



Written by [James Murphy](#) on March 15, 2019

SPLC Fires Founder Morris Dees Amid Lawsuits and Credibility Crisis

The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has fired Morris Dees, its co-founder and former chief litigator. Dees, 82, was terminated for alleged misconduct, but exactly what that misconduct was is not yet known.

The SPLC is widely known as an anti-Christian, anti-conservative, and anti-free-speech hate group who has [labeled](#) everyone from President Trump to elements of the constitutionalist John Birch Society as potentially dangerous right-wing extremists.



In a statement, current SPLC president Richard Cohen said, "As a civil rights organization, the SPLC is committed to ensuring that the conduct of our staff reflects the mission of the organization and the values we hope to instill in the world."

"When one of our own fails to meet those standards, no matter his or her role in the organization, we take it seriously and must take appropriate action."

When reached by the Montgomery Advertiser, Dees had little to add, except to confirm that he wasn't leaving voluntarily. "It was not my decision, what they did," Dees said. "I wish the center the absolute best. Whatever reasons they had of theirs, I don't know."

"I've read the [statement](#) they issued," Dees said. "I feel like some of the things in the statement were unfortunate. But I refuse to say anything negative about the center or its employees. I'll let my life's work and reputation speak for itself."

Reportedly, Dees has not been recently involved in the day-to-day running of the SPLC, and reported on Thursday that he hadn't tried a case for a decade or more. By Thursday afternoon, the SPLC had scrubbed Dees' biography from their website, although his name still remains in a summary of the organization's history.

In 1994, the Advertiser reported that Dees, who at that time was in almost complete control of the SPLC, was accused of mistreatment of minority employees of the organization. Staffers at the time "accused Morris Dees, the center's driving force, of being a racist, and black employees have 'felt threatened and banded together.'" The SPLC denied those claims at the time.

The Advertiser's managing editor when the 1994 story was published, Jim Tharpe, weighed in on Dees' firing. "I would hope the IRS and the Justice Department would take this as [an] opportunity to come in and take a close look at the center, its finances and its day-to-day operations," Tharpe said. "It's long overdue."

The firing appears to be part of a "house cleaning" for the organization. Cohen also declared, "Today we announced a number of immediate, concrete steps we're taking, including bringing in an outside organization to conduct a comprehensive assessment of our internal climate and workplace practices, to



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ensure that our talented staff is working in the environment that they deserve — one in which all voices are heard and all staff members are respected.”

The SPLC, which oversees the ironically named [Hatewatch](#) — a list of groups the SPLC considers “hateful” — has been the target of several high-profile lawsuits over the past year, including one for defamation being brought by former CRTV personality and Proud Boys founder [Gavin McInnes](#). Both McInnes and the Proud Boys were [de-platformed](#) by all of the major social networks late last year, largely owing to a misinformation campaign against McInnes by the SPLC. Sadly, many of the Internet’s largest social-networking sites and search engines continue to rely on the SPLC as an arbiter of what is considered “hate speech” in America.

McInnes encapsulates the SPLC’s usual strategy quite nicely: “What they do is they cast this wide net of ‘everyone’s a Nazi’ and they start destroying lives.”

Indeed. When “everyone’s a Nazi,” it’s more likely that no one is a Nazi. While real racism and bigotry do still exist, groups such as the SPLC are guilty of watering down the true meaning of those terms by their rampant and irresponsible use of them.

Whether the firing of Dees and the other “concrete steps” the SPLC is currently taking marks the beginning of a reckoning for the libelous organization remains to be seen. Hopefully, some combination of the lawsuits they’re facing, the lies that they’ve told, their own incompetence, or, as Tharpe suggests, a review of their activities by the IRS or the Justice Department, will relegate the SPLC to the place it belongs: The scrap-heap.

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