

When Hate Speech Triggers Hateful Violence

Floyd Lee Corkins, the man charged with the Aug. 15, 2012, attack at the Family Research Council's Washington, D.C., headquarters, was sentenced on Thursday. For his numerous crimes, including the first-ever prosecuted act of domestic terrorism in the nation's capital, Corkins was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

In an unfortunate and saddening coincidence, the sentencing wasn't the only reminder this week of the terror a man with evil intentions can inflict upon a community. Our hearts go out to the families of the victims of last week's Washington Navy Yard attack and the brave men and women who worked to stop the attack. Senseless acts of violence like these have become all too common in our society.

I clearly remember the hours after the shooting here, when our staff gathered to pray for Leo Johnson, our injured colleague, and for the man who perpetrated the attack.

Forgiveness is essential for healing and closure. We have forgiven Corkins for his actions. Forgiving him does not, however, alleviate the consequences of his inspired crime of violence nor the reality that our world and the world around us has changed. Armed security guards now sit at the desk where Leo Johnson sat that day. He underwent numerous operations to repair damage from the gunshot wound. Hopefully the sentence that Corkins received will not only hold him accountable for his crime, but will also discourage future violence. We and our families know that but for God's grace and Mr. Johnson's actions, many of us could have been killed, and we hope that this sentence will serve to discourage other would-be mass murderers in the future.

Soon after the attack, Corkins admitted to the FBI that he identified the Family Research Council as a target through the Southern Poverty Law Center's so-called "hate map." Prosecutors later revealed in federal court this link between the center and this act of domestic terrorism. It is quite ironic that the Southern Poverty Law Center, the supposed authority on all things hateful, was linked in court to Corkins' hateful attack on the Family Research Council.

This attack was truly hateful. Corkins' stated intention was to kill as many staff members as possible and to smear Chick-fil-A sandwiches on their faces. This was not the rash action of an unstable mind. Corkins planned his attack in great detail and hoped for massive casualties. He purchased a gun and learned how to shoot it. He rehearsed the trip to the building, faking a reason for entering the lobby two days before the actual attack. As he admits, this crime was premeditated. Despite all of this, his crime has yet to be listed as an incident of hate on the Southern Poverty Law Center's website. More irony.

Let me be clear: The Family Research Council does not believe that the Southern Poverty Law Center's connection in court to this terrorist shooting in any way lessens Corkins' responsibility for his crimes. He tried to silence by violence. However, the Southern Poverty Law Center also seeks to silence others—by demonizing those with whom it disagrees. In a civil society, shutting down debate is not how reasonable people and organizations operate. Intimidating others shreds the "ordered liberty" our Founders desired and ultimately undermines the rights of everyone.

After the attack, having seen the hostility fostered by the Southern Poverty Law Center toward the Family Research Council, I called on them to stop cultivating this atmosphere of hate that resulted in violence through their reckless labeling of pro-family groups. The center has ignored my request for civility and refuses to remove the Family Research

Council from its target map.

Despite the evidence, many in the media refuse to admit what the Southern Poverty Law Center itself says: It is a liberal organization designed to track only what it considers to be “right-wing” extremism. When *National Review* questioned the center about “extremism,” the organization responded by saying, “We’re not really set up to cover the extreme left.” One has to wonder about their methodology if they blatantly ignore extremism based simply on the actor’s politics.

Casting further doubt on the organization’s labeling is the fact that the number of “hate groups” the center tracks has risen by 69 percent since 2000, while the number of hate-crime incidents reported by the FBI has dropped 29 percent since 1996. This seems to imply that the center’s hate label has no connection to actual hateful activity.

More appalling, however, is that the Obama administration’s Departments of Justice, Homeland Security and Defense routinely relies on Southern Poverty Law Center “experts” when discussing extremism. This means these departments are receiving politically biased information and that this information conflicts with the FBI’s own findings on hate-motivated violence. Furthermore, the fact that the center’s records show the organization has more than \$250 million in assets brings into question what this supposed anti-poverty organization is really trying to accomplish—and is also the reason nonprofit watchdog CharityWatch gave it an “F” rating.

My staff and I would never have dreamed there would come a day when publishing research that says children flourish best with a mom and a dad would subject them to obscene calls, verbal harassment and an armed gunman threatening their lives. It is equally jarring that academic research into homosexuality and public policy would produce violence. Thursday’s verdict sends a message that in our society, violence cannot and will not be tolerated. The Southern Poverty Law Center should retract its

inaccurate and malicious hate label, which is what encouraged Corkins' hateful violence, and send another message: Civil discourse is essential to a democratic republic.

Tony Perkins is president of the Washington, Family Research Council. He is a former member of the Louisiana legislature, where he served for eight years, and he is recognized as a legislative pioneer for authoring measures like the nation's first Covenant Marriage law.