

A Journalist's Guide to Understanding the Tactics of the SPLC



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Background

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) was founded in 1971 with a unique and successful strategy to put the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) out of business. They waged “lawfare” against them, suing the KKK on behalf of the victims and winning monetary settlements in court.

The strategy worked. Within a decade or so, the loss of assets and changing attitudes about matters of race, even in the areas of the country where the KKK had flourished, effectively eradicated that loathsome organization. A few small cells remained, but the KKK’s days of wielding political influence and terrorizing communities were over.

Crippling the KKK was good for the country, but it was bad for the SPLC. Without a real enemy to fight, the SPLC needed to find new ones in order to justify its continued existence. As the number of white supremacist groups dwindled, and those that remained had little or no impact on society, the SPLC had to invent new threats.

According to the SPLC, there are [1020 “hate groups”](#) in the United States. That number is meant to shock people. Many of the “hate groups” listed on the SPLC’s annual list are nothing more than a handful of hateful people, or websites that purvey hatred. These are offensive people with offensive messages, but it is debatable whether they constitute an entity sufficiently organized to meet even a loose definition of a “group.”



Image: istock | Heather Shimmin

While the hate group designation is a vicious smear that stigmatizes many groups who truly are hateful, the criteria for winding up on that list is, at best, subjective. “The Southern Poverty Law Center defines a hate group as an organization that – based on its official statements or principles, the statements of its leaders, or its activities – has beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics,” [states the group’s website](#).

In some cases, the statements and activities are so explicit as to leave little doubt that they constitute hate and incitement. Often, however, assigning the hate group designation comes down to a handful of people in Montgomery, Alabama, reading tea leaves and inferring intent from random statements, often taken out of context, or insinuating guilt by very tenuous association. In practice, the hate group designation has become a cudgel used to bludgeon people and organizations whose opinions the SPLC disagrees with into silence.

The SPLC’s definition of a group is equally malleable. As Mark Potok, who along with colleague Heidi Beirich, is chiefly responsible for compiling the SPLC’s annual hate lists, confesses, the SPLC cannot vouch for the fact that many of the “hate groups” on its list may be nothing more than [“a man and his dog and a computer.”](#) Moreover, Potok candidly admits that the purpose of the SPLC’s annual list is to [banish differing opinions from the public square](#). “I want to say plainly that our aim in life is to destroy these groups, to completely destroy them.”

Far more disturbing, however, are a host of organizations on the SPLC’s ignominious list that merely espouse political views that the SPLC and other like-minded groups disagree with. These political points of view are neither motivated by hatred for any particular group of people, nor are they on the political fringes of American society. In some cases, the viewpoints expressed by organizations on the SPLC’s hate list represent those shared by a majority of Americans.

As *The Washington Post* columnist [Dana Milbank wrote in 2012](#), the SPLC’s broad-brush application of the “hate group” label is, at best, irresponsible and, at worst dangerous. In the aftermath of a violent attack against the Family Research Council (FRC) (a group that opposes abortion and same sex marriage), carried out by a gunman who cited the SPLC’s application of the hate group label to the FRC, Milbank held the SPLC partially to blame. “I disagree with the Family Research Council’s views on gays and lesbians. But it’s absurd to put the group, as the law center does, in the same category as Aryan Nations, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Stormfront and the Westboro Baptist Church.”

Citing SPLC “hate group” accusations is sloppy and unethical journalism

Writing in *Philanthropy*, the journal of the Philanthropy Roundtable, which monitors charitable and nonprofit organizations, Karl Zinsmeister poses the pertinent question, “Why do so many reporters cite the SPLC blacklist as if it were some kind of neutral *Consumer Reports* guide to what’s intolerable in cultural advocacy?”

[The American Press Association](#), one of the leading journalistic trade associations, explicitly cautions against reporting damaging information without making a good faith effort to determine its veracity:

Journalists rely on a professional discipline for verifying information. When the concept of objectivity originally evolved, it did not imply that journalists are free of bias. It called, rather, for a consistent method of testing information – a transparent approach to evidence – precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work.

Countless surveys indicate that journalists’ political views tend to skew left of center. That is by no means a disqualification, or an inherent bar to fair reporting. In fact, many journalists fairly report on a range of political issues on which they likely hold strong personal views, without allowing their subjective opinions to bias their reporting. They do this, as the American Press Association continues, by “Seeking out multiple witnesses, *disclosing as much as possible about sources*, or asking various sides for comment, all signal such standards.” (Emphasis added.)

And yet, when it comes to “disclosing as much as possible about the source” of ugly accusations against groups and individuals that appear on the SPLC’s “hate” list, many journalists fall woefully short of this most basic ethical tenet of their trade. While the inclusion of a third party citation (the SPLC) is sufficient to protect journalists and their news organizations from liability for slander, it is not an ethical defense.

Multiple sources raise doubts about the SPLC, its tactics and its motives...

And they are really not hard to find. A simple Google search locates dozens of articles, written by reputable journalists, appearing in leading news journals that all reach the same conclusion:

- The SPLC’s labeling practices are reckless and highly subjective.
- The SPLC applies the “hate group” label to stifle political points of view with which it disagrees.
- Accusing political opponents of spreading “hate” is a lucrative fund-raising tool that has helped the organization amass hundreds of millions of dollars (very little of which is used to help the people on whose behalf the organization purports to advocate).

(An extensive list of articles highly critical of the SPLC and its tactics appears in an appendix to this document.)

What is even more compelling than the sheer volume of harsh criticism of the SPLC, is that the criticism is leveled by journalists and publications that span the political spectrum. Nor are these assessments of the SPLC new. As far back as the mid-1990s, the SPLC’s hometown newspaper, the *Montgomery (Alabama) Advertiser*, [conducted a three-year investigation](#) and reported on the organization’s numerous unethical practices.

SPLC Practices Slander AND Hypocrisy

Among the practices reported in the *Montgomery Advertiser*’s 1994 series (which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize), were accusations of systematic racial discrimination. The SPLC claimed to have addressed those issues but, 25 years later, not much had changed. **In March 2019, the SPLC summarily fired its founder, Morris Dees**, for what it called undisclosed misconduct issues. It quickly became apparent that the misconduct issues extended far beyond the founder and that the organization that created the Teaching Tolerance website, has been tolerating unlawful discrimination within its own ranks for decades.

The SPLC, which spent decades torching other people’s reputations, and amassing a fortune along the way, was forced to hire a “gender and racial equity” expert to address the group’s internal problems. **In the wake of Dees’ firing**, SPLC employees signed a letter expressing their concerns that internal “allegations of mistreatment, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and racism threaten the moral authority of this organization and our integrity along with it,” and describing the work atmosphere as “toxic.”

One would not be surprised to find harsh criticism of the SPLC in conservative media outlets, given that the SPLC's attacks are predominantly directed at groups and individuals who are right of center. And, indeed, that is the case – publications such as *National Review*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The Federalist*, *City Journal*, and *Reason* – have all excoriated the SPLC as a “[demagogic bully](#),” that enriches itself by means of baseless attacks against political opponents.

More surprising is that these assessments are shared by those who share the SPLC's ideological views. The seminal attack on the integrity of the SPLC appeared in an article title “The Church of Morris Dees” in the [November 2000 issue of Harper's Magazine](#) – a publication with an editorial viewpoint solidly left of center. But the criticism of the SPLC does not stop there. The unashamedly far left magazine, *The Nation*, has been equally dismissive of the SPLC.

The late self-described “[radical journalist](#),” Alexander Cockburn, was an outspoken critic of the SPLC, frequently attacking the group's credibility. In a 2009 piece in *The Nation*, (“[King of the Hate Business](#)”) Cockburn accused the SPLC of manufacturing bogeymen because creating imaginary villains is just that: good for business – the SPLC's business, to be precise.

“Where are the haters? That hardy old standby, the Ku Klux Klan, despite the SPLC's predictable howls about an uptick in its chapters, is a moth-eaten and depleted troupe, with at least 10 percent of its members on the government payroll as informants for the FBI,” Cockburn wrote. “What is the archsalesman of hatemongering, Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center, going to do now? Ever since 1971, US Postal Service mailbags have bulged with his fundraising letters, scaring dollars out of the pockets of trembling liberals aghast at his lurid depictions of a hate-sodden America in dire need of legal confrontation by the SPLC,” continued Cockburn.

The harsh criticism of the SPLC is not limited to the openly ideological journalism on either the left or the right. Numerous journalists and media outlets that strive for objectivity in their reporting concur with the opinions expressed by their more ideologically-driven colleagues. The have included, *The Atlantic*, National Public Radio, *Tablet*, *Bloomberg*, and others.



Follow the money. The SPLC sure does.

Ideology is certainly an important reason for why the SPLC does what it does. Money, if it is not the prime reason, is a close second. As Cockburn, Ken Silverstein (in *Harper's*), and countless others who have investigated the SPLC's operations have concluded, peddling hate (and manufacturing it where it doesn't exist) is highly profitable. The bulging mailbags alluded to by Cockburn in 2009 have resulted in a bulging endowment for the SPLC. The group raked in a reported \$45 million in 2016 and, as of 2019, the SPLC's endowment stood at [\\$518 million](#).

In a [2017 investigative piece for Politico](#), journalist Ben Schreckinger reported that the SPLC's "is disproportionately large for its operating costs. SPLC President Richard Cohen defends the endowment as necessary to ensure the group can survive legal battles that might last for years." Except that it doesn't use the money for legal battles on behalf of those in poverty or those who are victims of legitimate hate. Rather, "The organization has been criticized for spending more of its money on fundraising and overhead and less on litigation than comparable groups like the American Civil Liberties Union." Among the places all that money does go, according the nonprofit watchdog group, Charity Navigator, is into the pockets of the SPLC's top executives. In 2015, Cohen received \$333,000 in compensation, while the organization's founder, Morris Dees, pulled down \$337,000.

Cohen's and Dees' pockets is not the only place the money is going. A substantial portion of the \$518 million (that's not being spent on behalf of true victims of hatred) has found its way into offshore bank accounts. As of 2019, [\\$121 million of those dollars](#) could be located in "non-U.S. equity funds" located in sunny locals such as the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, and Bermuda.

The SPLC's unethical behavior is not limited to its malicious labeling of political opponents. According to experts in the finances of nonprofit organizations, [cited by *The Washington Free Beacon*](#), the SPLC's practice of transferring funds to offshore accounts is unprecedented. "I've never known a US-based nonprofit dealing in human rights or social services to have any foreign bank accounts," said Amy Sterling Casil, CEO of Pacific Human Capital, a California-based nonprofit consulting firm. "It is unethical for any US-based charity to invest large sums of money overseas. I know of no legitimate reason for any US-based nonprofit to put money in overseas, unregulated bank accounts," she continued.

Casil's observations are echoed by Charles Ortel, a former Wall Street analyst and financial advisor. "It seems extremely unusual for a '501(c)(3)' concentrating upon reducing poverty in the American South to have multiple bank accounts in tax haven nations," he stated.

The SPLC's money allows them to slander people and organizations

The SPLC's formidable war chest prevents them from being held accountable by those whose reputations they slander. Justice is expensive, and many of the groups that wind up on the SPLC's "hate" list either can't afford to fight them in court, or would rather put their resources to work for the causes that the money was raised.

One such example is [Mount St. Michael](#), a Tridentine (or Latin rite) Catholic Church located in Spokane, Washington, which has been on the SPLC's hate group list since 2006. The church stands accused of promoting a radical traditional Catholic ideology and, according to the SPLC, of anti-Semitic activities. The church's alleged anti-Semitic activities were news to a local human rights activist and an area rabbi, as late as 2013.

Tony Stewart, described by Spokane *The Spokesman-Review* as "a North Idaho human rights activist who praises the law center for its work to defeat the Aryan Nations," was among those astonished to discover that Mount St. Michael was a designated hate group. According to the local newspaper, "Stewart said he visited Mount St. Michael a few years ago when he invited the Singing Nuns to appear on a local public television show. They said they wanted to meet him first. 'We had coffee and cookies. I had a wonderful couple of hours with the leaders of the convent and the sisters,' Stewart said. Likewise, "Rabbi Michael Goldstein of Temple Beth Shalom said he's unaware of any problems connected to the north Spokane church."

Carol Swain, a law professor at Vanderbilt University, observes that the "poverty" law center's wealth leaves those who are unfairly maligned by the hate label with few options. "I've never heard of anyone getting off their list," Swain said. That was certainly the case with Mount St. Michael. According to the *The Spokesman-Review*, "The Rev. Casimir Puskorius, pastor of Mount St. Michael, calls the listing 'very unfair' and contends it's a result of a liberal organization taking issue with the teachings of a conservative Christian group. 'We considered suing them, some years ago, but they have more resources than us,' Puskorius said.

Beating the SPLC bully requires money and clout

Professor Swain was not entirely correct that no one can get off the SPLC's list, short of a contrite admission of guilt to crimes they never committed. In recent years, the SPLC has picked on political opponents who were bigger and strong than them, and who chose to fight back. Like any schoolyard bully, the SPLC backed down.

Maajid Nawaz and the Quilliam Foundation



Image: Eugene Regis

Under the category of “Anti-Muslim Extremists,” the SPLC’s 2015 list included the name of Maajid Nawaz and the group he founded, the Quilliam Foundation. Based in Britain, the Quilliam Foundation describes itself as “the world’s first counter-extremism think tank.” And, [according to the *The Atlantic*](#), Nawaz is a “self-described former extremist who spent four years in an Egyptian prison, he has changed

approaches and now argues for a pluralistic and peaceful vision of Islam. He stood for Parliament as a Liberal Democrat in 2015, and advised Prime Ministers Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, and David Cameron.”

In other words, Nawaz and his organization were labeled “anti-Muslim extremists” for combating Muslim extremism. But beyond the irony, being on that list posed potentially serious consequences for Nawaz other than merely being forced to wear the SPLC’s scarlet letter. “They put a target on my head. The kind of work that I do, if you tell the wrong kind of Muslims that I’m an extremist, then that means I’m a target,” he said. “They don’t have to deal with any of this. I don’t have any protection. I don’t have any state protection. These people are putting me on what I believe is a hit list.”

Because the stakes were so high, Nawaz sued the SPLC. In 2018, [the case was settled](#) with the SPLC issuing the Quilliam Foundation an apology and a check for \$3.375 million. “With the help of everyone who contributed to our litigation fund, we were able to fight back against the Regressive Left and show them that moderate Muslims will not be silenced,” Nawaz stated in a press release.

Equally important, the SPLC issued a public mea culpa in which they conceded that their research and subjective criteria for labeling others as haters is flawed. [A statement by SPLC president Richard Cohen](#) read:

The Southern Poverty Law Center was wrong to include Maajid Nawaz and the Quilliam Foundation in our Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremists. Since we published the Field Guide, we have taken the time to do more research and have consulted with human rights advocates we respect. We've found that Mr. Nawaz and Quilliam have made valuable and important contributions to public discourse, including by promoting pluralism and condemning both anti-Muslim bigotry and Islamist extremism. Although we may have our differences with some of the positions that Mr. Nawaz and Quilliam have taken, they are most certainly not anti-Muslim extremists. We would like to extend our sincerest apologies to Mr. Nawaz, Quilliam, and our readers for the error, and we wish Mr. Nawaz and Quilliam all the best.

Ben Carson



Image: Gage Skidmore

In 2015, Dr. Ben Carson, currently Secretary of the Health and Human Services Department, and then an aspiring candidate for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination, was placed on the SPLC's "Extremist Watch List," a slur dutifully reported by many media outlets.

Fifteen years after Congress passed (by a veto-proof majority) and President Bill Clinton signed the [Defense of Marriage Act](#) (DOMA), which for federal purposes defined marriage as "a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word 'spouse' refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife," Dr. Carson affirmed his support for that definition. In his 2011 book, *America the Beautiful*, [Carson wrote](#), "[I]f we can redefine marriage as between two men or two women or any other way based on social pressures as opposed to between a man and a woman, we will continue to redefine it in any way that we wish, which is a slippery slope with a disastrous ending, as witnessed in the dramatic fall of the Roman Empire."

While public attitudes toward same sex marriage changed dramatically in the years after enactment of DOMA (and the Supreme Court ruled that such unions are legal nationwide), Dr. Carson hardly belonged on the same list with the likes of David Duke. Yet, the SPLC's justification for labeling a dangerous extremist was, "Extremists in the U.S. come in many different forms – white nationalists, anti-gay zealots, black separatists, racist skinheads, neo-Confederates and more."

Below: A now-removed page from SPLCenter.org labeling Ben Carson as an anti-LGBT extremist. Image courtesy of legalinsurrection.com



[Home](#) » [Get Informed](#) » [Extremist Files](#) » [Profiles](#)

Ben Carson



Date of Birth: 1951
Location: Detroit, Mich.
Ideology: [Anti-LGBT](#)

Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson rapidly ascended as a far-right political star after publicly scolding President Obama, whom he sat a few feet away from, at a National Prayer Breakfast in February 2013. Carson's reproach of Obama for his health care and tax policies went viral, unleashing a flood of adulation from right-wing media and hate groups. Carson's own story as an "up by the bootstraps" black man reared in poverty translated into an inspiring, magnetic narrative that captured media attention.



Ben Carson

FEDERATION FOR AMERICAN IMMIGRATION REFORM

Unlike many other individuals and organizations maliciously labeled by the SPLC, Carson had [powerful allies who rallied to his defense](#), and four months after being placed on the list Extremist Watch List, he was off with an apology from the SPLC. In a statement now scrubbed from its website [the SPLC wrote](#), "In October 2014, we posted an 'Extremist File' of Dr. Ben Carson. This week, as we've come under intense criticism for doing so, we've reviewed our profile and have concluded that it did not meet our standards, so we have taken it down and apologize to Dr. Carson for having posted it."

Labels have consequences

As Maajid Nawaz warned when he made his decision to take legal action against the SPLC, “These people are putting me on what I believe is a hit list.” Nawaz’s fears were not unfounded. Four years earlier, on August 15, 2012, Floyd Lee Corkins walked into the Washington, D.C., headquarters of the Family Research Council (FRC) with the intent of murdering as many of the organization’s employees as he could. Fortunately, Corkins was stopped by an alert security guard before carrying out his attempt at mass murder. The security guard, Leo Johnson, was shot three times, but survived the attack.

The FRC was and remains on the SPLC’s list of hate groups. “Together, the Family Research Council (FRC) and the American Family Association (AFA) may comprise the most important anti-gay lobby in this country. Since 2006, the FRC has hosted the Values Voter Summit, an annual conference for social conservatives that attracts numerous public figures,” [the SPLC stated in its 2011 listing of the FRC](#). Ironically, a few paragraphs later, the SPLC added the statement “Words have consequences,” as part of its justification for labeling the FRC as a hate group.

Indeed, words did have tragic consequences. Corkins pled guilty to committing an act of terrorism in 2013. “Corkins -- who **had chosen the research council as his target after finding it listed as an anti-gay group on the website of the Southern Poverty Law Center** -- had planned to stride into the building and open fire on the people inside in an effort to kill as many as possible, he told investigators, according to the court documents,” [reported CNN](#). (Emphasis added.)

Whatever one might think of the FRC’s views on homosexuality, as *The Washington Post*’s Dana Milbank (who is among those who disagrees strongly with the FRC), asserted, they do not belong in the same list with the likes of the Klan. In the aftermath of the shooting the SPLC issued a [terse three-sentence statement](#), generally “condemn[ing] all acts of violence,” and have nothing more to say about whether their own words have consequences.

Conclusion

It is Journalistically Unethical to Cite the SPLC’s “Hate Group” Label without Independent Corroboration

None of the enormous volume and diverse criticism of the SPLC’s motives and tactics represents an affirmative defense that the groups on the SPLC’s list are not hate groups. It does however, establish an affirmative responsibility on the part of journalists to corroborate independently whether the charges have any merit. Reporting the SPLC’s accusations uncritically amounts to journalistic malpractice, writes Mark Pulliam in the [Manhattan Institute’s City Journal](#):

The SPLC’s spurious imprimatur gives mere calumny gravitas, allowing liberal journalists to wield its highly charged judgments as a weapon, citing it as if it were a dispassionate authority. Many liberal (or merely lazy) journalists discredit conservative organizations by noting that they are ‘listed by the SPLC as a hate group,’ treating its often dubious designations as gospel truth.”

Nor is it acceptable to empower any unaccountable organization (even one with a much better reputation than the SPLC) to determine whose opinions and research deserves to be part of the political debate and whose views should be banished from the public square. Such power is dangerous in the hands of the government, which is why our nation’s founders enshrined freedom of speech and political expression in the First Amendment to the Constitution. It is no less dangerous in the hands of self-appointed watchdogs whose dictates are uncritically parroted by a free press whose mission is to seek out the truth.

Before citing the SPLC’s “hate group” designations, reporters should be mindful of the ethical standards set forth by their own professional associations that require due diligence:

- That the journalist makes a good faith effort, based on an independent evaluation of the preponderance of evidence, that the individuals or organizations accused by the SPLC objectively meet the definition of a hate group or engage in hate speech.
- That any citation of an SPLC designation must include mention of the fact that the name-callers have been called names themselves, by

scholars and journalists who have no vested interest in discrediting the SPLC. It should be a professional obligation of journalists to disclose that the SPLC's motives, methods, and tactics have been widely criticized by scholars and journalists from across the political spectrum.

- That the SPLC is an unaccountable entity with a clearly evident ideological viewpoint that establishes their own arbitrary standards for designating organizations and individuals as agents of hatred.
- Merely seeking a response from the accused party does not constitute journalistic fairness. The accusation is always more powerful than the denial – which is exactly why the SPLC does what it does. Moreover, it places those who are falsely accused in a position of having to prove a negative. How does one prove that they are not hateful?

If these independent corroborations cannot be met, and if these disclosures regarding the SPLC are not mentioned alongside the accusations, the citations of the SPLC's designations constitute a clear violation of journalistic ethics.

APPENDIX I:

The Truth about FAIR

The Federation for American Immigration Reform was founded in 1979 and is the nation's oldest and largest organization advocating on behalf of the public interest in U.S. immigration policy. For 40 years, FAIR has advocated for immigration policies that are legal, limited, and do not discriminate for or against prospective immigrants based on matters of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or other immutable characteristics.

FAIR draws a clear distinction between *immigrants* and *immigration policy*. The former are human beings who must always be treated with respect and dignity. Treating all people respectfully, however, does not preclude holding them accountable when they violate our immigration laws, or advocating for a more limited and merit-based standard for admission.

The latter is a public policy. Like all public policies, immigration policy exists to promote the national interest and the primary constituency for these laws and policies is the American people. And, like any other public policy, there should be open and respectful debate about how to best serve the interests of the nation and project our values. Any objective assessment of FAIR's 40-year record of advocacy would conclude that FAIR engages in civil and legitimate advocacy.

Journalists who know FAIR and cover immigration dismiss the SPLC's charges.

FAIR has been a designated "hate group" by the SPLC since 2007, after our group was instrumental in defeating immigration legislation we believed was detrimental to the interests of the nation. Public interest groups working to rally public support or opposition to legislation is both a time-honored tradition and a guaranteed right under the Constitution.

From the outset, journalists and producers who cover immigration policy on a regular basis have dismissed the SPLC's designation of FAIR as being utterly without merit. Since that original designation FAIR has:

- Appeared on more than 5,000 radio broadcasts.
- Carried out nearly 4,000 interviews with print and online journalists.
- Appeared on more than 1,300 TV news reports.

(For the record, we keep a log.) Moreover, these news media appearances have included virtually every notable media outlet in the United States and prominent foreign news organizations. In addition, FAIR has published hundreds of opinion pieces, on all aspects of immigration policy, in leading print and online journals.

It is virtually inconceivable that so many journalists and news organizations would rely on FAIR for information and expert commentary if there was even a shred credible evidence that the SPLC accusations had any merit.

FAIR testifies regularly before Congress and state and local legislative bodies.

Since its inception in 1979, FAIR representatives have testified before Congress on more than a hundred occasions on all aspects of immigration policy. Invitations to testify have been made by congressional committees chaired by both Republicans and Democrats.

FAIR also maintains working relationships with members of Congress and congressional committee staffs. Members of Congress and oversight committees regularly request information and input from FAIR.

FAIR has also built relationships with state and local legislators who confront immigration related issues in their communities. Our state and local legislative department provides requested information and advice to lawmakers at the state, county, and city levels, and regularly testifies before those bodies.

FAIR also works with local law enforcement departments, including a close working relationship with hundreds of the nation's elected sheriffs.

FAIR is regularly invited to address civic, religious, and educational forums on immigration policy.

Despite the malicious SPLC designation, FAIR representatives continue to be invited to appear as speakers or panelists to discuss all matters of immigration. These invitations are extended by major universities, religious

institutions, community civic groups, and political organizations.

These groups that seek out FAIR – many of which disagree with the organization’s positions – do so because FAIR engages in rational and respectful discourse on very difficult contemporary issues. The fact that FAIR continues to receive such invitation is evidence that those who fairly assess FAIR’s record quickly dismiss the SPLC’s allegations.

The preponderance of evidence suggests that the SPLC’s ongoing effort to discredit FAIR and other groups that support immigration enforcement and reductions is entirely motivated by a desire to stifle legitimate public debate about an important national issue.

APPENDIX II:

A Note to Journalists

Professional journalists are understandably wary about attempts to use them to attack opponents or otherwise disseminate misinformation. Because of the media's unique ability to reach so many people, the Society of Professional Journalists has established a Code of Ethics to protect members of the media from those sorts of abuse. Below are several principles that should be considered when journalists are confronted with allegations about FAIR.

1. Test the accuracy of the information. Founded in 1979, FAIR has a long, public record of advocacy on immigration policy. FAIR has compiled thousands of media appearances; published hundreds of opinion pieces in newspapers, magazines and online; published hundreds of research studies on virtually every aspect of immigration policy; testified more than a hundred times before Congress and state legislatures; and made hundreds of presentations before academic, civic, religious and political organizations. With such an extensive public record, the accuracy of the charges leveled against FAIR can be easily tested by any journalist who cares to make the effort.
2. Diligently seek out subjects to respond to allegations. FAIR is an easily accessible organization. But the ethical requirement goes beyond merely seeking out a response from FAIR. Under the profession's ethical code, the publication or broadcast of an accusation followed by a denial is appropriate only if the journalist has independently tested the accuracy of the underlying accusation and found it to have merit. "He said, she said," falls within the realm of gossip, not responsible journalism. The accusation is inherently more powerful than the pro forma denial.
3. Always question sources' motives. The motives of both the SPLC and the organizations quoting the SPLC are plainly transparent. The organizations attacking FAIR have clearly defined political agendas that, by their own admission, are being thwarted by FAIR. The SPLC has a documented history of misrepresenting facts for the purpose of raising money. Those goals and motives must be evaluated by any journalist reporting on the accusations made against FAIR.

4. Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. The act of accusing an opponent of being a “hate group” clearly falls into the realm of advocacy. The SPLC does not use objective criteria when making this determination. Reporting accusations, even if they are attributed to a source, is not inherently “news reporting” if the source has an overt political or hidden agenda that is being advanced by the publication or broadcast of the accusation.

No legitimate journalist who has carried out these four basic professional responsibilities has independently concluded that there is evidence to support the designation of FAIR as a “hate group.” Therefore, including allegations in news stories or broadcasts made by individuals or organizations promoting a political agenda is a clear violation of the professional journalists’ code of ethics, even if they include a statement of denial from FAIR.

APPENDIX III:

Further Reading

This is a list of articles and reports detailing the SPLC's questionable tactics and motives. (All of these were located with a simple Google search.) These critiques appear in a politically and ideologically diverse range of publications, but all reach the same conclusion: **The SPLC is NOT a credible source.**

[Watching the Watchdogs](#), Dan Morse, *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 16, 1994 (Part of a series of article about the operations, tactics, and fundraising activities of the SPLC.)

Of 13 black former center staffers contacted, 12 said they either experienced or observed racial problems inside the Law Center. Three said they heard racial slurs, three likened the center to a plantation and two said they had been treated better at predominantly white corporate law firms. Three said the treatment was no worse than other places they have worked...Charles Ogletree, a black Harvard Law School professor who knows blacks who've had negative experiences at the center, said he no longer recommends his students take internships there.

[Attacking a Hometown Icon](#), Transcript of remarks at Harvard University's Niemann Center by James Tharp, former editor at the *Montgomery Advertiser* regarding the paper's expose on the SPLC, May 1999.

We also found some questionable fundraising tactics. One of the most celebrated cases the center handled was the case of a young black man, Michael Donald, who was killed by Klansmen in Mobile, Alabama, and his body suspended from a tree, a very grotesque killing...The center, after that part of the case took place, sued the Klan organization to which they belonged and won a \$7 million verdict. It was a very celebrated verdict in this country. The problem was the people who killed this kid didn't have any money.

[The Church of Morris Dees](#), Ken Silverstein, *Harper's*, November 2000.

Morris Dees doesn't need your financial support. The SPLC is already the wealthiest civil rights group in America, though this letter quite naturally omits that fact. Other solicitations have been more flagrantly misleading. One pitch, sent out in 1995-when the Center had more than \$60 million in

reserves-informed would-be donors that the “strain on our current operating budget is the greatest in our 25-year history.”

[“Hate,” Immigration, and the Southern Poverty Law Center](#), Ken Silverstein, *Harper’s*, March 22, 2010

For the record, I am totally opposed to Center for Immigration Studies’ stance on immigration...I also agreed to the invitation because, much like CIS, I feel that the Law Center is essentially a fraud and that it has a habit of casually labeling organizations as “hate groups.”

[The Southern Poverty Business Model](#), Ken Silverstein, *Harper’s* (blog site), November 2, 2007

(Reprint of letter by noted civil rights attorney Stephen Bright to the dean of the University of Alabama Law School):

I also received the law school’s invitation to the presentation of the “Morris Dees Justice Award,” which you also mentioned in your letter as one of the “great things” happening at the law school. I decline that invitation for another reason. Morris Dees [founder of the SPLC] is a con man and fraud, as I and others, such as U.S. Circuit Judge Cecil Poole, have observed and as has been documented by John Egerton, *Harper’s*, the *Montgomery Advertiser* in its “Charity of Riches” series, and others.

[The State of Hate: Researchers at the Southern Poverty Law Center have set themselves up as the ultimate judges of hate in America. But are they judging fairly?](#), David Montgomery, *The Washington Post*, November 8, 2018

The SPLC’s stated goal is to create an unbiased hate list, but forays into political activism by other parts of the organization could certainly hurt the list’s reputation. For the first time, the SPLC recently took a stand on a Supreme Court nomination, urging Alabama’s senators to vote against Brett M. Kavanaugh. It also just formed a political arm called the SPLC Action Fund that can lobby and support ballot measures.

[Has a Civil Rights Stalwart Lost Its Way?](#), Ben Schreckinger, *Politico Magazine*, July/August 2017

The SPLC’s hate group and extremist labels are effective. Groups slapped with them have lost funding, been targeted by activists and generally been banished from mainstream legitimacy. This makes SPLC the *de facto* cop in this realm of American politics, with all the friction that kind of policing engenders...William Jacobson, a law professor at Cornell and critic of the SPLC, says the group has wrapped itself in the mantle of the civil rights struggle to engage in partisan political crusading. “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,” he says. “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,” Jacobson adds.

[The Southern Poverty Law Center: Anti-Hate Activists, Slick Marketers or Both?](#), Ben Schreckinger interviewed on NPR’s On the Media, September 7, 2017

When you talk to people who track hate groups professionally, track extremism professionally, they do lament the fact that there is not a more neutral watchdog organization than the SPLC, that the SPLC has sort of cornered the market on monitoring extremism and monitoring hate groups in the United States, because they feel that they can’t always take what they get from the SPLC at face value... From my perspective as a journalist and as someone who’s watching the political scene, it’s the questions about their political motivation that are most relevant, that make it problematic to rely on them as a source and to wonder about the broader effect they may be having on the political discourse and the polarization we’re seeing in the country.

[Some People Love to Call Names](#), Karl Zinsmeister, *Philanthropy Quarterly*

Taking people and groups with political views different from your own and lumping them with villains and gangsters is the mark of a bullying organization that aims to intimidate and even criminalize philosophical opponents. Paradoxically, the SPLC’s tactics lead directly to incendiary hate and violence—as was demonstrated by the Family Research Council shooting, and again in March when Charles Murray attempted a presentation at Middlebury College about his bestselling book *Coming Apart*.

[12 Ways The Southern Poverty Law Center Is a Scam to Profit From Hate-Mongering](#), Stella Morabito, *The Federalist*, May 17, 2017

What makes the hate list of the Southern Poverty Law Center different from the “burn book” a high school queen bee keeps in the 2004 movie “Mean Girls”? Answer: not much. The burn book was a compilation of insults, gossip, and rumors intended to repel the diva’s “enemies,” label everybody, and keep herself on top of the heap. The SPLC uses its list of designated hate groups in much the same way: to manipulate the lives of others, smear reputations, control personal relationships, and reap the spoils. The dynamic is the same, whether played on the adolescent scene or in the political arena. Both lists serve mostly as power-mongering tools.

[King of the Hate Business](#), Alexander Cockburn, *The Nation*, April 29, 2009

What is the arch salesman of hatemongering, Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center, going to do now? Ever since 1971, US Postal Service mailbags have bulged with his fundraising letters, scaring dollars out of the pockets of trembling liberals aghast at his lurid depictions of a hate-sodden America in dire need of legal confrontation by the SPLC... But where are the haters? That hardy old standby, the Ku Klux Klan, despite the SPLC's predictable howls about an uptick in its chapters, is a moth-eaten and depleted troupe, with at least 10 percent of its members on the government payroll as informants for the FBI.

[A New Blacklist from the Southern Poverty Law Center Marks the Demise of a Once-Vital Organization](#), Lee Smith, *Tablet*, October 30, 2016

Where the SPLC was once able to win legal battles through careful, often dangerous research that could stand up in court, the organization now identifies the Center for Security Policy, a hawkish right-wing think tank, as a hate group, right alongside the Ku Klux Klan. Where the organization once pushed for freedom for all regardless of race or creed, now it aims to silence those whose opinions it finds objectionable. In doing so, it makes it hard for any impartial observer to place much confidence in future claims about groups and individuals that may actually be dangerous.

[A Demagogic Bully: The Southern Poverty Law Center demonizes respectable political opponents as “hate groups”—and keeps its coffers bulging](#), Mark Pulliam, *City Journal*, July 27, 2017

H.L. Mencken described the secret of successful demagoguery as “keep-[ing] the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by an endless series of hobgoblins, most of them imaginary.” Mencken was referring to “practical politics,” but his insight is equally applicable to public relations and fundraising campaigns trafficking in extravagant claims. For the past 40 years, a self-styled watchdog group, the Southern Poverty Law Center, has excelled in promoting such unwarranted alarm, with a politicized series of hobgoblins, in the process amassing a fortune from its credulous donors.

[King of Fear Mongers](#), Charlotte Allen, *The Weekly Standard*, April 15, 2013

CharityWatch (formerly the American Institute of Philanthropy), an independent organization that monitors and rates leading nonprofits for their fundraising efficiency, has consistently given the SPLC its lowest grade of “F” (i.e., “poor”) for its stockpiling of assets far beyond what CharityWatch deems a reasonable reserve (three years' worth of operating expenses) to tide it over during donation-lean years. But even if the SPLC weren't sitting

on an unspent \$256 million, according to CharityWatch, it would still be a mediocre (“C+”) performer among nonprofits.

[Seven Reasons to Beware the Southern Poverty Law Center](#), Carol Swain, *American Thinker*, February 7, 2018

The SPLC uses guilt by association to engage in *ad hominem* attacks against individuals.

Hannah Scherlacher, a Campus Reform worker, found [her name listed](#) in the SPLC’s “Anti-LGBT Roundup of Events and Activities” after the conservative Family Research Council interviewed her. Surprisingly, Scherlacher’s interview had nothing to do with LGBT issues. In 2009, soon after I [criticized](#) the SPLC for having mission creep, it labeled me [“an apologist for white supremacy.”](#)

[The Southern Poverty Law Center: A Reliably Dubious Source](#), Eric Rozenman, Jewish Policy Center, December 17, 2017

Is SPLC a reliable source on bigotry and hatred in the United States, a money-raising machine, or combination of both? Does it rigorously define and uncompromisingly expose prejudiced individuals and groups, or conflate them with the center’s political opponents? Due diligence by journalists seems to be required.

Additional criticisms of the SPLC:

[Southern Poverty Law Center Smears Me](#), Ed Whelan, *National Review*, September 21, 2017

[Southern Poverty Law Center Transfers Millions in Cash to Offshore Entities](#), *The Washington Free Beacon*, August 31, 2017

[‘Red Flag’ Report: Media’s Favorite ‘Hate Group’ Watchdog SPLC Transfers MILLIONS To Offshore Investments](#), James Barrett, *The Daily Wire*, August 31, 2017

[The Southern Poverty Law Center Has \\$69 Million Parked Overseas](#), Jeryl Bier, *The Weekly Standard*, September 6, 2017

[Occupy the Southern Poverty Law Center](#), Charles C.W., *National Review*, May 4, 2012

[Essentially a Fraud](#), Kyle Smith, *National Review*, August 23, 2018

[New Report Accuses Amazon of Not Doing Enough to Curb Hate Groups and recommends that the e-commerce giant listen instead to the discredited Southern Poverty Law Center](#), Liel Leibovitz, *Tablet*, July 10, 2018

[How Did Maajid Nawaz End Up on a List of ‘Anti-Muslim Extremists’?](#), David A. Graham, *The Atlantic*, October 29, 2016

[Southern Poverty Law Center Gets Creative to Label ‘Hate Groups’: Principled conservatives are lumped together with bigots](#), Megan McArdle, Bloomberg News, September 7, 2017

[You Can’t Get There from Here](#), JoAnn Wypijewski, *The National*, February 8, 2001

[The Southern Poverty Law Center Surrenders Unconditionally to Maajid Nawaz. We Should Be Concerned](#), Ken White, Popehat.com June 18, 2018

[The Southern Poverty Law Center Scam: A “hate group” list loved by the media is bogus](#), John Stossel and Maxim Lott, *Reason*, January 16, 2018

[The sad hysteria of the Southern Poverty Law Center](#), Shikha Dalmia, *The Week*, March 20, 2018

[The Bad Hate the Good: The Southern Policy Law Center vs. Prager University](#), Dennis Prager, Real Clear Politics, June 19, 2018

[Critics: SPLC targets, demonizes conservative groups](#), Philip Lucas, *Associated Press*, February 18, 2016

[Dana Milbank: Hateful speech on hate groups](#), Dana Milbank, *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2012

[Dozens of groups considering lawsuits against the SPLC in wake of settlement](#), HotAir.com, John Sexton, June 19, 2018

[The Washington Post exposes giant, well-funded hate group](#), *The Colorado Springs Gazette* editorial board, Nov 14, 2018

[Hate groups watchdog has Mount St. Michael on list, North Idaho human rights activist, rabbi surprised](#), *The Spokesman-Review*, Jim Camden, March 9, 2013