

A Peek Into Hate, Inc.

PETER B. GEMMA

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) bills itself as a “civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry, and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of society.” According to its website, the SPLC claims to be a watchdog agency, “monitoring the activities of domestic hate groups and other extremists.”¹ *National Review* has described a different SPLC, which is “a machine for turning leftist hysteria into cash,” that is trying to “marginalize and shut up even mildly right-of-center voices by calling them instruments of hate, [attempting] to tie conservative commentators, authors, political figures, and professors to the alt-right or neo-Nazism. At the same time, it elevates absurd bloggers to the level of potential leaders of lynch mobs.”²

The Southern Poverty Law Center can best be described as “Hate, Inc.,” and it has proven to be a lucrative business. As of October 2017, the SPLC claimed 291 employees, 640 contractors, six national offices, and an endowment fund of more than \$319 million. Unlike other non-profits, investigations into the finances of the SPLC have exposed the organization’s offshore investments in the Caribbean; its 2016 annual report reveals nearly 20 percent of the SPLC’s endowment fund, \$69,093,576, can be found in “non-U.S. equity funds.”³

Alabama lawyer Morris Dees (right), now 80, incorporated the Southern Poverty Law Center in 1971 as a tax-exempt, charitable organization under the IRS designation 501(c)(3), which allows contributions to be tax deductible. The SPLC claims to have a staff of 75 lawyers who defend illegal aliens, promote gay rights in public policy, and advocate various reforms in the criminal justice system. In its 2015 IRS filings, the group reported spending just \$61,000 on legal services,⁴ but that same year the SPLC spent \$20 million on salaries. Richard Cohen, president and CEO of the SPLC, was

compensated \$346,218 and awarded \$20,000 more in other income and non-taxable benefits. Morris Dees received a salary of \$329,560 along with \$42,000 in additional compensation and non-taxable benefits.⁵



Karl Zinsmeister of the Philanthropy Roundtable (which monitors the business practices of non-profits), has strongly criticized the SPLC: “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.’”⁶

Progressive journalist Megan McArdle of *The Atlantic* magazine, in an article entitled “Southern Poverty Law Center Gets Creative to Label ‘Hate

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 DailyCaller.com, and the Washington Examiner.

Groups,”” cited the central issue with the SPLC’s mission: “Principled conservatives are lumped together with bigots.”⁷

To silence its enemies and censure opinions that even sound marginally conservative, the SPLC has evolved into a political bully promoting left-wing propaganda and using smear tactics, backed by its fundraising prowess. On its notorious “hate list,” neo-Nazi and Ku Klux Klan operations are on the same page as Christian organizations like D. James Kennedy Ministries, the Family Research Council, and the American Family Association, along with other groups such as the American College of Pediatricians and the Center for Immigration Studies. The SPLC even accuses Muslim human rights activists Maajid Nawaz and Ayaan Hirsi Ali as “anti-Muslim extremists.”

In a *New York Times* op/ed, “Why Is the Southern Poverty Law Center Targeting Liberals?” Ayaan Hirsi Ali argued that:

The SPLC is an organization that has lost its way, smearing people who are fighting for liberty and turning a blind eye to an ideology and political movement that has much in common with Nazism. I am a black woman, a feminist, and a former Muslim who has consistently opposed political violence. The price for expressing my beliefs has been high: I must travel with armed security at all times. My friend and collaborator Theo van Gogh was murdered in broad daylight. Yet the SPLC has the audacity to label me an “extremist,” including my name in a “Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremists.”⁸

The SPLC is alleged to have over 100 campus chapters at colleges and universities. Student chapters must agree to further the SPLC’s goals by raising awareness of the activities of “hate and extremist groups” through on-campus events and distribution of materials. Recently, the Southern Poverty Law Center cashed in on the handful of demonstrations that became violent by identifying every single Confederate monument across the United States, including elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. In dangerously ominous tones, the SPLC warned of “turmoil and bloodshed” unless the statues are taken down.

Let there be no doubt as to why the Southern Poverty Law Center promotes a “hate list.” The SPLC’s chief writer Mark Potok (who retired in 2017) has asserted: “You are able to destroy these groups sometimes by the things you publish. It’s not so much that they will bring down the police or the federal agents on their head, it’s that you can sometimes so mortally embarrass these groups that they will be destroyed.” He has openly admitted:

Sometimes the press will describe us as monitoring hate groups. I want to say plainly that our aim in life is to destroy these groups, completely destroy them.⁹

The SPLC has earned critics from the left and right. Liberal columnists Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair lampooned Dees as the “King of the Hate Business,” in which they observe: “U.S. Postal Service mailbags have bulged with [Morris] Dees’ fundraising letters, scaring dollars out of the pockets of trembling liberals aghast at his lurid depictions of hate-sodden America, in dire need of legal confrontation by the SPLC.”¹⁰

The Humanist magazine finds: “The SPLC campaigns for laws that will effectively deny free speech and freedom of association to certain groups of Americans on the basis of their beliefs. The SPLC [sends] its ‘findings’ to over 6,000 law-enforcement agencies; then, with no discernible irony, it goes on to justify its Big Brother methods in the name of tolerance.”¹¹

The libertarian *Reason* magazine has called the SPLC “a scam” and “a left-wing, money grabbing, slander machine.” *Reason* notes: “there are many non-hateful groups on the Southern Poverty Law Center’s hate list. But [the far left] Antifa, which clearly is a hate group, is not on the list.”¹²

Josh Goldstein, writing for the conservative *Townhall*, insists: “The Southern Poverty Law Center has become a leftist mouthpiece and, guided by its progressive evolution, a hate group. Make no mistake, the SPLC will continue labeling more and more conservative and Christian groups as hate groups.”¹³

The SPLC purports to be a repository of impartial research for the public and even government entities, but there is another side to the SPLC story: a slick operation with an ideological agenda run by zealots. Mark Potok, SPLC’s former spokesman, agrees: “We see this as a political struggle. We’re trying to wreck groups. We’re trying to destroy them. Not to send them to prison unfairly or to take their free speech rights away, but as a political matter to destroy them.”¹⁴ ■

Endnotes

1. <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate>
2. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/03/southern-poverty-law-center-bias-hate-group-labels-scam/>
3. Jeryl Bier, “The Southern Poverty Law Center Has \$69 Million Parked Overseas,” *The Weekly Standard*, September 6, 2017; <http://www.weeklystandard.com/the-southern-poverty-law-center-has-69-million-parked-overseas/article/2009553>
4. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/sep/1/splc-transferred-millions-offshore-tax-havens/>

5. https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/990_103116.pdf
6. Karl Zinsmeister, "Some People Love to Call Names," *Philanthropy Roundtable*; http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence_in_philanthropy/some_people_love_to_call_names
7. <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-09-07/southern-poverty-law-center-gets-creative-to-label-hate-groups>
8. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/24/opinion/southern-poverty-law-center-liberals-islam.html>
9. <https://www.heritage.org/civil-rights/commentary/the-latest-hate-smear-target-civil-rights-group>
10. <https://www.counterpunch.org/2009/05/15/king-of-the-hate-business/>
11. Barbara Dority, "Is the extremist right entirely wrong?" *The Humanist*, November 1, 1995; http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1374/is_n6_v55/ai_17529288/pg_3/
12. <https://reason.com/reasonstv/2018/01/16/the-southern-poverty-law-center-scam>
13. <https://townhall.com/columnists/joshgoldstein/2017/07/26/splc-hate-group-n2360208>
14. <https://pjmedia.com/trending/2017/09/01/southern-poverty-law-center-our-aim-in-life-is-to-destroy-these-groups-completely/>

SPLC'S AIM AND REGARD FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

Sometimes the press will describe us as monitoring hate groups. I want to say plainly that our aim in life is to destroy these groups, completely destroy them.¹

—Mark Potok, former SPLC spokesman

SPLC'S FLAWED 'HATE' DEFINITION

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. 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. It taints not only the group or person, but others who associate with them.²

—William Jacobson, Cornell University law professor

There's no consensus academic definition of extremism, and the SPLC's methodology for making that call isn't clear. So it's very subjective even within academia, and even more so for a motivated organization.³

—J.M. Berger, fellow with the International Centre for Counterterrorism at the Hague

SPLC EXAGGERATES HATE GROUP NUMBERS

This is pure disinformation, and an example of the terrible things the SPLC does in the campaigns to keep the money flowing from frightened liberals and blacks. Several years ago with minimal effort I went through a list of 800-plus "hate" groups published by the SPLC and determined that over half of them were either non-existent, existed in name only, or inactive.⁴

—Laird Wilcox, Researcher of Extremist Groups

The Southern Poverty Law Center's [hate] list is wildly inflated. They list skinhead groups in places where there are no organized groups, but instead it's just a couple of individuals. There are definitely white supremacists in New Jersey, but it's overstated by the SPLC's list.⁵

—Mark Pitcavage, Director of Investigative Research for the Anti-Defamation League

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnTz2yJJo_8&feature=relmfu

2. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/28/morris-dees-splc-trump-southern-poverty-law-center-215312>

3. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/06/28/morris-dees-splc-trump-southern-poverty-law-center-215312>

4. *The New American*, More on the SPLC, April 12, 2006, William Norman Grigg.

5. http://www.nj.com/south/index.ssf/2015/03/new_jersey_has_fourth_highest_number_of_hate_group.html