



THE “ANTI-HATE” GROUP THAT IS A HATE GROUP KARL ZINSMEISTER

Shutting down people you don’t agree with is about as un-American as you can get.

Rigorous debate, honest discussion, open exchange of ideas—that’s the American way.

But free thinking and speech are threatened today by a group with a sweet-sounding name that conceals a nefarious purpose. This group is called the Southern Poverty Law Center, or SPLC.

Originally founded as a civil-rights law firm in 1971, the SPLC reinvented itself in the mid-‘80s as a political attack group. Every year now it produces a new list of people and charities it claims are “extremists” and “haters.”

Aided by glowing coverage from the establishment media, the SPLC’s hate list has become a weapon for taking individuals and groups they disagree with and tarring them with ugly associations.

The SPLC employs a two-pronged strategy:

First, find a handful of crazies with barely any followers, no address, and no staff, and blow them up into a dangerous movement— proof that there are neo-Nazis lurking everywhere. On their notorious “Hate Map,” the SPLC lists 917 separate hate groups in the U.S.! No one has even heard of more than a handful of them.

The second strategy of the SPLC is to undermine legitimate political voices that they oppose by associating them with extremists like the KKK.

Take the charity known as the Alliance Defending Freedom. The SPLC lists them as a “hate group.” Is that fair? Well, the ADF has a network of 3,000 attorneys from all across the U.S. who’ve donated more than a million volunteer hours in defense of religious liberty. They’ve had a role in 49 victories at the U.S. Supreme Court. Putting the Alliance Defending Freedom on a list with 130 Ku Klux Klan chapters is not only wrong, it’s malicious.

According to the SPLC, one of the most influential social scientists in the U.S.— Charles Murray— is a, quote, “white nationalist.” Ayaan Hirsi Ali, perhaps the most eloquent spokesperson for the rights of Muslim women, is, to the SPLC, a “toxic... anti-Muslim extremist.”

Scores of other individuals and charities active in mainstream conservative or religious causes have likewise been branded by the Southern Poverty Law Center as threats to society.

Mind you, it is entirely fair to disagree with any of those folks. But it is utterly unfair to call them haters or extremists. The largest category listed by the SPLC as extremists—with 623 entries—covers groups like the Tea Party organizations that are wary of centralized government. Last time we checked, favoring smaller government was a mainstream and perfectly honorable American tradition.

What is not honorable is the course prescribed by a leader of the SPLC, Mark Potok, who was caught on video proclaiming the organization's true intentions. He told a group of supporters, quote, "the press will describe us as 'monitoring hate groups'.... I want to say plainly that our aim in life is to destroy these groups, to completely destroy them."

Portraying someone with political views different from your own as a public menace is bullying.

And it's a dangerous game. Instead of reducing hate and violence, the SPLC's name-calling directly incites it.

In March 2017, Charles Murray was trying to discuss his acclaimed book *Coming Apart* at Middlebury College when he was violently attacked by protesters inflamed by the SPLC's labeling of him as a racist. A professor escorting Murray ended up in the hospital.

In 2012, a gunman attempted mass murder at the Family Research Council, and failed only because the first man he shot managed to disarm him. The attacker told the police he acted because the SPLC had listed the Family Research Council as a hate group.

It's a vicious irony: while promoting itself as a monitor of "hate groups," the SPLC has, in practice, become a fomenter of hate.

Yet the group rolls on, bigger than ever. What keeps them going?

For one thing, the establishment media constantly quote them.

Scare stories about right-wing storm-troopers are a sure way to attract eyeballs, and fit nicely with the media's own preconceptions of the "dangerous reactionaries" lurking out there in middle America.

Second, alarmism is a great fundraising technique. Convincing people there are fascists everywhere has turned the SPLC into a cash machine. Last year, the group hustled \$50 million dollars out of frightened liberal donors, adding to the \$368 million dollars of assets they were already sitting on.

So, the next time you see the Southern Poverty Law Center quoted in the news, just remember: the masterminds behind the SPLC aren't eliminating hate. They are fueling it.

I'm Karl Zinsmeister for Prager University.