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U.S. talk radio host banned

By Valerie Richardson, THE
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A British blacklist that includes four Americans among 16 named foreigners barred from the country is prompting outrage from free-speech activists and the best-known of the targets, popular talk-radio host Michael Savage.

The Americans are particularly angry that the list lumped Islamic radicals and convicted skinhead killers with people who have not been found guilty of any crime.

"Michael Savage is not guilty of any crime, and lumping him in with mass murderers on a 'ban list' is deplorable," said Brad O'Leary, president of the American Radio Free Speech Coalition and author of "Shut Up America! The End of Free Speech."

Mr. Savage, whose San Francisco-based radio show is America's third-most-popular one and who is known for his fervent opposition to illegal immigration and same-sex marriage, said he would pursue a defamation lawsuit against British Home Secretary Jacqui Smith.

"This lunatic Jacqui Smith has defamed me and if possible, I will sue her," Mr. Savage said Tuesday on his nationally syndicated program, which has an estimated 8 million listeners.

Besides Mr. Savage, the three Americans on the blacklist are Westboro Baptist Church pastor Fred Phelps,

known for his anti-gay stance and picketing of funerals, his daughter Shirley Phelps-Roper, and white supremacist leader Stephen "Don" Black.

Mr. Black's Web site Stormfront denounced the British government's priorities, saying he was banned for a "thought crime," while "third-world rapists and murderers [are] allowed to flood the country."

Efforts to reach Mr. Phelps and his daughter on Tuesday were unsuccessful.

Mrs. Smith released the names Tuesday, saying that the "least-wanted" list is intended to clarify "the sorts of unacceptable behavior we are not willing to have in this country." The names of six others on the list were withheld for security reasons.

British law permits the government to exclude any noncitizen who foments terrorism, serious criminal activity or "hatred," according to a statement issued by the British Home Office. Britain does not have a unified, written constitution, and free speech is a customary and common-law right, not a legal/constitutional right, as in the U.S.

Others excluded from travel to Britain are teenage Russian skinheads Artur Ryno and Pavel Skachevsky, now serving jail sentences for the murders of 20 migrant workers. Seven Islamic radicals, including Hezbollah terrorist and convicted murderer Samir Al

Quntar, also made the list.

"The government opposes extremism in all its forms, and I am determined to stop those who want to spread extremism, hatred and violent messages in our communities from coming to our country," said Mrs. Smith.

In a televised interview with the British Broadcasting Corp., she said that Mr. Savage "certainly isn't your sort of Terry Wogan-type character by any means," referring to a genial Irish television and radio broadcaster. "This is somebody who has fallen into the category of fomenting hatred, of such extreme views and expressing them in such a way that it's actually likely to cause intercommunity tension or even violence if that person were allowed into this country."

Releasing the list "enables people to see the sorts of unacceptable behavior we are not willing to have in this country," she said.

Critics immediately weighed in against the ban, pointing out that it did not distinguish between those who express unpopular or extreme views and those who have actually committed criminal acts.

"Americans should not be denied entry into any country simply because they exercise their basic, human right to free speech," said Mr. O'Leary. "Britain's home secretary says banning Savage is about protecting her country's 'values.' What she's really saying is that her country doesn't value free speech."

Mr. O'Leary also called on Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton to "weigh in" on the travel restriction.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Mr. Savage's show is produced and distributed by Talk Radio Network, which recently announced a deal to distribute and produce a new radio show by The Washington Times.

* Christina Bellantoni contributed to this report.