



SPLC's Poverty of Ethics

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which defines itself as “a nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry,” recently labeled family-values organizations as “hate groups” for championing faith-based moral views, including opposition to same-sex marriage and support for the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy.

The Family Research Council, of Washington, D.C., was among the insulted parties and decided to fight back. On December 15, 2010, the organization launched the website [StartDebatingStopHating.com](#) and took out a newspaper ad (the latter appearing in *Politico* and the *Washington Examiner*) that denounced the speech-chilling “character assassination” tactics of the SPLC, while supporting “vigorous” and “responsible” exercise of open debate. Those who signed the online petition showed their solidarity with the Family Research Council, the American Family Association, Concerned Women for America, and other national groups that have made their mark in the culture wars. Heavy hitters supporting the full-page ad, which featured some 150 signatories, included Michele Bachmann, Jim DeMint, Phyllis Schlafly, Richard Land, Alveda King, Alfred Regnery, Star Parker, John Boehner, and David Limbaugh.

The line-in-the-sand stance by conservatives against the leftist outfit is long overdue. The Southern Poverty Law Center, a Montgomery, Alabama-based non-profit, public interest law firm, was launched by attorneys Morris Dees and Joseph Levin, Jr. in 1971. It has become synonymous with tracking the speech and conduct of white supremacists (e.g. the National Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nations) with an interactive 50-state “Hate Map” that lists 932 groups.

In its early days, the organization acquired bragging rights by winning cases like *Pugh v. Locke*. That case, filed by the SPLC in 1974, tackled the issue of Alabama’s sometimes inhumane prison conditions. In *Donald v. United Klans of America* (1984), Dees brought a wrongful death suit on behalf of Beulah Mae Donald, mother of Michael Donald, a black teenager who had been murdered by the Klan in Mobile. The SPLC won a historic \$7 million judgment against the defendants. Mrs. Donald, however, received a fraction of that amount, as the only asset the United Klans of America had was a meeting hall appraised at about \$175,000.

Smells of a Smear

But nowadays the SPLC has become infamous for its commando-aggressive, slick campaigns against mainstream Americans who support constitutional government, the Second Amendment, sound money, traditional marriage, and legal immigration. For instance, John F. McManus, publisher of *The New American* and president of The John Birch Society, was featured on an ominous “Meet the ‘Patriots’ ” list that the SPLC puts out regularly. (Yes, in today’s leftist lexicon the word “patriot” is used as an epithet rather than an accolade.) McManus made the cut for observing, “The combination of the government and the Federal Reserve are destroying the dollar and setting us up for world currency, world control, world government.”

But he is hardly alone. The SPLC has also taken cheap shots at other articulate, accomplished Americans who don’t toe the politically correct party line, such as Iowa Congressman Steve King, Indian-born writer Dinesh D’Souza, Pastor Chuck Baldwin, and African-American law professor Carol Swain. After writer Allan Wall was a guest on *Fox & Friends* (being interviewed about Mexico’s tough immigration laws), the Montgomery crowd tried to smear him by implying that he was a racist and calling him “a longtime contributor to the racist Vdare.com website” — but really proving that SPLC minions have a one-track mind. Wall, who did a tour of duty in Iraq and is a respected school teacher,



Written by [Isabel Lyman](#) on January 27, 2011

has lived in Mexico and is married to a Mexican. *Vdare.com*'s writers, which include Michelle Malkin and Rob Sanchez, are an eclectic bunch, unlike the collectivist liberal leadership of the SPLC.

In writing about Jared Lee Loughner, the Tucson shooter, Mark Potok, an SPLC spokesperson, notes that Loughner made a reference to "currency that's not backed by gold or silver."

For Potok these are code words for "far right-wing ideology." He argues, without supplying a shred of evidence, "The idea that silver and gold are the only 'constitutional' money is widespread in the antigovernment 'Patriot' movement that produced so much violence in the 1990s."

Loughner himself listed *The Communist Manifesto* and *Mein Kampf* (synonymous with far left-wing ideology) among his favorite books. His associates describe him as a "left-wing pothead." Yet Potok chooses to torture logic and fabricate lies, because he can't state what appears to be obvious: Jared Loughner is a liberal, albeit a very disturbed one.

Even benign films like *Gods and Generals* and *The Lord of the Rings* have been attacked by the SPLC. The former is scorned because the Civil War flick "is told from the Confederate perspective." In actuality, the film shows both Confederate and Union soldiers in sympathetic lights, humanizing both sides and underscoring the tragedy of a nation at war with itself. The latter is suspect because it is "Eurocentric."

If that isn't absurd enough, consider that J. Richard Cohen, the SPLC's president, wrote a letter to CNN/U.S.'s then-president Jonathan Klein last year, asking that popular newscaster Lou Dobbs be "removed" from the airwaves because, in part, Dobbs was promoting "racist conspiracy theories" (i.e., daring to have an open discussion about President Barack Obama's citizenship bona fides).

No Support for Stand-up Guys

Conversely, it is revealing the people that the SPLC champions. In 1998, *Teaching Tolerance*, a publication of the SPLC aimed at impacting public education, featured a friendly interview with communist sympathizer Bill Ayers. No mention was made of his past as a dangerous Weather Underground domestic terrorist who was responsible, as William Jasper has accurately noted, for a "deadly spree of bombings, shootings, jailbreaks, and robberies."

The SPLC is also on record opposing the Arizona immigration law, SB 1070, describing it as "a civil rights disaster and an insult to American values." Clearly, Legal Team SPLC is not about to go to bat for any individuals who have been victimized by the heinous actions of repeat-offender criminal illegal aliens or transnational gangbangers — who aren't just talking trash, but who are also inflicting bodily harm upon innocent people.

Dr. Wayne Lutton of Michigan, editor of *The Social Contract* quarterly, which last year published a nearly 100-page, widely cited exposé of the SPLC, agrees. "Since 9/11, there have been more than 20 Islamist terrorist plots aimed at the United States, including the deadly mass shooting by U.S. Army Maj. Nidal Hasan, the recent Times Square bombing attempt, the Christmas Day effort to destroy a Delta-Northwest Airlines flight into Detroit, and the Fort Dix, New Jersey, effort to kill military personnel, among others," he says. "Yet the SPLC dishonestly insists that Tea Partiers and 'militias,' and upholders of traditional family values are the real danger."

Unfortunately, the faux hate industry doesn't show signs of going the way of the Ku Klux Klan. In fact, it remains both a cash cow and a media darling. With net assets of nearly \$200 million, the "charitable" organization has been colorfully described by *Harper's* magazine as having more wealth than the "annual GDP of the Marshall Islands." The SPLC's well-compensated directors invest their millions in



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hedge funds and offshore bank accounts in the Cayman Islands.

Fighting poverty and injustice just isn't a high priority for Attorney Dees these days. But don't look to the so-called watchdogs of the American political and media establishment to expose the blatant hypocrisy. The SPLC wouldn't have come this far without a truckload of favorable words and pictures from the old guard and new vanguard media titans.

Last summer the *Montgomery Advertiser* published, with a straight face, scores of photos of the house that Morris Dees shares with Susan Starr, his current wife. A suburban tract home or cozy cottage it's not. Casa Dees, complete with guest quarters, features oodles of surrealistic decorations. (A matador's costume hangs in a bathroom, and a rickshaw is parked near the indoor-outdoor swimming pool.) The pretty missus happens to be a textile artist who designs transparent coats and ceremonial robes and whose clientele is society's crème de la crème.

Mark Potok, also a *Huffington Post* contributor, is frequently cited as a credible authority on right-wing "extremism" by NPR, the Associated Press, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, cable show talking heads, etc.

Ted Koppel, former *Nightline* anchor, has stated: "Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center has a long and distinguished record of fighting for civil rights." *Newsweek* notes, "*Teaching Tolerance* is a winner among programs providing moral education." *U.S. News & World Report* thinks that the SPLC's Intelligence Project investigators have "bested the nation's mighty law enforcement agencies." In 1991, NBC showed a made-for-TV flick lauding Dees' legal accomplishments.

All that's missing is an invite to *Dancing With the Stars*.

The stream of positive publicity has brought the organization credibility with federal law-enforcement outfits. Among the FBI's recommended resources on its "hate crime" page is a link to — you guessed it — the Southern Poverty Law Center. Ditto for the U.S. Department of Justice. Perhaps more ominous is the fact that the aforementioned J. Richard Cohen was part of a Department of Homeland Security working group last year, called Countering Violent Extremism. The panel, which included various police chiefs, Muslim leaders, and academics, but nobody who signed the Family Research Council's ad, put forth this recommendation: "DHS should reassess its hate crime training to include understanding extremism."

When you consider who is doing the assessing ... well, every small-government proponent and constitutionalist should be wary and vigilant of this liaison.

Show Me the Money

Fortunately, not every so-called civil rights proponent has drunk the Kool-Aid. The Morris Dees Justice Award at the University of Alabama law school, created to honor Dees' "life-long career dedicated to public service," was the last straw for death penalty attorney Stephen B. Bright, of the Atlanta-based Southern Center for Human Rights. Bright has boldly described Dees as "a con man and fraud."

In a letter to the Crimson Tide's law school dean (drafted when the SPLC budget was a mere \$175 million), he excoriated Dees' financials thusly: "The positive contributions Dees has made to justice — most undertaken based upon calculations as to their publicity and fund raising potential — are far overshadowed by what *Harper's* (magazine) described as his 'flagrantly misleading' solicitations for money. He has raised millions upon millions of dollars with various schemes, never mentioning that he does not need the money because he has \$175 million and two 'poverty palace' buildings in Montgomery. He has taken advantage of naive, well-meaning people — some of moderate or low



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incomes — who believe his pitches and give to his \$175-million operation. He has spent most of what they have sent him to raise still more millions, pay high salaries, and promote himself. Because he spends so much on fund raising, his operation spends \$30 million a year to accomplish less than what many other organizations accomplish on shoestring budgets.”

That sums up the legacy of the Southern Poverty Law Center more accurately than any tony humanitarian award ever will.

One can only hope that the greedy man behind the multi-million dollar smear machine will come to his senses and repent of his deeds. It’s not so far-fetched an idea when you consider that a former business partner of Dees gave his fortune to the poor and began a life devoted to real social justice.

That would be the late Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity. Fuller once had this to say about his relationship with Dees: “Morris and I ... shared the overriding purpose of making a pile of money. We were not particular about how we did it; we just wanted to be independently rich.”

Morris Dees achieved his goal and, in the process, lost his soul.



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