

Media Jump to Smear Right with Extremist Label

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The arrests on March 28 and 29 of nine people associated with the so-called Hutaree Militia in Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio have provided media commentators and reporters with an opportunity to broadly smear all political conservatives, constitutionalists, Tea Party activists, and opponents of President Obama's health care as "extremist" and "anti-government."

The Michigan-based Hutaree Militia members are charged in a federal indictment with conspiring to murder a police officer and then intending to use the officer's funeral as an opportunity to kill more law enforcement officers. Predictably many reporters and commentators have turned to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) for "expert" perspective on the arrests, and the SPLC has been only too ready to spin the story as proof of their contention that the greatest danger to our republic is "anti-government" extremism by "right-wing" organizations the SPLC likes to identify as "hate groups."

The problem is the SPLC is notorious for falsely labeling groups it disagrees with — especially Christian groups, pro-life organizations, and constitutionalists — as being racist, homophobic, anti-semitic, anti-government, anti-immigrant, nativist, extremist, hate-promoting, and intolerant. It is also infamous for employing the "sandwich smear," in which it reports on the nefarious statements and/or activities of some genuine hate groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, or the Nazi Party, while also making reference to innocent, law-abiding organizations in such a way as to smear and discredit them by false association.

The SPLC, which operates as a principal front for the militant homosexual lobby, has been especially vicious in attacking Christian organizations opposed to homosexual marriage and special privileges for homosexuals. This side of the Southern Poverty Law Center became especially apparent in 2008, when the [SPLC submitted a brief](#) calling on the California Supreme Court to overturn the Proposition 8 ballot initiative banning same-sex marriage (the initiative had been overwhelmingly approved by California voters).

Of course, the SPLC has been attacking the "Christian Right" for years, leveling the [sandwich smear](#) on such respected Christian and pro-family organizations as Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family, the late Rev. D. James Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries/Center for Reclaiming America, and Beverly LaHaye's Concerned Women for America, as well as the Alliance Defense Fund, the American Family Association, the Chalcedon Foundation, American Vision, the Christian Action Network, the Family Research Council, Summit Ministries, and the Traditional Values Coalition.

Peter LaBarbera of the Christian ministry, Americans for Truth About Homosexuality (AFTAH), takes on the SPLC [here](#), for its false attacks on his organization as a hate group. And conservative Jewish activist and columnist Don Feder of [Jews Against Anti-Christian Defamation](#) exposes "The Never-ending Fraud of the Southern Poverty Law Center" in a column

[here](#).

Matt Barber, an attorney concentrating in constitutional law and the Director of Liberty Counsel, writes (in "[Southern Poverty Law Center Officially Declared 'Left-Wing Hate Group'](#)") that, "like any bully, the SPLC only goes after those it believes it can push around."

"But really," says Barber, "it confers a badge of honor upon every legitimate Christian and conservative organization it so disingenuously mislabels 'hate group.' It's a tacit admission by the SPLC that these groups represent a political threat; that their activities undermine the SPLC's not-so-thinly-veiled, left-wing agenda."

Critics of the SPLC are not restricted to ideologues of the "far right" or the "Christian right," as the SPLC might prefer to have us believe. In fact, the SPLC and its founder, Morris Dees, have been severely chastised by some media "liberals," and even some on the far left of the political spectrum, mostly for the SPLC's wild exaggerations of the "right-wing threat" in order to raise millions of dollars.

This dark side of the SPLC is ably aired by *Harper's* Ken Silverstein in a 2000 article entitled, "The Church of Morris Dees: How the Southern Poverty Law Center profits from intolerance" (see [here](#), and for a Silverstein update, see [here](#)).

Longtime Marxist Alexander Cockburn, writing in *The Nation*, a far-left magazine, calls Morris Dees "the archsalesman of hatemongering," in an article last year entitled "[King of the Hate Business](#)."

Yet another SPLC critic is writer and researcher Laird Wilcox, nationally renowned for his studies of fringe political and subversive movements for more than four decades. He has established the impressive Wilcox Collection of Contemporary Political Movements at the University of Kansas, an extensive collection of books, video and audio tapes, pamphlets, files, clippings and periodicals. He is longtime member of the ACLU and Amnesty International and has received a number of awards from organizations that many would label as liberal. However, like many others who have closely scrutinized the SPLC, he has found the organization to be guilty of the very "hate" it alleges against many of the groups it targets. In fact, he charges SPLC with unjustly tarring "their ideological opponents, which includes a wide range of organizations and individuals who have nothing to do with racism." This can even be life-threatening, he notes, because police officers may over-react to a bumper sticker or other "indicator" based on false or exaggerated information provided by SPLC. In his 1999 book, [The Watchdogs: A close look at Anti-Racist 'Watchdog' Groups](#), Wilcox ominously charges:

By alleging "dangerousness" on the basis of mere assumed values, opinions and beliefs, they put entirely innocent citizens at risk from law enforcement error and misconduct.

With the SPLC largely discredited by its own record of partisanship and extremism disguised as "research," it is amazing that its publications and spokespersons can still manage to be quoted as authoritative sources. Alas, whether due to laziness or sharing the same leftist ideology, many in the media continue uncritically to quote SPLC pronouncements as if they are gospel. That was

the case when WLUK Fox 11, the local Fox TV affiliate in Appleton, Wisconsin, decided to do a "newscast" regarding the recent Hutaree Militia arrests.

A video clip of the local [Fox broadcast](#) appears on the station's website, in a piece entitled, "SPLC: WI home to militia-related groups — Warning comes after Hutaree arrests."

The text of the Fox 11 web article closely parallels the narrative of the video news clip, but is slightly different.

"The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) says Wisconsin is home to several militia-related groups," begins the online story by Lou Hillman. "The warning comes after nine suspects tied to a Christian militia in the Midwest were charged with conspiring against law enforcement," it continues.

"The FBI tells FOX 11 it does not believe Hutaree has connections to Wisconsin," Hillman admits, but then goes on to say, "but those who study militia groups say it is a definite possibility."

Hillman then quotes SPLC "researcher" Heidi Beirich, who warns about the 13 "patriot groups" the SPLC has identified in Wisconsin.

"These are extreme anti-government groups, they're not para-military but they believe the same kinds of things," Beirich says of the "patriot" groups.

The Fox 11 report continues:

One of the Wisconsin organizations identified as a "patriot" group is the John Birch Society in Grand Chute.

"They are probably one of the number one organizations that provide the conspiracy theories that fuel the anti-government world," said Beirich.

The group, however, says its goal is to help protect people's independence and freedom. Although, CEO Arthur Thompson admits the group's literature and website are popular among active militia groups. "A lot of times they use it to recruit with but that doesn't mean we support their policies of how they want to implement what they believe in. We believe in a lot of things but we don't believe in coercion or violence to promote what we believe in," said Thompson.

The Fox 11 article followed Thompson's quote with a couple lines about the Posse Comitatus, a sometimes-violent group of the 1960s and 70s that had no relationship to the Birch Society. Then the report concludes with a Beirich "anti-government" quote that many viewers and readers may have been led to believe applied to the Society. The report states:

"They hate the government and when I say hate, I mean, they're talking about revolution," said Beirich.

Beirich says the militia-related groups feel the federal government is enemy number one.

In this sly (or sloppy, if we give Fox 11 "credit" for being careless, rather than malicious) sandwich smear, Hillman uses the SPLC's undefined term "patriot group" and weasel words like "a definite possibility" and "they," along with close textual proximity to associate the JBS with hate groups accused of wanting to kill police and foment violent revolution.

Half a Century of Promoting Freedom

The John Birch Society, which celebrated the [50th anniversary](#) of its founding in 2008, with several days of festivities and conferences in Appleton, is a patriotic, educational organization dedicated to restoring and preserving limited, constitutional government, free enterprise, and Christian-style civilization.

Since the JBS strongly supports the U.S. Constitution and urges its members to study it and apply it when evaluating legislation and candidates for public office, and when communicating with elected officials, it can hardly be honestly described as "anti-government." Echoing the antipathy of America's Founding Fathers toward invasive, oppressive government, the [John Birch Society's motto](#) is: "Less government, more responsibility, and — with God's help — a better world."

An especially irresponsible aspect of the Fox 11 piece is the inference (whether intended or not) that there may be some connection between the Birch Society and the Hutaree plot to murder police officers. This slander would be laughable if it were not so serious. Any reporter exercising due diligence would quickly discover that back in 1963 the JBS launched its [Support Your Local Police \(SYLP\) campaign](#) with the goal of keeping police departments under local control and resisting the efforts, even then, of merging and centralizing law enforcement into a national police force, which is a hallmark of dictatorship. Here is another recent JBS/SYLP [link](#). (Clue to Fox 11: simply type "police" and "Birch Society" in your Internet search engine and you will soon have ample proof that JBS has continued its SYLP program. In fact, an article by this author last year specifically addressing this issue entitled, "[Terrorist Targeting of Police](#)," in *The New American*, an affiliate of The John Birch Society, pointed out that terrorist attacks on police are a prescription of the communists taken from their handbooks, such as the *Mini-Manual of the Urban Guerilla* by Carlos Marighella.)

The John Birch Society continues to support local police as one of the major checks and balances provided in our constitutional system of government, and there is nothing in its more than 50 years of existence to suggest that it has ever endorsed, encouraged, promoted or tolerated any ideas or plans for illegal or immoral acts, let alone violent and deadly attacks upon the police. Reports that insinuate otherwise, in the words of Mr. Wilcox, "put entirely innocent citizens at risk from law enforcement error and misconduct."

If Mr. Hillman and Fox 11 did not, and do not, intend to put innocent citizens at risk, then they bear the onus of correcting their dangerous mischaracterization of an honorable organization and making sure it does not happen again.

Since its founding, The John Birch Society has always opposed racism, anti-Semitism,

communism, socialism, fascism, and Nazism — all of which are forms of collectivism that seek to deny the God-given rights of a person based on group traits of race, color, creed, or socio-economic class. Members of the Birch Society are staunch *individualists* and believe in judging each person as an individual based on his or her character, not according to collectivist notions of "groupthink" and judging people according to benign group characteristics.

However, that has not stopped liberal-left critics from falsely accusing the Society of these things. In so doing these critics have adopted the tactics developed by the Communist Party of smearing their opponents rather than honestly debating them on the issues.

As far back as 1943, a Communist Party directive had instructed members under communist discipline about methods to use in combating critics. As quoted by the 1956 *Report of the House Committee on Un-American Activities* (volume 1, page 347), here in part is what the directive said:

Members and front organizations must continually embarrass, discredit and degrade our critics.... When obstructionists become too irritating, label them as fascist or Nazi or anti-Semitic.... Constantly associate those who oppose us with those names that already have a bad smell. The association will, after enough repetition, become "fact" in the public mind.

Those were the Stalinist years of communism, but it was not only hard-core, card-carrying Communist Party members who heeded Stalin's call; many fellow travelers and "liberals" gladly embraced the smear tactic as well.

For many years The John Birch Society bore the brunt of such attacks, but today many other constitutionalist, conservative, pro-family, pro-life, pro-marriage, pro-Second Amendment organizations are also being subjected to the same keelhauling by professional propagandists of the Stalinist variety — and their media enablers who aid and abet the defamation.

Members of liberal-left organizations and their allies in the media claim to be the standard bearers of the First Amendment when arguing to protect the "rights" of pornographers to publish smut, broadcasters and entertainers to scream profanity, and communists to advocate sedition and subversion. However, many of the same "standard bearers" are in the forefront of the efforts to eviscerate the First Amendment — and all other constitutional protections — for those with whom they disagree, by falsely applying the "hate group" and "anti-government" labels to them. In so doing, they not only violate the rights of those whom they directly attack but they also diminish and endanger the rights of all Americans.

Related content:

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[Homeland Security: Everyone's a Threat](#)

[Profiling and Criminalizing Political Dissent](#)

Photo: Trailers on property belonging to David Brian Stone, the leader of Hutaree, the day after an FBI raid in Clayton, Mich.: AP Image

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