

Teaching Tolerance

The SPLC's youth mission

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The Sothern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) understands the importance of targeting youth, and America's schools offer it a perfect captive audience of impressionable minds unprepared to challenge its propaganda. In 1992, the SPLC established the Teaching Tolerance project to coordinate its youth outreach efforts. The project currently employs fifteen full-time staff members at SPLC headquarters in Montgomery, Alabama. Their primary mission is to make a variety of free "educational" materials available to students and teachers.

This article takes a look at Teaching Tolerance's web presence, which is divided between the main SPLC website (<https://www.splcenter.org/teaching-tolerance>) and its dedicated site [Tolerance.org](https://www.tolerance.org/) (<https://www.tolerance.org/>). Scrolling down the main SPLC site, we first encounter Teaching Tolerance under the heading "What We Do," where it is listed as one part of the Center's "three-pronged strategy to battle racial and social injustice," the other parts being "Fighting Hate" (monitoring so-called hate groups) and "Seeking Justice" (litigation). A picture of smiling children of various races accompanies an admonition that "the future of our great country lies in the hands of today's young people."

A click takes us to a statement of the project's supposed aims: "reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations, and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's school children." Already we can glimpse the ideology being promoted: all human groups are fundamentally equivalent; any perceptions of difference are "prejudice" fit only for eradication. If some groups do less well than others, it is because schools do not provide them with "equitable experiences;" their shortcomings are the fault of the school system, which is treating them unfairly. But most ludicrous of

all is the claim of "improving intergroup relations"; as we shall see, the "tolerance" promoted by the SPLC largely amounts to the inculcation of resentment in underperforming minorities and guilt in white children.

Below this statement of aims are listed the project's four principal activities. These include 1) the aforementioned website [Tolerance.org](https://www.tolerance.org/), to which we shall return; 2) a magazine for students; 3) an odd little program concerned with the seating arrangements in school cafeterias; and 4) the distribution of documentary films with accompanying "teaching kits." We shall discuss these in reverse order.

Teaching Tolerance currently offers eight documentaries: three deal with the "Civil Rights Movement," and one each with the Holocaust, Cesar Chavez, anti-homosexual bullying, and lynching. One documentary called *Starting Small* discusses "teaching tolerance in preschool and the early grades."

The text accompanying the lynching documentary, aimed at students as young as thirteen, offers a good look at the SPLC's methods of "teaching" impressionable young minds:

For decades following the Civil War, racial terror reigned over the United States and, particularly, the American South, claiming thousands of lives. The racial terror of lynching encompassed far more than the noose often used to symbolically conjure its memory today. While public hangings did take place, so too did prolonged acts of torture. Victims of lynching were often brutally beaten, even mutilated, castrated, dismembered, burned alive, or any combination of these acts.

These killings were deliberate, premeditated, and often public. Often, a crowd of hundreds or thousands bore witness to the violence. Frequently, concessions were sold, witnesses posed for photographs with the corpse, and members of the crowd left with detached body parts of the dead as souvenirs.

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Mainstream press outlets covered lynchings like sporting events, with play-by-play, evocative descriptions of the spectacle.

Authorities were indifferent... State and local governments in the South often feigned an inability to stop these public executions from happening, even when they were advertised in advance. Known perpetrators of the violence rarely faced legal consequences.

Acts for which blacks were commonly lynched are said to have included “bumping against a white person in public, speaking disrespectfully, or disobeying orders.” Viewers are also taught that the incarceration of black criminals today is a historical continuation of lynching.

I am not an historian and do not know for sure how common it was for white Southerners to torture blacks for bumping into them, but it seems reasonable to wonder whether increasing young people’s understanding of history could possibly be the goal of distributing such materials.

It is quite a contrast to turn from such heavy-handed emotional manipulation to “Mix It Up at Lunch Day,” a straight-faced effort “to encourage students to identify, question, and cross social boundaries” by changing the seating patterns in school cafeterias on a designated day. This is said to require a planning committee, advance publicity, lists of starter questions for the students (with the goal of “leading them to ‘aha!’ moments”), photographic documentation, and “debriefing and follow-up” afterwards. Teaching Tolerance offers ready-to-print posters for advertising these events; one depicts a group of smiling schoolchildren bursting through a brick wall with various lunch items in their hands.



To reassure the skeptical, statistics are cited indicating that large majorities of students report such events helped them make new friends, heightened their sensitivity toward tolerance and social justice issues, and made them more comfortable interacting with different kinds of people. One can only imagine the comfort and friendship that would result from scheduling such an event immediately after a screening of the lynching documentary.

The Teaching Tolerance project publishes a magazine for students, also called *Teaching Tolerance*, every Spring and Fall semester; recently a Summer online-only issue has been added. The magazine bristles with buzzwords such as “white privilege” and “intersectionality.” The current issue (Spring 2018) includes articles on Maya Angelou, how to teach the history of slavery, and a black teacher’s struggles to empathize with “white guilt.”

Another article describes how well Charlottesville, Virginia, schools responded to an attempted protest against the removal of Confederate monuments last August—described as a “naked display of hatred... which sent shock waves across the nation.” There is no mention that the protest was shut down before it got started, or that the shock waves were largely due to a violent riot staged by *opponents* of the protest, who enjoyed the tacit support of local police. In any case, it appears students were protected from the pro-monument side, if not from those rioting against them, by having at least one “Diversity Resource Teacher” as well as an “equity team” present in every school. Maybe it also helped that it was summer vacation.

Especially revealing, to my mind, was an article “debunking the myth” that America is a land of opportunity:

Research consistently demonstrates that upward social mobility is uncommon for [black] families. 51 percent of black Americans born into the bottom 20 percent of income earners remain there as adults. By comparison, only 23 percent of white Americans born into the bottom 20 percent of income earners remain there.

Even more alarming are the rates at which black Americans experience downward mobility. Black individuals born into middle- and upper-middle class homes fall into lower income brackets as adults at much higher rates than white Americans born into those same income positions. Furthermore, a 2017 study by economists William J. Collins and Marianne H. Wanamaker shows that differences in upward mobility between black and white Americans have remained consistent since 1880.

None of this would surprise a well-informed racial realist; it is called “regression to the mean.” But it is one thing to tell people their difficulties are not necessarily their own fault, and quite another to teach them they are *someone else’s* fault.

[Mississippi teacher] Kate Gluckman says that when her students learn how their lives and communities have been shaped by racism that is outside their control, they seem to feel as if a weight has been lifted from their shoulders. “It’s not just that your community is bad and people are lazy... No, this is a result of deliberate action.”

Elsewhere, the article suggests that even the dilapidated housing found in many black neighborhoods results from “barriers” set up by racist whites.

These people have a lot of *chutzpah* to claim they are trying to “improve intergroup relations.”

Finally, there is Tolerance.org, the dedicated website of the Teaching Tolerance project. Much of its content is organized around eight “topics”: 1) race and ethnicity, 2) religion, 3) ability (“create a learning environment that rejects ableism!”), 4) class, 5) immigration, 6) gender and sexual identity, 7) bullying and bias, and 8) rights and activism.

Readers are offered pearls of wisdom like these:

Binary notions of gender, biology and sexual orientation exclude large swaths of human diversity. This diversity can be better understood by using spectrum-based models. Spectra make room for anyone whose experiences do not narrowly fit into binary choices such as man/woman, feminine/masculine or straight/gay.

TSC readers will be interested in what the site has to say about immigration. Unsurprisingly, there is plenty about “bigotry towards immigrants,” which is portrayed as the exclusive source of reservations about mass immigration.

One article lists what it claims are “ten myths about immigration.” These include: “undocumented

immigrants don’t pay taxes,” “we can stop undocumented immigrants coming to the U.S. by building a wall on the Mexican border,” and “banning immigrants from majority-Muslim countries will protect the U.S. from terrorists.” Having phrased their “myths” in this way, the author has no difficulty pointing out that illegals pay sales tax, that not all of them come over the Mexican border, and that not all terrorists are Muslim. Take *that*, bigots!

A similar talent for missing the point is on display in the treatment of Islam and homosexuality. A brief article makes the point that “gay Muslims” do exist, and mentions a “gay Imam” operating the US. What about Omar Mateen and the Pulse gay nightclub massacre? Teaching Tolerance acknowledges only that this event has “amplified misunderstandings.” Doesn’t importing large numbers of Muslims into the more easygoing United States make conflict inevitable? According to Teaching Tolerance, only because “the rhetoric some people [!] use has pitted LGBTQ people against Muslims at large.” In a word, there are no sources of conflict other than “right wing bigots.” If only we tolerated all groups, they would tolerate each other.

These supposed spokesmen for tolerance want to import deadly conflict into our country, and then blame it on those of us who warned against doing so.

Some of the material on Tolerance.org is aimed at teachers rather than students. For example, teachers can apply for grants of up to \$10,000 for “projects that promote affirming school climates and educate youth to thrive in a diverse democracy.” There is also a “professional development” section which explains how to “honor diverse identities,” informs them “how stereotypes undermine test scores,” and even shows them how to “teach” the Black Lives Matter movement, which “school and communities often struggle to understand.”

The Teaching Tolerance crew also travels the country offering day-long “professional development workshops” for teachers. When I checked, the next event was sold out and the waiting list full. The products of America’s teaching training programs are eager for the message put out by the SPLC. ■

SPLC’s Questionable Finances

“I’ve never known a U.S.-based nonprofit dealing in human rights or social services to have any foreign bank accounts.... I am stunned to learn of [SPLC’s] transfers of millions to offshore bank accounts. It’s a huge red flag and would have been complexly unacceptable to any wealthy, responsible, experienced board member who was committed to a charitable mission I ever worked with. I know of no legitimate reason for any U.S.-based nonprofit to put money in overseas, unregulated bank accounts.”

—Amy Sterling Casil, CEO of Pacific Human Capital, a California-based nonprofit consulting firm

<http://freebeacon.com/issues/southern-poverty-law-center-transfers-millions-in-cash-to-offshore-entities/>