

Welcome and Moderator:

Mark Krikorian,
Executive Director, Center for Immigration Studies

Speakers:
Jerry Kammer,
Senior Research Fellow, Center for Immigration Studies

Ken Silverstein,
Washington Editor, Harper's Magazine

Carol Swain,
Professor of Law and Political Science, Vanderbilt University

Thursday, March 18, 2010
National Press Club
Washington, D.C.

*Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

MARK KRIKORIAN: Good morning. My name is Mark Krikorian and I'm executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies. All of our work is online at cis.org, including research on the impacts of immigration and the management of immigration, the point of which is to try to shed some light in the debate over such an important national issue. But the report we're releasing today is different from our other research because it examines not the impacts of immigration but whether we can have a debate on immigration.

The accusation of racism is the most serious charge you can make against someone in modern America, comparable to accusations in the past of being a leper, a witch or a communist. The charge of racism is so incendiary that even mass murderer Jeffrey Dahmer felt it necessary to deny that his crimes were motivated by it. This man, a cannibalistic, necrophiliac killer, went to great lengths to assure a relative of one of his victims that, in her words, quote, "He was not a prejudiced person. It wasn't out of race that he killed these young men," unquote.

When a taboo is that strong, someone is going to exploit it for political ends. And that's just what we've seen in the immigration debate. The advocacy groups lobbying for legalization of illegal immigrants and for increased legal immigration have long hurled accusations of racism at their opponents, but that had never been at the center of their message. The most respectable groups on that side of the debate always were clear that not all critics of mass immigration and amnesty were driven by invidious motives.

But over the last couple of years, as they've found that their efforts to persuade lawmakers and the public have not been bearing fruit, to put it mildly, these accusations have become a major, if

not the major focus of pro-amnesty lobbying. Their goal is not to win the debate over immigration but to shut it down altogether, to persuade journalists, policymakers and other opinion leaders to shun those who disagree with organizations on the pro-amnesty, mass-immigration side of the issue, such that these groups have made clear that no one skeptical of immigration should be considered a legitimate voice.

And this is very clear from the fact that there is no significant critic of high levels of immigration or legalization who has not been specifically attacked as nativist, xenophobic, fill in the adjective du jour. The escalation of efforts to shut down debate, from what was once just a casual throwaway line to what is now a coordinated effort lavishly funded by the pro-amnesty foundations, finally convinced us that it warranted a deeper explanation – a deeper exploration – focused specifically on the Southern Poverty Law Center, whose work on this issue underlies this whole smear campaign. And that’s the purpose of the report we’re releasing today, “Immigration and the SPLC.”

And the author is going to present a summary of his findings, and then we’re going to have two responses. Jerry Kammer is the author of the report and a senior research fellow at the Center for Immigration Studies. He’s a longtime journalist, covered a variety of issues for the Arizona Republic. His coverage of Mexico won him the Robert F. Kennedy Award for Humanitarian Journalism. Later, he worked at Copley News Service, which is mainly the San Diego Union-Tribune, and in 2006, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his work in exposing the Duke Cunningham congressional bribery scandal.

Then we’ll have two responses, first from Ken Silverstein, who’s the Washington editor of Harper’s Magazine and author of an article called “The Church of Morris Dees” in the November, 2000, issue of the magazine, which was about the SPLC. Finally, Carol Swain will respond. She’s a professor of political science and a professor of law at Vanderbilt University and an author of a couple of books that are relevant – “The New White Nationalism in America: Its Challenge to Integration,” and editor of “Debating Immigration,” both published by Cambridge University Press.

Let me reiterate, before we get started, this has nothing to do with what our nation’s immigration policy should be. I expect the four of us up here don’t agree on what enforcement policy should look like, what levels of immigration policy should look like, or anything else, but that’s not the point of this exercise. The point here is, is it permitted to have a debate over an important national issue or should those who disagree with the elite consensus be silenced? So let me start with Jerry, and then we’ll move on and take questions afterwards. Jerry?

JERRY KAMMER: Thanks, Mark. Hi, everybody, thanks for coming. I’m supposed to talk for about 15 minutes, and I’ve prepared some comments, remarks that I think will go that long. And Mark, if I go over, just give me the hook, please. I’d like to begin by talking a bit about a column that David Brooks wrote last week in the Times that I thought was particularly interesting. He wrote about efforts to dismiss President Obama as a socialist. I’ve got an excerpt here that I think relates to the paper that we’re presenting today.

This is from David Brooks: “In a sensible country, people would see Obama as a president trying to define a modern brand of moderate progressivism. In a sensible country, Obama would be able to clearly define this project without fear of offending the people he needs to get legislation passed. But we don’t live in that country. We live in a country in which many people live in information cocoons, in which they only talk to members of their own party and read blogs of their own sect.”

I think this issue of sects and extremist views is a problem on both sides of the immigration debate. There are extremes on both sides. But I think the group that is most active in promoting views that are distorted, false and destructive is the Southern Poverty Law Center. That is why I wrote the report. I’d like to tell you a story that’s in the report about a man who has been convicted by what I call the SPLC kangaroo court. A kangaroo court is the idea of a court that’s called for the express purpose of reaching a verdict that has been predetermined.

His name is Roy Beck. He’s the executive director of NumbersUSA. For many years he was an environmental journalist. When Beck was a young man in the 1970s, one of the environmental issues that was most important to progressive groups was population growth. It was a central theme of the first Earth Day back in 1970. Beck became concerned about the trend line in U.S. population growth. He knew that our population had reached 100 million in 1915, 200 million in 1967, and then it reached 300 million in 2006. And unlike the 1960s, when the principal sort of growth was baby boomers, it’s now driven primarily by immigration.

In 2008, the Pew Research Center offered this analysis, quote: “If current trends continue, the population of the United States will rise to 438 million in 2050, and 82 percent of the increase will be due to immigrants arriving from 2005 to 2050 and their U.S.-born descendants.” End quote. There are also credible projections that say our population could reach 600 million by the end of the century. In our report, on page six, we have Robert Samuels (sic) of the Washington Post talking about what he sees as a failure of the press to raise and elucidate this issue in the immigration debate.

In 1996, Roy Beck wrote a book with this subtitle – with this title, sorry: “The Case Against Immigration.” The subtitle was: “The Moral, Economic, Social and Environmental Reasons for Reducing U.S. Immigration Back to Traditional Levels.” Note, he’s not talking about cutting off immigration. Traditional levels means about 300,000, which long characterized our immigration policy. Now it’s up to a million people who get green cards every year, and of course we have the folks who come across the border illegally or overstay their visas.

Francis Fukuyama reviewed the book in The New York Times. He said Beck had written, quoting now, “in a way that fosters serious debate rather than name-calling.” He also wrote that Beck’s arguments, quote, “are presented carefully and dispassionately and deserve serious answers.” Now, a year ago, Heidi Beirich of the SPLC wrote about Roy Beck in a piece in which she attacked FAIR, NumbersUSA and CIS, our organization.

Her piece was called “The Nativist Lobby: Three Faces of Intolerance.” In it, she wrote this: “Roy Beck says that he is no racist, and his Web site and other writings do not contradict that.” But she was not about to concede that Roy Beck is a decent human being who seeks to present

legitimate concerns in a reasonable voice. Beirich wants you to believe that despite a record that is long and clear – despite what he says and writes and believes – deep down inside, Roy Beck is a racist in her view.

Pay no attention to his record. Pay no attention to his Web site, where he says in big, bold letters “No to immigrant-bashing,” and where he writes, quote: “The chief difficulties that America faces because of current immigration are not triggered by who the immigrants are but by how many they are.” Heidi Beirich of the SPLC wants you to believe that if you strip away all that superficial stuff, you’ll find that Roy Beck is really just a puppet on a string held by one John Tanton.

Now listen to this statement on a video that’s posted on the National Council of La Raza’s Web site for its “Stop the Hate” campaign, in which the SPLC has played a central role. Quote: “Roy Beck may look very plainspoken and somber about the issue of immigration, as though he’s just concerned about the environment or population growth, but he has a past with Tanton that’s deep and goes back to Tanton’s racist beliefs.”

Now there are many words a reasonable person could use to describe this guilt-by-association stuff, and Lord knows my wife Marie and my colleagues have heard a few of them. But in this forum and in the spirit of David Brooks’ hopes for a more sensible country and a more civil discussion, I’ll just call it nonsense. But this nonsense is at the heart of the attack on FAIR, NumbersUSA and CIS that has been launched by the SPLC, the National Council of La Raza and several affiliated groups.

Let me talk a little bit about John Tanton. He’s a small-town doctor from Northern Michigan. Like Roy Beck, his immigration concerns were preceded by environmental concerns. He has played organizing roles at the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, Zero Population Growth, the Nature Conservancy, and the list goes on and on. In 1979, he founded FAIR. Six years after that, he helped found CIS. A decade after that, he helped Roy Beck start NumbersUSA.

But in the narrative constructed by the SPLC and then carried forward by La Raza, that’s all you need to know about FAIR, CIS and NumbersUSA. Everything that comes after that, no matter how responsibly these groups lay out concerns about the demographic, social, economic and political effects of mass immigration, they must be seen as tainted by John Tanton, whom they depict as the puppeteer – the sinister leader in a conspiracy of bigots that must be denounced and insulted at every turn.

Now, I first want to say that Tanton has said and done some things that I personally reject. As I write in the report, his organizational talents come with a downside. He’s an eye doctor from a small town in Northern Michigan who has a tin ear for the sensitivities of immigration. And as I write in the report, Tanton is correctly called the founder of the modern movement to restrict immigration, but he has also helped to undermine that movement.

In an arena that requires the ability to frame issues in a way that broadens consensus, he sometimes speaks with a freewheeling bluntness that even those who admire him find upsetting. Some say that Tanton has shown a tendency to be unnecessarily provocative, a tendency that

some have used to change the topic from immigration to Tanton himself. Tanton has become the great distraction, the great diversion. The report looks at several statements that Tanton made that have been, in my opinion, just ripped out of context.

I'll just talk about one here. It comes from a story in the Detroit Free Press about Tanton in 1997, and it has this passage: "Casting an eye towards the traffic jams, crowded schools and social divisiveness in California, many fear that unfettered immigration could eventually swamp the nation." And then switching to Tanton: "In his characteristically blunt manner, Tanton explained his obsession with immigration, likening the flood of humanity to America's shores over the past 400 years to a plate of bacteria in a medical lab." Quote from Tanton: "You put a bug in there and it starts growing and it gets bigger and bigger and bigger, and it grows until it finally fills the whole plate. It uses up the medium and then, maybe, it crashes and dies."

Now this language is a definite sign that John Tanton was not an English major. It is, shall we say, inelegant. Worst of all, it provided an opening for Heidi Beirich to claim, with righteous indignation, John Tanton compared immigrants to bacteria. Now, when I read Beirich's piece, I didn't know the broader context. I cringed. I thought, oh, god. Is this guy saying this about people who have just come across the Arizona border?

But of course he wasn't. Tanton was talking about a process of demographic expansion that has been going on for hundreds of years and includes his own ancestors. But the SPLC and the NCLR saw their opening and they drove their campaign bus right through it, streaming a big banner that declares, John Tanton compared immigrants to bacteria. Janet Murguia of the NCLR took up the battle cry when she went on CNN with Lou Dobbs. At the beginning of the "Stop the Hate" campaign, she indignantly said of Tanton, he once compared immigrants to bacteria.

Now this report is written to defend the proposition that we should have a reasonable, respectful conversation of immigration that deals with central issues and does not look for sinister motivations. But it points out also that if FAIR wanted to conduct a similar attack, there is plenty of ground to do it.

You could begin with the organization's name – National Council of La Raza – which was very upsetting to Cesar Chavez, who said this: I hear about La Raza more and more. Some people don't look at it as racism, but when you say "la raza," you are saying an anti-gringo thing, and our fear is that it won't stop there. Today, it's anti-gringo; tomorrow it will be anti-negro; and the day after that, it will be anti-Filipino, anti-Puerto Rican and then it will be anti-poor Mexican and anti-darker-skinned Mexican."

Rep. Henry Gonzalez of Texas, a liberal Democrat whom I developed great respect for covering the savings and loan scandal when he was chairman of the House Banking Committee – a tremendous man – described the party La Raza Unida as "reverse racism, as evil as the deadly hatred of the Nazis." Denouncing what he called the politics of race, he said, quote: "Only one thing counts to them: La Raza above all."

In recent years, as the NCLR has gained provenance in the political mainstream, the name has caused strains even within the organization. While some Mexican Americans say they have

adopted the term “la raza” without embracing its militant connotations, others have been uncomfortable with an organization whose very name emphasizes racial identity. Janet Murguia of NCLR acknowledges difficulty in a 2008 interview with the columnist Ruben Navarrette, who – Ruben himself called the name a musty throwback to the 1960s.

Here’s what Janet Murguia said: “We take a lot of heat for our name.” And she acknowledged that there had been discussions about changing it. Then she said: “But historically, I think, it is something that our community feels wedded to.” Now, I very much regret that Janet Murguia became such a prominent figure in the campaign to smear FAIR, CIS and Numbers. I don’t think that’ll do anything at all to promote a more reasonable country, a more reasonable debate. Quite to the contrary.

But I believe that Janet Murguia is a wonderful person from a tremendous family that I regard as an all-American family from Kansas, with proud roots as Mexican Americans. But I’m sorry that she has decided to join forces with the SPLC in this smear campaign. I wish that she would acknowledge the historical record of the man who came up with the concept of “la raza cosmica,” from whom her organization takes its name.

His name was Jose Vasconcelos, who lived from 1882 to 1959 – very prominent politically, culturally in Mexico. Racist scorn permeated the writing of Jose Vasconcelos. He was obsessed with the notion of competition among races and nations, and he wrote of the Chinese this passage in “La Raza Cosmica” – and I see, Mark, I am up to almost 14 minutes. Sorry.

This is from Vasconcelos: “We recognize that it is not fair that people like the Chinese, who, under the saintly guidance of Confucian morality, multiply like mice, should come to degrade the human condition precisely at the moment when we begin to understand that intelligence serves to refrain and regulate the lower zoological instincts.” Vasconcelos envisioned a time when, quote: “The lower type of the species will be absorbed by the superior type. Inferior races, upon being educated, will become less prolific, and the better specimens will go on ascending a scale of ethnic improvement.”

Now, this is strong stuff. It’s explicitly based on eugenic and racist ideas. I don’t think it should be a part of our debate now, any more than I think that much of what the SPLC – should be a part of the debate. But ugly stuff is the specialty of the Southern Poverty Law Center, which in my opinion plays a very cynical game of promoting intolerance and character assassination. And there is a big commercial motivation there. It’s a game that I think can be called jihad for dollars.

The SPLC has moved away from its early work in such poverty law fields as death penalty cases, employment rights and voting rights because Dee’s learned that he could take in more money by exaggerating the size and menace of the Klan. An editorial that accompanied the series that made the Montgomery Advertiser a Pulitzer finalist in 1994 – it was a finalist in 1995 – for its nine-day expose of Morris Dees. The editorial said that while the Klan deserves the scorn of all reasonable people, it had become a farce, and that critics of the SPLC were justified in saying that it, quote, “focuses on an anti-Klan theme not because the Klan is a major threat, but because it plays well with liberal donors.”

No one is more – I'm going to abbreviate this, but our report notes that the best reporting about the SPLC in its early days, especially about their financial cynicism, comes from liberal publications. (Inaudible) – publication from The Nation, JoAnn Wypijewski wrote in 2001 – she said: No one has been more assiduous in inflating the profile of hate groups than millionaire huckster Morris Dees. She called the SPLC puffed-up crusaders.

And she says: Hate sells, poor people don't, which is why readers who go to the SPLC Web site will find only a handful of cases on such non-lucrative causes as fair housing, worker safety or health care. Why the organization continues to keep poverty or even law in its name can be ascribed only to a nostalgia or to a cynical understanding of the marketing possibilities in class guilt.

We have other comments from, like, Alexander Cockburn talking about the cynicism of Dees in raising money. Now, the report makes the case that this smear campaign is not in isolation. It's part of Morris Dees' long history of sensationalism and dishonesty in arousing fear amongst his liberal donors. This is what Dees wrote in 1988 in a more political context: "The people who give big money through the mail are either on the far right or the far left. They are true believers. You can't fire them up with a middle-of-the-road cause or candidate. You've got to have someone who can rouse people." In other words, don't be reasonable; don't be civil.

Morris Dees is running a base campaign. He doesn't care what the middle thinks. He wants to appeal to his liberal votes, people who are goodhearted, generous, good intentions, but all too often, I think, are seduced by his fundraising campaigns. If I could just read the conclusion of the report, noting that SPLC has become central to the smear campaign with its attacks on FAIR, CIS and Numbers.

I said: Conducted in the name of tolerance, civility and good governance, the campaign is itself intolerant, uncivil and extremist. In the name of defending democracy it seeks to stifle one of democracy's most vital functions, the vigorous discussion of important public issues. It demonstrates that the Southern Poverty Law Center has become a peddler of its own brand of self-righteous hate. It is a center of intolerance marked by a poverty of ideas, a dependence on dishonesty and a lack of fundamental decency. That's it.

MR. KRIKORIAN: Thank you, Jerry. Ken?

KEN SILVERSTEIN: Okay, so I have to start by saying that I was initially reluctant to accept the invitation to be on the panel because my views on immigration are very, very different from the center's. I have two kids who are half-Dominican and their mother came to this country many, many years ago. I actually am not quite sure whether she came legally or not. I know her mother came here illegally. And I am pretty much a believer in – you know, I wouldn't say open borders – but again, my position is just very, very different from the center's.

But I accepted being on the panel for a few reasons. One was because I have huge respect for my friend Jerry Kammer and he asked me to. And if Jerry asks me to be on the panel, it would really be something extreme that would keep me from being on the panel. Secondly, I believe in free speech. It's a controversial topic; it's subject to debate. I don't believe that I have a monopoly of

wisdom here, and I didn't want to be scared away from addressing a controversial issue because I've tried not to be in my own work over the last 25 years as a reporter. So I wasn't going to be too cowardly to be on the panel.

Now, I also think that the SPLC helps squelch free debate and free speech because it does, in my view, frequently resort to smears and distortions in labeling its critics. And lastly, I wanted to be on the panel because I have a great dislike for the SPLC. I do think it is a fraudulent organization headed by a huckster, and I have no regard for the organization. And so I told Jerry that I would be happy to talk about the Southern Poverty Law Center, and I would limit my remarks to the organization itself.

So let me talk a little bit about the center. I first heard about the Southern Poverty Law Center in the 1990s and my initial reaction, like probably most people, was that it was this wonderfully heroic organization, you know, fighting the good fight – an underdog standing up for all the right causes. And at some point along the way I met an attorney in Atlanta named Stephen Bright, who heads an organization called the Southern Center for Human Rights, which is a real civil rights organization. And I have enormous regard for Steve, and he said – I don't even know how the topic came up, but we started talking about the Southern Poverty Law Center.

And he was extremely critical, like, I discovered, many civil rights organizations and leaders were very critical of the center. Steve said that, first off, the center had stopped doing most of the core work with which it was associated – you know, anti-death penalty work, indigent defense, voting rights – and instead it was primarily a fundraising operation. It spent most of its time sending out fundraising solicitations and raising cash. It had stopped doing good work. And there's one former lawyer from the SPLC who left the organization, who said that the SPLC made an enormous amount of money by exploiting black pain and white guilt.

Millard Farmer, who is a very renowned anti-death penalty attorney, who is a former associate of Dees, called Dees the Jim and Tammy Fay Baker of the civil rights movement. And then he added – this was in an interview with me – though I don't mean to malign Jim and Tammy Fay. (Laughter.) So I discovered that there were a lot of people who I had high regard for in the civil rights movement who thought Dees was a fraud. And so I started looking into the organization and the first thing I found was this fabulous, groundbreaking series in the Montgomery Advertiser, which is in Jerry's report.

But just a couple of highlights – what the Advertiser revealed was that, again, the center had stopped doing most of this important work that it had done at the outset. And it's reported that black attorneys who worked at the center frequently felt discriminated against. It quoted Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree saying, quote, "My students have come back with disappointing experiences. It's particularly disappointing to encounter racism at a civil rights organization."

It used its money from all of this fundraising to pay very, very large salaries to Morris Dees and other heads of the organization and to pile up a huge endowment. And even groups that monitored charities were extremely critical of the law center. It said that some of these groups concluded that donors to the Southern Poverty Law Center had no idea of how much money it

had, and were duped into thinking that it was tottering on the brink of financial disaster, and that people in Montgomery often referred to its lavish headquarters as the poverty palace.

So I came away, after looking into the organization, and became much, much more critical of it. Of course, its biggest fundraising pitch over the years – one of its initial pitches after it abandoned the anti-death penalty thing, which wasn't lucrative enough – it didn't generate enough money and it scared too many people off – was the Klan. And of course, this is the brilliance of Morris Dees' marketing strategy. Everybody hates the Klan, of course. The Klan is a disgusting, horrible organization.

But what Dees has always done is to exaggerate the power of the Klan and other far-right-wing groups to make it appear that the country is teetering on the brink of, you know, the Klan seizing power. So it's always sent out these ridiculous fundraising pitches where the Klan is puffed up and exaggerated, which is just completely dishonest and misleading. Back in 1987, a classic case, Dees wins a \$7 million against the Klan for the murder of a young black man. And then it uses its victory in that case, over the next couple of years, to raise \$9 million through fundraising.

And it suggested in these fundraising pitches that the \$7 million had gone to the mother of the victim, this boy who was killed by the Klan – when in fact, the Klan was bankrupt, essentially. It had no money. And the Southern Poverty Law Center won for this woman \$52,000, most of which – in fact, I think, all of which she had to give back to the center because they had given her an interest-free loan. So this is a situation where, you know, the organization is raising a lot of money on the basis of fraudulent advertising. And if you look at the reports by charities, or groups that monitor charities, they are extremely critical of this sort of practice.

What was really striking to me, too, was how much money the Poverty Center raised over the years, and how little it actually spent on civil rights work. I wrote a piece about it in Harper's back in 2000, which you can find online. I think it's called "The Church of Morris Dees," which you can just – a Google search should turn it up. And back in 2000, it took in \$44 million, and it spent only \$13 million on its core programs. Most of this money – you know, the difference – my math isn't so great, but it's about \$31 million – most of that money went into more fundraising, to raise more money, and into bolstering its endowment.

Now, back in '78, in the early years, Dees promised that he'd stop fundraising entirely once the Southern Poverty Law Center reached an endowment of \$55 million. He'd stop. No reason to raise more money. At the time he had about \$10 million. But then, over the years, they start raising lots and lots of money, and as they near this figure of \$55 million when they're supposed to stop, suddenly they up the ante.

Now, we'll stop when we get to \$100 million, okay? And they said in a newsletter, that's an amount that will allow us to, quote, "cease the costly and often-unreliable task of fundraising." Well, this just never happened. I mean, by 2000, when I wrote about them, they were up to \$120 million. And that year they spent \$5.76 million on fundraising, which was twice as much as it spent on civil rights law.

By 2008 – and mind you, this is after they have lost \$48 million in investments – they had \$174 million. You know, so they’ve just been raising money and raising money, soaking up money that could go to legitimate civil rights groups that do honest, admirable work. But instead, with these tearful pleas about how they’re constantly going broke, it seems, based on their fundraising, they raise all of this money from people who are duped into believing that the center could cease to exist at any moment if you don’t hand over you \$25 or \$100 or \$1000.

Anyway, the endowment is \$174 million currently, which, as I’ve noted in several articles that I’ve posted online, is bigger than the GNP of many smaller nation-states. I mean, I think it was between Tonga and Togo last time I checked. It’s a lot of money. It does not need to be raising money; it doesn’t spend the money for good purposes. You know, as I’ve noted in some of my reporting, Dees – I think it was in 1998 – he was inducted into the Direct Marketing Association’s hall of fame. (Laughter.) For a very good reason.

And you know, Jerry’s report is filled with great details. One thing he cites is Tom Turnipseed, a lawyer who is a former associate of Dees, who described one fundraising pitch where they sent out the envelope with six different stamps. And Turnipseed said that this was to give the impression that they were barely staying alive, and Jerry quotes him as saying, “It was like they had to cobble them together to come up with the 35 cents.”

So I mean, to me it’s just not an honest organization. It does some good work, but based on the amount of money it raises it does very little. And I have always encouraged people, don’t give them a dime. Give it to real civil rights groups that do real work. And that is primarily why I agreed to talk. I really think that it’s an organization that needs to be exposed and criticized, and I’m happy to do it.

MR. KRIKORIAN: Thank you, Ken. Carol?

CAROL SWAIN: Good morning. I’m also an individual that, over the years, I’ve been reluctant to be too-publicly associated with the Center for Immigration Studies – not because I thought there was anything wrong with the quality of their work, but because of the criticisms of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

And I’ve been familiar with the Southern Poverty Law Center for more than a decade. I first found out about the organization when I was doing research on my two books on white nationalism – “The New White Nationalism in America: Its Challenge to Integration” and “Contemporary Voices of White Nationalism” – and I cite them in several places. But even back then I saw a problem with that data. It seemed very clear that each year the number of groups they classified as hate groups went up some. It would go up every year, but when you looked, it was because they would take an existing group that’s always been out there, and they would reclassify it. And that was a way to keep the numbers increasing.

And then gradually the Southern Poverty Law Center sort of went out of the business, I think, of looking for real hate groups such as neo-Nazis, some of the black Muslim groups – different organizations that may be a threat to our society – they stopped going after those groups and they started targeting conservative individuals. And eventually they got to me, and I’ll give you more

information about that. And once, you know, my face is smeared across the front page of newspapers in my state with the headline that I'm an apologist for white supremacy, I thought, well, I might as well get involved. (Laughter.)

And so I can concur with everything that's been said here this morning negative about the Southern Poverty Law Center. They do smear individuals and try to discredit them. And it's not about threats in the traditional sense; it seems to be a campaign to silence conservative individuals. And they were very much behind the vilification of Lou Dobbs, and he's someone that I know very well. I respect him, and he's anything but a racist. When they turned their guns on him, and pretty much drummed him out of his livelihood, I just felt like they had crossed a line that was pretty serious.

I wrote an article in 2008, the summer of 2008, called "Mission Creep," in which I accused them of being affected by it – and that's when an organization sort of goes beyond what it was originally created for and moves into other areas. And that's sort of, I believe, how I drew their fire. But their smear tactics have already been talked about here. It's the guilt by association; it's the outright fabrications – because they do make up information, and they manipulate the media into carrying their water.

And in the case of what happened to me, that was what they did. And you know, I suspect, and I can't prove it, that they probably called *The Tennessean*. It was very much a setup, the way it was framed, the way the article was framed. Information that I gave that would explain what I was accused of was neglected to be included in the article. And it's clear, too, that they cherry-pick their causes. They cherry-pick the individuals and organizations that they will go after.

In my article on mission creep, I talked about how they had ignored the New Black Panther Party. In 2008, on Election Day, there was videotape of them standing outside of a polling booth in Philadelphia dressed in their Black Panther gear. And they did look menacing. And this was outside of a polling booth, and to me that's the equivalent of the KKK. I go to vote, and the KKK, if they're standing out there in their Klan robes, you know, I'm not going to like it. I'm not going to be afraid, but I'm not going to like it. And they had pretty much given the New Black Panther Party a free pass.

And I mean, if they're concerned about hate, they had, in 2000, classified the New Black Panther Party as a hate group, so it would have been perfectly appropriate for them to have covered that story. They never did cover it. And so that was why I wrote the article about mission creep, and I think that led them to put me on the list of people that they were out to get.

The Southern Poverty Law Center tries to silence people on a range of issues. It's not just immigration. It's also people that are pro-life; it's people that are concerned about racial preferences, people that are concerned about same-sex marriages, gun control, immigration and patriots. And see, I'm wearing my American flag, and you see my scarf here – I mean, that makes me a threat, because I'm a patriot. And that's how the Southern Poverty Law Center sees it.

And they also seem to believe, and seem to feel that if you're white – and obviously I'm not – that you lose your right to criticize and protest. And so there's a double standard. It's okay if a political minority engages in a protest; it's okay if a racial-ethnic minority engages in a protest. But in the case of groups like the "tea party" movement, because most of them are white and most of them are conservative, that's not okay. They're a threat to society.

And what they're doing is shutting down free speech in a very dangerous way. And when I wrote my book, "The New White Nationalism in America," I warned about the dangers of shutting down discourse on legitimate issues. Because of political correctness and the ability of well-meaning people to discuss legitimate issues, like affirmative action, like crime, like immigration, it sort of forces people to have to carry on their dialogue in forms that may be more extremist than they have to be. And so they're actually making more converts, probably, to extremist organizations than they would if they allowed people to talk about the issues that concern them.

And I believe that, if I were white, I would be concerned about demographic changes. I would wonder about what the country is going to look like in the future, and I'd be concerned about the fact that we have so many poor people. These are legitimate issues to be discussed in public forums, to be discussed on university campuses, but in this environment that the Southern Poverty Law Center and some of the liberal media organizations control, you cannot have discussions about issues that are important like that. And these discussions tend to go underground, and when they go underground, you have like-minded people talking to one another. Cass Sunstein has written about the dangers of like-minded people talking to one another. It tends to make them more extreme.

If we are concerned about race relations, if we are concerned about the threats of extremist groups, the best thing we can do is include their voices in the dialogue. And that's not what we're doing, and the Southern Poverty Law Center is one of the most intolerant organizations out there. They're guilty of everything, you know, that they accuse other groups of being guilty of. And I think they're dangerous and they need to be exposed. I can't say anything stronger about how I feel about that. (Laughter.)

The way that they operate, now that they have moved from hate groups into just attacking conservative individuals, is that they will write an article, and they will drop the names of people in it – Michelle Bachman, Rick Perry, they've had their names dropped. There have been some professors that have written papers about the neo-Confederates, that type of thing – they'll list these people as threats.

Some years ago, there was this guy named Robert Griffin that wrote a book about William Pierce, who started the National Alliance, which was a neo-Nazi group. And so this person did participant/observation research, and at the time the Southern Poverty Law Center wrote this about Griffin's book: "The kid-gloved treatment of Pierce made Griffin a hero to white racists. It also raised the question of why a seemingly respectable professor would write a book so blatantly uncritical of a notorious figure like Pierce." And so those are the kind of words – seemingly respectable – because this researcher had decided to study this particular individual, this particular group.

Now, the story with Griffin is that he sort of had, over the years he hung out with this group, he has become a white activist or white nationalist – someone I would consider a white nationalist. But the very fact that he conducted research should not have been enough to get him on the Southern Poverty Law Center’s hate list.

The other thing that the Southern Poverty Law Center has done is try to discredit the “tea party” movement, which is a lot of people that are concerned about America in the way that I’m concerned about America. They’ve actively tried to discredit them. And the spring 2010 issue has a list of active Patriot groups in the United States in 2009. It includes common-law courts, publishers, ministries and citizens’ groups, and it lists the Constitutional Party (sic), Oath Keepers, We the People – just goes down the list of citizens’ militias, grand jury – then it says, when you read down further enough: Listing here does not imply that the groups themselves advocate or engage in violence or other criminal activities, or are racist.

But once your name is in this report your reputation is shot. I mean, it’s kind of over once they list you. And I mean, this is very, very dangerous – very dangerous because the Constitution gives us the right of freedom of assembly, freedom of speech. And they only want it for one side. If you continue to shut down legitimate voices of dissent, I think you do get that revolution that they’re so afraid of. They are making it happen because they’re not allowing a healthy debate.

And so I believe that it’s up to all of us to do what we can to expose them, but also to stop this political correctness madness. It’s totally mad. I have decided that I will continue to speak, and I believe that part of their attempt to discredit me over a film that I endorsed – called “A Conversation About Race” – was really about immigration. I had edited a book in 2007 called “Debating Immigration,” in which I tried to bring diverse voices into the conversation.

By doing that I included the voice of Peter Brimelow, and I felt that his voice was entitled to be included in that book as well. The voice of Christians that were not open-borders Christians, that believe that the state has a right to enforce the laws of the land, and that we can expect immigrants – people who come here illegally – to obey the laws – and they were are a nation of laws and not a nation of just total chaos. Well, because of that book, which has been well received, I think they wanted to shut my voice down on the immigration issue.

And I am concerned about the fact that the people harmed in this debate are low-wage, low-skilled workers – some of them are black, some of them are white and some of them are Hispanics. In fact, those groups are hurt the most. They’re hurt by lower wages, and they’re hurt by being displaced. And it is a total fabrication and misconception that high levels of immigration is not affecting American workers. I don’t know of any jobs that Americans won’t do. And even when it comes to the agricultural jobs, there are people legally in this country, and there are some Americans that would do those jobs. There’s high unemployment in every sector where immigrants compete, and we need to have a healthy discussion about this and not be silenced. Thank you.

MR. KRIKORIAN: Thank you, Carol. So those were our comments from our local white nationalist. (Laughter.)

(Cross talk.)

MR. KRIKORIAN: Jerry will make some comments.

MR. KAMMER: I should point out that you can find on wallstreetjournal.com a very good piece about the SPLC's attack on Professor Swain, written by – I think it's James Taranto?

MR. KRIKORIAN: Yeah.

MR. KAMMER: It goes into detail, and he talks about this as an effort to shut down the debate.

MS. SWAIN: What was the name again?

MR. KRIKORIAN: Taranto is the author, James Taranto. T-A-R-A-N-T-O.

MR. KAMMER: At wsj.com.

MS. SWAIN: And the title is "In Defense of Carol Swain." (Laughter.)

MR. KRIKORIAN: Which is something that the Wall Street Journal will never write on my behalf, frankly, but that's beside the point. Although I do have to give them credit for it. He did acknowledge that he disagreed on immigration, but that, you know, the debate was legitimate, which is the first time that's ever actually happened in that newspaper.