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# King of the Hate Business

*With haters on the wane, what will the hate-seekers do?*

By Alexander Cockburn

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The sun is dipping low in the evening sky over the Republican Party as the Other Leading Brand. A mere 21 percent of the adult population identify themselves as Republicans. Senator Arlen Specter sees the writing on the wall. He prefers to make his sixth senatorial run under the ample Democratic banner, rather than get mangled in the tiny shark tank of a Republican primary attended only by people who want to see the country run by Limbaugh and Hannity. With Al Franken certified, Specter crossing the aisle and Joe Biden in reserve, the Democrats can no longer hide behind the excuse of a Republican filibuster. They'll figure out a way, no doubt, but it could be embarrassing.

It's also horrible news for people who raise money and make money selling the notion that there's a right resurgence out there in the hinterland with legions of haters ready to march down Main Street draped in Klan robes, a copy of *Mein Kampf* tucked under one arm and a

Bible under the other, available for sneak photographs from minions of Chip Berlet, a prime promoter of the Christian menace.

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. Nine years ago Ken Silverstein wrote a devastating commentary on Dees and the SPLC in *Harper's*, dissecting a typical swatch of Dees's solicitations. At the time, Ken pointed out, the SPLC was "the wealthiest civil rights group in America," with \$120 million in assets.

As of October 2008 the net assets of the SPLC were \$170,240,129. The merchant of hate, Mr. Dees, was paid an annual \$273,132 as chief trial counsel, and the SPLC's president and CEO, Richard Cohen, \$290,133. Total revenue in 2007 was \$44,727,257, and program expenses \$20,804,536. In other words, the Southern Poverty Law Center was raising much more than it was spending on its proclaimed mission. Fundraising and administrative expenses accounted for \$9 million, leaving more than \$14 million to be put in the center's vast asset portfolio.

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. As Noel Ignatiev once

remarked in his book *Race Traitor*, there isn't a public school in any county in the USA that doesn't represent a menace to blacks a thousand times more potent than that offered by the KKK, just as there probably aren't many such schools that haven't been propositioned by Dees to buy one of the SPLC's "teaching tolerance" programs. What school is going to go on record as rejecting Dees-sponsored tolerance? Rub the kids' noses in tolerance until they get Dad's AK out of the closet and go on a rampage. Dees and his hate-seekers scour the landscape for hate like the arms manufacturers inventing new threats, and for the same reason: it's their staple.

A recent article in *Newsweek* cites the SPLC's latest "Year in Hate" report: "in 2008 the number of hate groups rose to 926, up 4 percent from 2007, and 54 percent since 2000." The SPLC doesn't measure group membership, meaning that it probably missed me. Change that total to 927. I'm a hate group, meaning in Dees-speak, one with "beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people," starting with Dick Cheney. I love to dream of Cheney being waterboarded, subjected to loops of Schoenberg played at top volume, locked up naked in a meat locker. But the nation's haters are mostly like me, with their enjoyment of a (increasingly circumscribed) constitutionally guaranteed right to hate that is solitary, disorganized and prone to sickening relapses into love, or at least the sort of amiable tolerance for all mankind experienced when looking at photos of Carla Bruni and Princess Letizia of Spain kissing.

The effective haters are big, powerful, easily identifiable

entities. Why is Dees fingering militiamen in a potato field in Idaho when we have identifiable, well-organized groups that the SPLC could take on? To cite reports from United for a Fair Economy, minorities are more than three times as likely to hold high-cost subprime loans, foisted on them by predatory lenders, meaning the big banks; all black and Latino subprime borrowers “could stand to lose between \$164 billion and \$213 billion for loans taken during the past eight years.” Get those bankers and big mortgage touts into court, chief trial counsel Dees! How about helping workers fired by people who hate anyone trying to organize a union? What about defending immigrants rounded up in ICE raids? How about attacking the roots of Southern poverty, and the system that sustains that poverty as expressed in the endless prisons and death rows across the South, disproportionately crammed with blacks and Hispanics?

You fight theatrically, the Dees way, or you fight substantively, like, for example, the Institute for Southern Studies run by Chris Kromm; or like Stephen Bright, who makes only \$11,000 as president and senior counsel of the Southern Center for Human Rights. The center’s director makes less than \$50,000. It has net assets of a bit over \$4.5 million and allocates about \$1.6 million a year for expenses, which is 77 percent of its \$2 million annual revenue. Bright’s outfit is basically dedicated to two things: prison litigation and the death penalty. He fights the system, case by case. Not the phony targets mostly tilted at by Dees but the effective, bipartisan, functional system of oppression, far more deadly and determined than the SPLC’s tin-pot hate groups. Tear up your check to Dees

and send it to Bright.

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**Alexander Cockburn** Alexander Cockburn, *The Nation's* "Beat the Devil" columnist and one of America's best-known radical journalists, was born in Scotland and grew up in Ireland. He graduated from Oxford in 1963 with a degree in English literature and language. After two years as an editor at the *Times Literary Supplement*, he worked at the *New Left Review* and *The New Statesman*, and co-edited two Penguin volumes, on trade unions and on the student movement. A permanent resident of the United States since 1973, Cockburn wrote for many years for *The Village Voice* about the press and politics. Since then he has contributed to many publications including *The New York Review of Books*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and the *Wall Street Journal* (where he had a regular column from 1980 to 1990), as well as alternative publications such as *In These Times* and the *Anderson Valley Advertiser*.

He has written "Beat the Devil" since 1984.

He is co-editor, with Jeffrey St Clair, of the newsletter and radical website *CounterPunch*(<http://www.counterpunch.org>) which have a substantial world audience. In 1987 he published a best-selling collection of essays, *Corruptions of Empire*, and two years later co-wrote, with Susanna Hecht, *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers, and Defenders of the Amazon* (both Verso). In 1995 Verso also published his diary of the late 80s, early 90s and the fall of Communism, *The Golden Age Is In Us*. With Ken Silverstein he wrote *Washington Babylon*; with Jeffrey St. Clair he has written or coedited several books including: *Whiteout*, *The CIA*, *Drugs and the Press*; *The Politics of Anti-Semitism*; *Imperial Crusades*; *Al Gore*, *A User's Manual*; *Five Days That Shook the World*; and *A Dime's Worth of Difference*, about the two-party system in America.

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