

47 Nonprofits Warn Google, Facebook, Twitter, Netflix and Amazon: You're Complicit In SPLC's 'Hate Group' Defamation

"...anyone relying upon and repeating its misrepresentations is complicit in the SPLC's harmful defamation..."

 Richard Cohen, President of the Southern Poverty Law Center, speaking at a press conference November 29, 2016 in Washington, DC. Photo by Wiley McNamee/Getty Images

By JAMES BARRETT

In a joint statement published Wednesday, dozens of leaders of nonprofits who are banding together for a potential defamation lawsuit against the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) warned that those who rely on and repeat the "misrepresentations" of the left-wing organization are "complicit" in its defamation of American citizens.

"Editors, CEOs, shareholders and consumers alike are on notice: anyone relying upon and repeating its misrepresentations is complicit in the SPLC's harmful

defamation of large numbers of American citizens who, like the undersigned, have been vilified simply for working to protect our country and freedoms," the leaders wrote.

As PJ Media's Tyler O'Neil reported on Tuesday, following the SPLC's \$3.375 million defamation settlement with Maajid Nawaz and his Quilliam Foundation, at least 60 nonprofits similarly maligned by the partisan organization are now considering a class action lawsuit against the self-styled "hate group watchdog."

On Wednesday, leaders of at least 47 of those groups issued the following joint statement:

JOINT STATEMENT BY ORGANIZATIONS DEFAMED BY THE
SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

We, the undersigned, are among the organizations, groups and individuals that the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has maligned, defamed and otherwise harmed by falsely describing as "haters," "bigots," "Islamophobes" and/or other groundless

epithets. We are gratified that the SPLC has today formally acknowledged that it has engaged in such misrepresentations.

In an out-of-court settlement announced today, the Southern Poverty Law Center formally apologized in writing and via video for having falsely listed Maajid Nawaz and the Quilliam Foundation as “anti-Muslim extremists” in one of the SPLC’s most notorious products, *The Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremists*. It also agreed to pay them \$3.375 million, tangible proof that the SPLC, which amounts to little more than a leftist instrument of political warfare against those with whom it disagrees, fully deserves the infamy it has lately earned. For example, in addition to its settlement with Nawaz and Quilliam, the organization has had to disavow multiple misstatements and other errors in its reporting in the past few months. Journalists who uncritically parrot or cite the SPLC’s unfounded characterizations of those it reviles do a profound disservice to their audiences.

Editors, CEOs, shareholders and consumers alike are on notice: anyone relying upon and repeating its misrepresentations is complicit in the SPLC’s harmful defamation of large numbers of American citizens who, like the undersigned, have been vilified simply for working to protect our country and freedoms.

With this significant piece of evidence in mind, we call on government agencies, journalists, corporations, social media providers and web platforms (i.e., Google, Twitter, YouTube and Amazon) that have relied upon this discredited organization to dissociate themselves from the Southern Poverty Law Center and its ongoing effort to defame and vilify mainstream conservative organizations.

On Tuesday, O'Neil reported that at least 60 organizations are considering legal action against the SPLC following its defamation settlement with Nawaz.

"We haven't filed anything against the SPLC, but I think a number of organizations have been considering filing lawsuits against the SPLC because they have been doing to a lot of organizations exactly what they did to Maajid Nawaz," Liberty Counsel founder and chair Mat Staver told PJ Media on Tuesday. "There are probably about 60 organizations that we're talking to – there's at least 60," he said, describing the Nawaz settlement as "significant" because "the allegations that were at issue here were very similar to the allegations against the other groups."

"The SPLC promotes false propaganda, demonizes and labels groups they disagree with, and that labeling has economic as well as physical consequences," said Staver.

In his report on the joint statement Wednesday, O'Neil underscored that companies would be best advised to take these legal threats seriously because "the left-wing group has a documented malice against these groups":

The threat to journalists should be taken particularly seriously, as CNN uncritically shared the SPLC "hate map" last year, and outlets like ABC News and NBC News uncritically marked ADF a "hate group" using the SPLC label.

The threat to CEOs extends to various companies – like Google and Amazon – that use the "hate list" to marginalize certain groups online. Large companies have also partnered with the SPLC in other ways. Apple pledged \$1 million to the organization, along with other key benefits, while J.P. Morgan chipped in \$500,000. Companies like Lyft and MGM Resorts have partnered with the group, while Pfizer, Bank of America, and Newman's Own have each contributed over \$8,900 to the SPLC in recent years.

The scope of this potential lawsuit is hard to determine, and the threat is real. News outlets, companies, and organizations that champion the SPLC's "hate list" should be quaking in their boots.

As for the accusation that the SPLC's has demonstrated "malice" against conservative groups, the overtly partisan nature of the organization's actions have grown glaring enough to be called out by even left-leaning Politico, which published a piece in the summer of 2017 about how the former "civil rights stalwart" seems to have "lost its way." Among the examples provided in the piece of the SPLC's transformation into "more of a progressive hit operation than a civil rights watchdog," the author included the group's treatment of Nawaz, the Family Research Council, the Center for Immigration Studies, Charles Murray, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Sen. Rand Paul, and Dr. Ben Carson (formatting adjusted):

- *Former Islamist and self described "counter-extremist" Maajid Nawaz appeared in the SPLC's 2016 "Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremists" for using his platform "to savage Islam."*

- *The Family Research Council – a conservative Christian nonprofit led by Tony Perkins—has been classified by the SPLC as a hate group since 2010 for spreading “false and denigrating propaganda about LGBT people.” In 2012, a gunman who read on the SPLC’s website that the FRC was anti-gay shot up the group’s lobby.*
- *The Center for Immigration Studies, a nonprofit led by Mark Krikorian that supports lower immigration, appeared in the SPLC’s 2017 “Year in Hate and Extremism” report for producing “fear-mongering misinformation about Latino immigrants.”*
- *Political scientist Charles Murray has been a fixture on the SPLC’s roster of “extremists,” in part for his writing on race-based intellectual disparities. In March, Middlebury students informed by the SPLC’s designation violently prevented Murray from speaking on campus.*
- *Somali-born Dutch activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali was stoking controversy for her vocal criticism of Islam long before she found her way onto the SPLC’s 2016 “Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremists.” But while some say she is a bigot, others laud her as a human rights icon. ...*

The SPLC has included Senator Rand Paul and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson among the neo-Nazis and white supremacists on its extremists lists (Paul for suggesting private businesses shouldn’t have to adhere to the Civil Rights Act and criticizing the Fair Housing Act; Carson for his views opposing same-sex marriage). The group did back

down after it put Carson on the 2014 “extremist watch” list— removing his name and issuing an apology that earned a lot of coverage in the conservative media. “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,” the organization’s statement said, “so we have taken it down and apologize to Dr. Carson for having posted it.”