

THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER – NO ARTISTRY IN ITS SMEARS

By Don Feder

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I was slimed by the Southern Poverty Law Center – a group that dresses its leftist agenda in tolerance cliches. Not that I mind. Over the years, I've been smeared by the best. The Poverty Law Center is a rank amateur, by comparison.

According to the SPLC, I am a hateful person who bears watching. I'm also "involved with several extremist groups" which are either "anti-immigrant" or "anti-gay."

These allegations are contained in the November 1st issue of the Center's online publication HATEWATCH ("Watchmen on the Walls Return To Latvia"), which discussed my participation in a November 14-18 pro-family conference in Riga.

According to HATEWATCH, after touring the U.S. with a "traveling anti-gay road show," Watchmen On The Walls – which is associated with the New Generation Church in Latvia -- was returning to the citadel of Slavic homophobia.

I should feel right at home in such execrable company, SPLC suggested, noting that in a speech I gave last year at a Vision America conference (which it described as a "Christian Right outfit") I remarked that the goal of militant homosexuals was to "transform us so that Salt Lake City on a Sunday morning looks like today's San Francisco on a Saturday night."

A few observations: 1) At least they got the quote right – for SPLC, a major achievement. 2) Most of the 2-day conference ("The War on Christians And The Values Voter in 2006") had

nothing to do with homosexuality, but focused on attacks on Christians from the courts, Hollywood, the news media, etc. 3) I not only spoke at the event (along with then House Majority Leader Tom DeLay and several U.S. Senators), but organized the conference – which must make me an even more depraved and desperate character in the Center’s eyes.

As for my dangerous liaisons (“Feder is involved with several extremist groups”), SPLC noted that I’m a member of the advisory board of the Federation for American Immigration Reform “an *anti-immigrant* group whose leader has *compared immigrants to bacteria.*”

This is so typical of the left: A group that seeks border security and wants to do something about the crisis of illegal immigration is “anti-immigrant.” Based on the same reasoning, those opposed to date rape must be anti-male.

The “bacteria” stuff refers to a 1997 Knight-Ridder article on FAIR founder John Tanton. “Bacteria” was the way the author of the article characterized Tanton’s views on immigration. Tanton himself never used the word.

But the foregoing is mild compared to SPLC’s *modus operandi*, which makes the Anti-Defamation League and the ACLU seem nuanced, objective and calm by comparison.

- In a 2006 speech at Arkansas’ Fayetteville State University, SPLC’s founding president Julian Bond (currently a member of its board of directors) charged the Republican Party’s “idea of equal rights is the American flag and the Confederate swastika (*sic.*) flying side by side.” Bond later denied saying this. Sadly, for him, the *Fayetteville Observer* had his comments on tape.

- The rather staid American Enterprise Institute was tarred as racist -- part of “an array of right-wing foundations and think tanks (*that*) support efforts to make bigoted or discredited ideas respectable.” Exactly how bigoted or discredited ideas are made “respectable” the Poverty Law Center never explained.
- Conservative scholar Dinesh D’Souza, an immigrant from India who’s exposed the race industry, was indicted by SPLC as an extremist “whose views are seen by many as bigoted or racist.” When the Center doesn’t have the guts to call someone a racist (or feels it might be skirting libel laws to do so), it attributes its views to unnamed observers. (“The Southern Poverty Law Center’s tactics are seen by many as devious and/or reprehensible.”)
- Guilt by association is a favorite SPLC technique. Thus, it seeks to connect Watchmen on the Walls and New Generation Church to the Sacramento death of Satender Singh (a man thought to be gay) in July. In an Intelligence Report posting currently on the SPLC website, Casey Sanchez reports, “Gay rights activists blame Singh’s death on what they call ‘The West Coast connection’ or the ‘U.S.-Latvia Axis of Hate,’ a reference to a virulent Latvian mega-church preacher who has become a central figure in the hard-line Slavic anti-gay movement in the West.” The “*virulent* Latvian mega-church preacher” is Pastor Alexey Ledyaev. The man charged in connection with Singh’s death (Andrey Vusik) has no connection with Ledyaev’s church or Watchmen on the Walls. The argument – breathtaking in its tortured reasoning – goes something like this: Watchmen on the Walls takes a biblical perspective on homosexual behavior. The alleged killer is believed to be a homophobe. Many members of “the mega-church” are Slavs. Vusik is a Slav. Hence –

“the West Coast connection” and the “U.S.-Latvia Axis of Hate.” If I were to employ such “logic,” SPLC would accuse me of inciting xenophobia.

- A 2003 article by Chip Berlet posted on the SPLC site accused conservative activist David Horowitz of blaming slavery in the United States on African tribesmen and Arab traders. In a letter to SPLC honcho Morris Dees, Horowitz explained that his historically accurate observation was made in the context of demands for reparations. Why should whites pay reparations, when others (Africans and Arabs) played an integral part in the slave trade? Horowitz asked.
- Instead of apologizing, Berlet sniveled that Horowitz’s group (now the David Horowitz Freedom Center) “has produced a vast amount of text marked by nasty polemic and exceptional insensitivity around issues of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity.” Way to go, Chip! If you can’t plausibly accuse your opponent of racism, attack him for nebulous “nasty polemic” and racial “insensitivity.”

What makes the Southern Poverty Law Center particularly odious is its habit of taking legitimate conservatives and jumbling them with genuine hate groups (the Klan, Aryan Nation, skinheads, etc.), to make it appear that there’s a logical relationship between say opposing affirmative action and lynching, or demands for an end to government services for illegal aliens and attacks on dark-skinned immigrants. The late novelist/philosopher Ayn Rand called this “the broad-brush smear.”

What the Southern Poverty Law Center calls fighting hatred is more than just an opportunity to defame political opponents. It’s good business.

Thanks to the fundraising genius of co-founder Morris Dees, at the end of FY 2005, SPLC had a surplus of \$189.4 million. As Chief Trial Counsel, Dees receives an annual salary (including pension contributions) of \$297,559. Though he'd hate to admit it, hate has made Dees a rich man.

Together, SPLC's three top executives – all white -- took home just shy of three-quarters of a million dollars in 2005.

SPLC has its critics on the left. Journalist Alexander Cockburn characterized Dees' fundraising technique as “frightening elderly liberals (*into believing*) that the heirs of Adolf Hitler are about to march down Main Street.”

In a 2000 article in Harper's Magazine (“The Church of Morris Dees”), Ken Silverstein wrote that with Dees at the helm SPLC “spends most of its time-and-money on a relentless fundraising campaign, peddling memberships in the church of tolerance with all the zeal of a circuit rider passing the collection plate.”

The article also explained how the Center has amassed a fortune exploiting the victims of bias crimes.

Silverstein wrote: “In 1987, Dees won a \$7-million judgment against the United Klans of America on behalf of Beulah Mae Donald, whose son was lynched by two Klansmen. The UKA's total assets amounted to a warehouse whose sale netted Mrs. Donald \$51,875. According to a groundbreaking series of stories in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, the SPLC, meanwhile, made \$9 million from fundraising solicitations featuring the case, including one containing a photo of Michael Donald's corpse.”

A perusal of its website would convince the casual observer that the nation is awash in goose-stepping neo-Nazis and noose-swinging night-riders -- all armed to the teeth and lusting for the blood of innocents.

SPLC habitually overstates the danger of real hate groups. Thus, in one of his 1999 fundraising letters, Dees wrote “The danger presented by the Klan is greater now than at any time in the past 10 years.”

In reality (that which exists outside the paranoid universe of direct-mail fundraising), the Klan is weaker now than it was in 1999; and in need of Viagra then. In the 1920s, the hooded scum held massive marches in our nation’s capital and controlled several state legislatures. Today, the Klan has an estimated 3,000 members nationwide, 10% of them FBI informers.

The Center devotes considerable resources to watching the Klan. (Its publication HATEWATCH was formerly called KLANWATCH.) It watches Klansmen grow senile, go into nursing homes and die. Today, most bias-related crimes (including the murders of James Byrd, Jr., Matthew Shepard and the Oklahoma City Bombing) are the work of a few nutcases.

Put that in a fundraising appeal and see what comes in from the yokels in Manhattan or San Francisco.

As telling as the hatred over which SPLC obsesses, is that which it ignores.

On the Center’s website, check out the colorful Hate Map, a state by state directory of extremist organizations. Broken down by category, these include the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, Racist Skinheads, White Nationalists and Black Separatists.

Then there are other groups only Dees and Hillary Clinton would consider hateful, like the Traditional Values Coalition and Young Americans for Freedom of Michigan State University. What's missing is any mention of a Saudi-funded mosque, a rabid imam preaching jihad or a Muslim group with ties to terrorism.

Imams telling the faithful that Jews are “the descendants of apes and pigs,” community leaders calling for holy war against the infidel, American Muslim groups shouting hooray for Hamas – all urban legends, as far as the Southern Poverty Law Center is concerned.

According to terrorism expert Steven Emerson, in his 2002 book “American Jihad,” the following groups are operating in the United States: Al Qaeda, Hamas, Hizbullah, Islamic Jihad, Muslim Brotherhood, Abu Sayyaf and the Algerian Armed Resistance – not to mention their supporters with innocuous-sounding names like the Islamic Society of North America.

Which is a greater threat to America – to the physical safety of you and your loved ones? 1. An octogenarian Klansman with tobacco juice dribbling down his chin, 2. A balding Hitler-wannabe who can barely fit his Sam Browne belt over his paunch or 3. A foreign-funded member of Martyrs' Mosque plotting the next 9/11?

But with its politically correct blinders firmly in place, the Southern Poverty Law Center sees no hatred in Jihad Nation, or on the left generally.

What's the Center's impact? Its website boasts that it “trains personnel for more than 75 federal law enforcement agencies and provides services for local, state and international agencies.” A picture on this page shows a regional commander of the Illinois State Police shaking hands with an SPLC staffer.

Doubtless, the Center provides invaluable training in helping law enforcement personnel to monitor the dangerous activities of extremists like the American Enterprise Institute and the Federation for American Immigration Reform – as well as to track the fiends who engage in “nasty polemic” and display racial “insensitivity.”

Then there’s its infiltration of public education through Teaching Tolerance, a curriculum “to help K-12 teachers foster respect and understanding in the classroom” for such victim-groups as illegal immigrants.

The Center says 600,000 educators subscribe to its *Teaching Tolerance* magazine. A recent issue urged teachers and students to oppose the use of Indian mascots by sports teams – which presumably fosters an atmosphere of discrimination and even violence against Native Americans, witness unprovoked attacks on casinos. (When will the Center do something about the stereotypical mascot of Notre Dame’s football team, which implies that Irish-Americans are small of stature, dress in green and are naturally pugnacious?)

The Southern Poverty Law Center is symptomatic of the left’s penchant for calumny, which is another sign of its intellectual impotence. Those who can’t frame arguments – participate in open debate – distort, stigmatize and engage in guilt by association. The left is guilty of the very tactics of which it accuses the late Joe McCarthy.

But, please, don’t call the Southern Poverty Law Center smear artists. There’s no artistry in its smears, which are crude, clumsy and transparent.

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