2016 election, the SPLC posted such stories as “Extremists Have Influenced the GOP 2016 Policy Platform,” and “Here Are the Extremist Groups Planning to Attend the RNC in Cleveland.” The Democratic platform and convention received no such coverage.

FAIR’s complaint to the Treasury Department accuses the SPLC of participating in communication activities prohibited by the IRS in a “flagrant, continued, and intentional campaign” targeting presidential candidate Donald Trump and other Republican candidates. “The SPLC went way over the line in this last election,” says Dan Stein, FAIR’s president. FAIR argues that the SPLC “publicly engaged in deep, deliberate, and unlawful participation during the 2016 presidential election cycle, flagrantly violating its nonprofit tax status.”

### **SPLC’S MODUS OPERANDI NOW IN FOCUS**

On a positive note, author Karl Zinsmeister wrote an op/ed for the Philanthropy Roundtable, a Washington, D.C. organization that helps foundations, corporations, and major living donors become effective and efficient in their giving. The piece, entitled “Some People Love to Call Names,” states that, “the Southern Poverty Law Center’s extremist list isn’t a Consumer Reports guide. It’s a political tool. From the French Revolution to Joseph McCarthy,” Zinsmeister notes, “partisans have over and over used name-calling to sully opponents, end debate, and block necessary cultural reforms. It’s often effective — as their heirs at the SPLC know. There is an American habit, though, of disdain for scaremongering, personal vilification, and attempts to censor discussion. We hope donors will think twice the next time some charity they are supporting or considering gets the side-eye from the Southern Poverty Law Center.”

Historian Victor Davis Hanson of the Hoover Institution noted on Fox News-TV that some corporations “have come to the conclusion that a few activist groups like the SPLC represent a greater danger by defamation to them of blackmail or boycotts.... They’re riding high because of the Charlottesville incident and they’re getting a lot of donations...but they may create a backlash with the corporations that support them.” The Southern Poverty Law Center might be riding high on donations, but its effectiveness could be on the wane. ■

### **Endnote**

1. On February 18, 2016, in an article entitled “Does the Southern Poverty Law Center Target Conservatives,” *The Christian Science Monitor* reported that in 2014, the SPLC targeted GOP presidential candidate Ben Carson in their “Extremist Files.” This created a backlash, and, after criticism of his inclusion, the group actually apologized to the candidate.