

Dees' early court judgments against what he called "hate groups" created a sort of institutional arrogance at his firm. Its self-defined mission expanded from battling bigots working against existing U.S. law to advocating a statist notion of "social justice."

Today, the SPLC's unwittingly Orwellian slogan is: "Fighting Hate. Teaching Tolerance. Seeking Justice."

The problem here, of course, is that one person's hate is another person's passion. And the words "tolerance" and "justice" — defined honestly — don't promise as much as utopian statists assume. When they say "tolerance," they often mean "endorsement;" and when they say "justice" they often mean "redistribution."

The intellectual decay of the SPLC's agenda may mean good things for America at large. The country doesn't have so many truculent racists any more — so the antiracists have to look harder and reach farther for problems to solve.

Along the way, Morris Dees' crusading firm has degenerated into a skill for liberal Democrats. And not even the establishment media revere the SPLC as much as they once did. In April, Newsweek ran a long-winded and pointless article about "hate" in America. (The emptiness of the piece may explain why the magazine's corporate owner has put it up for sale.) As expected, the journalistic drones included a concerned quotation from an SPLC employee:

Oath Keepers are "a particularly worrisome example of the 'patriot revival,' according to Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). . . . "Patriot" groups — described by the SPLC as outfits "that see the federal government as part of a plot to impose 'one-world government' on liberty-loving Americans" — are "roaring back" after years out of the limelight, according to Potok.

But even the drones recognized the self-interest in Potok's worries: "It is easy to exaggerate the numbers of these groups or the threat they pose, especially if you are an organization, like the SPLC, dedicated to exposing such things."

An unexpected bit of useful context from Newsweek; another humiliation for the SPLC — crusaders in search of a meaningful mission.

— Jim Walsh

A land far, far away — Like countless other Americans, I watched the so-called "epic" History Channel docudrama, "America, The Story of Us." I suspect that, like me, other viewers of this propaganda were troubled by what they saw: not the story of *us* lower- or middle- or even upper-class Americans but the story of *them* — self-deluded upper-upper-upper-class Hollywood celebs and politically connected, bailed-out bankers.

That's right: actors and actresses and other professional pretenders, with no historical expertise to speak of, repeatedly interrupted the grand narrative of our nation to give us their take on past figures and events. P-Diddy celebrated the ingenuity of American workers; Michael Douglas muttered something about "land of opportunity" and "those type of people who want to take that risk" and "take that gamble" and "believe in a better life"; Sheryl Crow explained the price paid by pioneers (hunger, disease) during westward expansion. And so on. You get the point, right? This was not the most intelligent telling of times gone by.

To make matters worse, a dozen two-minute commercials — or spin spots — featured Bank of America, a company that,

according to The Economist, is viewed unfavorably by 53% of Americans, but which was represented here as a patriotic institution and part of our national heritage. These commercials were like documentaries within documentaries: short pieces that told the story of this, our national bank, at once mighty and benevolent, omnipotent and kind.

Okay, so the commercials were more mythological than documentary. In all fairness, though, Bank of America has made efforts, aside from these commercials, to appease American taxpayers and consumers. It paid back the \$45 billion it received from the Troubled Asset Relief Program. The company and the individuals who work for it are not evil. But a system that privileges government favoritism at the expense of the average hardworking taxpayer — ah, that's another issue altogether.

Perhaps Meg James, in her review of the series, put it best when she said, "United States history is filled with such heroes as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Rosa Parks and Bank of America. Well, maybe not, but the colossal bank is doing its best to join the pantheon." Yes, Bank of America is trying to save face. Can you blame it? If I were managing the company, I would do the same thing — which just goes to show that even well-meaning people can get caught up in the system of state corporatism.

The fact that (surprise, surprise!) King Obama opened the series adds another layer of irony not only to the series' message (America is great because of its ability to pull itself up from its bootstraps) but also to Obama's recent sanctimonious, antibusiness platitudes. For here was the architect of the bailouts appearing side by side with his partners in collusion, the bankers. Add to these images the blabbering, bobble-headed celebrities, and you get the blessed trinity of this age of secularism: government power, corporate cronies, and simpleminded sycophants.

CGI effects and kinetic camerawork provide eye-candy but little intellectual substance for viewers of this unfortunate, overambitious, overhyped flop. Anyone hoping for more than clip and cliché should avoid this series at all costs. Those who like oversimplification (dare I say dumbing down?) should skim the Wikipedia entry for "United States." That's much faster. And without commercials.

— Allen Mendenhall

What is it good for? — As we approach the sesqui-centennial of the American Civil War, and we find ourselves knee-deep in fresh military adventures, Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, his spiritual exegesis of war, calls out with prophetic urgency.

I cannot read it without a shiver running down my spine. Lincoln deftly counterposes the inscrutable Creator with man's feeble, hubristic attempts to take the cause of God as his own. As Lincoln points out sardonically, both sides cannot possibly be prosecuting God's will, despite the not-so-small detail of each worshiping the same God. Surely Yahweh speaketh not with forked tongue?

In truth, war more resembles a *deus ex machina*, oblivious to all sides, descending upon man, who is left little choice but to wage it. Invariably, rationales are devised. Rallying cries, banners, and earnest reconstructions of *causa belli* ensue. These various human rationalizations represent futile attempts to assign scrutability to what is ultimately an inscrutable