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Hate Crime - Who Decides?

by Pete Edwards

In late March, Cleveland experienced the defacing of two properties with graffiti containing racial slurs. One of the houses was owned by a woman in her eighties. Leaders and citizens throughout the com-

munity condemned the vandalism as the act of sick individuals. A reward of up to \$1,000 was offered for leads to catch the culprits and local groups have stepped forward with help to remove the offensive graffiti.

Although the individuals

responsible have not been identified before going to press, it has been reported that they should be prosecuted for a hate crime. According to a report released by the Southern Poverty Law Center, hate groups operating in the US rose to 888 last year. Nationally, hate groups

have increased in the United States by as much as 48% since 2000.

On their website www.splcenter.org it says; "The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) was founded in 1971 as a small civil rights law firm. Today, SPLC is internationally known for its tolerance education programs, its legal victories against white supremacists and its tracking of hate groups. In 1981, the Southern Poverty Law Center began investigating hate activity in response to a resurgence of groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Today the SPLC Intelligence Project monitors hate groups and tracks extremist activity throughout the U.S. It provides comprehensive updates to law enforcement, the media and the public through its quarterly magazine, *Intelligence Report*. Staff members regularly conduct training sessions for police, schools, and civil rights and community groups, and they often serve as experts at hearings and conferences.

To combat the causes of hate, SPLC in 1991 established *Teaching Tolerance*, an educational program to help K-12 teachers foster respect and understanding in the classroom. Teaching Tolerance is now one of the nation's leading providers of anti-bias resources – both in print and online. Its award-winning magazine is distributed free twice a year to more than 500,000 educators, and its innovative multimedia kits are provided at no charge to thousands of schools and community groups."

Critics of the organization have said they distort findings and include any group they dislike. Writer Vadum, Matthew in his article "Southern Poverty Law Center Pushes Twisted Definition of 'Hate'" http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3827/is_200612/ai_n17196123 says.

"The SPLC understands the importance of language. It fights what it labels "hate," "intolerance" and "discrimination," but it defines those terms very differently than most Americans would. To the center, you practice "hate" whenever you fail to genuflect with politically correct reverence before every human difference. In the SPLC's world, armies of the night are forever on the march. Cross-burnings, lynchings and rampant racial discrimination are omnipresent. Those who question the SPLC's approach to race are blacklisted as contemptible bigots.

The center lumps all sorts of groups on America's political right together, labeling them enemies of the Republic. Conservative, libertarian, anti-tax, immigration reductionist and other groups are all viewed as legitimate targets for vilification."

One group SPLC has labeled as a hate group is Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) who describe themselves as:

"Headquartered on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., FAIR is the largest, oldest and most respected immigration reform group in America. With over 250,000 mem-

bers, FAIR advocates for non-discriminatory immigration polices that protect American jobs, wages, the environment, and national security. As a bipartisan organization free from special interest influence, FAIR is regularly sought by Congress and the media for its objective analysis and for its fair, practical and effective policy solutions."

In a press release FAIR said under the heading, "*The Southern Poverty Law Center Manipulates Crime Data and Terminology in Last-Ditch Attempt to Stop the Immigration Debate*," "the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) issued a misleading release announcing a significant increase in the number of hate groups and hate crimes over the last few years. The release then suggests that our national debate over immigration reform has fueled the increase in both. Offering no criteria as to what constitutes a hate group, manipulating the data for self-serving purposes, and then making broad, unsubstantiated conclusions, this latest release from the SPLC constitutes one of its most reckless charges to date. It is calculated to be inflammatory, tarnish the reputation of leading immigration reform groups, and shut down meaningful public policy debate about immigration reform."

www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?ACCT=104&STORY=/www/story/03-09-2008/0004770324



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