

# SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER: KEY EVENTS

## SUMMARY

- **1969:** Morris Dees sells his direct mail business interests for a reported \$6 million.
- **1971:** Dees and Joe Levin co-found the Southern Poverty Law Center to provide pro bono legal assistance in furtherance of the civil rights movement; Dees was chief fundraiser for George McGovern's presidential bid and used the campaign mailing list to raise money.
- **1970s/1980s:** SPLC develops a strategy of suing white supremacist groups in civil court and taking their assets on behalf of victims of racial violence and discrimination.
- **1981:** SPLC founds its "Klanwatch" project, sparked by alleged resurgence in white supremacist activity; the project continues to track groups for the "hate map."
- **1983:** SPLC headquarters is damaged in arson attack linked to the Ku Klux Klan.
- **1986:** As SPLC "broadened its mission" to go after additional groups on the right, the Center's entire legal staff resigns in protest.
- **1990:** SPLC releases its first "annual census" of hate groups.
- **Early 1990s:** SPLC extends its information operation to the classroom with the "Teaching Tolerance" program and educational materials.
- **Mid 1990s:** SPLC starts to track "radical, anti-government" groups in the "Patriot" movement.
- **Mid 1990s:** SPLC reports net assets of roughly \$50 million.
- **1998:** SPLC's re-brands "Klanwatch" as "The Intelligence Project," reflecting the growing scope of the group's work.
- **2000:** SPLC reports net assets of roughly \$120 million.
- **2001:** SPLC finishes construction of its brand-new, \$15 million headquarters that critics label the "Poverty Palace."
- **2003:** SPLC wins lawsuit against Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore to force removal of Ten Commandments monument from court grounds.
- **2010:** SPLC adds "anti-LGBT" and "anti-Muslim" categories to its hate map.
- **2012:** SPLC comes under scrutiny after an armed gunman – who later cited SPLC as an information source – attacked Family Research Council headquarters.
- **2013:** SPLC reports net assets of over \$250 million.

- **2017:** SPLC reports net assets of over \$350 million.

## OVERVIEW AND TIMELINE

**Mission Statement:** “The Southern Poverty Law Center is dedicated to fighting hate and bigotry and to seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society. Using litigation, education, and other forms of advocacy, the SPLC works toward the day when the ideals of equal justice and equal opportunity will be a reality.” ([GuideStar.org](#), Accessed 7/7/17)

**Issue Areas:** Hate & extremism, children’s rights, immigrant justice, LGBT rights, economic justice, criminal justice reform. ([SPLCenter.org](#), Accessed 7/7/17)

### **1969: Morris Dees Sells His Direct Mail Business Interests For A Reported \$6 Million.**

- “After graduation, Dees and [classmate Millard] Fuller hung out a shingle and practiced law. But the real money came from their mail order business, peddling everything from cookbooks to tractor cushions. In 1969, Dees sold the direct-mail firm to the Times Mirror Co. for \$6 million.” (Carl Cannon, “The Hate Group That Incited The Middlebury Melee,” [Real Clear Politics](#), 3/19/17)

### **1971: Dees And Joe Levin Co-Found SPLC To Provide *Pro Bono* Legal Assistance In Furtherance Of The Civil Rights Movement; Dees Was Chief Fundraiser For George McGovern’s Presidential Bid And Used The Campaign Mailing List To Raise Money.**

- “By the late 1960s, the civil rights movement had ushered in the promise of racial equality as new federal laws and decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court ended Jim Crow segregation. But resistance was strong, and these laws had not yet brought the fundamental changes needed in the South. ... [Morris Dees and Joe Levin] formally incorporated the SPLC in 1971, and civil rights activist Julian Bond was named the first president.” ([SPLCenter.org](#), Accessed 7/7/17)
- “Through a friend, [Dees] met Gary Hart, then running George McGovern’s 1972 presidential campaign. Dees’s direct-mail wizardry raised over \$24 million for McGovern from 600,000 small donors. During the campaign, Dees and Levin started the Southern Poverty Law Center. They used the McGovern mailing list to drum up financial support.” (“Morris Dees,” [People Magazine](#), 7/22/91)

### **1970s/1980s: SPLC Develops A Strategy Of Suing White Supremacist Groups In Civil Court And Taking Their Assets On Behalf Of Victims Of Racial Violence And Discrimination.**

- “In the decades since its founding, the SPLC shut down some of the nation’s most violent white supremacist groups by winning crushing, multimillion-dollar jury verdicts on behalf of their victims. It dismantled vestiges of Jim Crow...” ([SPLCenter.org](#), Accessed 7/7/17)

### **1981: SPLC Finds Its “Klanwatch” Project, Sparked By Alleged Resurgence In White Supremacist Activity; The Project Continues To Track Groups For The “Hate Map.”**

- “1981 – The SPLC creates Klanwatch to monitor Ku Klux Klan activity across the country. ... SPLC began monitoring white supremacist activity amid a resurgence of the Klan and today its Intelligence Project is internationally known for tracking and exposing a wide variety of hate and extremist organizations throughout the United States.” ([SPLCenter.org](http://SPLCenter.org), Accessed 7/7/17)

### **1983: SPLC Headquarters Is Damaged In Arson Attack Linked To The Ku Klux Klan.**

- “Lest you suggest that the building’s conspicuous, round-the-clock security might be overkill, a display in the lobby featuring a melted clock and scorched legal tomes stands as a reminder of the 1983 incident in which Klansmen entered the SPLC’s old headquarters just before dawn, doused the inside of the building in petrol and lit it ablaze.” (“Has A Civil Rights Stalwart Lost Its Way?” [Politico Magazine](http://Politico Magazine), July 2017)

### **1986: As SPLC “Broadened Its Mission” To Go After Additional Groups On The Right, The Center’s Entire Legal Staff Resigns In Protest.**

- “The SPLC was founded as a civil-rights law firm in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1971, and scored some notable victories against the KKK in its early years. But in 1986, when the group broadened its mission to attack a wide range of right-wing organizations, the entire legal staff except founder Morris Dees resigned.” (Karl Zinsmeister, “Some People Love to Call Names,” [Philanthropy Roundtable](http://Philanthropy Roundtable), Undated, Accessed 6/30/17)

### **1990: SPLC Releases Its First “Annual Census” Of Hate Groups.**

- “Each year since 1990, we have released an annual census of U.S. hate groups.” ([SPLCenter.org](http://SPLCenter.org), Accessed 7/7/17)

### **Early 1990s: SPLC Extends Its Information Operation To The Classroom With The “Teaching Tolerance” Program And Educational Materials.**

- “In the early 1990s, the SPLC launched its pioneering Teaching Tolerance program to provide educators with free, anti-bias classroom resources such as classroom documentaries and lesson plans. Today, it reaches millions of schoolchildren with award-winning materials that teach them to respect others and help educators create inclusive, equitable school environments.” ([SPLCenter.org](http://SPLCenter.org), Accessed 7/7/17)

### **Mid 1990s: SPLC Begins To Track “Radical, Anti-Government” Groups In The “Patriot” Movement.**

- “In the mid-1990s, we also began documenting the number of radical, antigovernment militias and other organizations that comprise the far-right ‘Patriot’ movement.” ([SPLCenter.org](http://SPLCenter.org), Accessed 7/7/17)

### **Mid 1990s: SPLC Reports Net Assets Of Roughly \$50 Million.**

- “Today [in 2013] the SPLC’s net assets total more than \$256 million ... That represented a more-than-doubling of the \$120 million in net assets that the SPLC reported in 2000, which

was itself more than a doubling of the \$52 million in net assets that the SPLC reported during the mid-1990s.” (“King Of Fearmongers,” [The Weekly Standard](#), 4/15/13)

### **1998: SPLC’s Re-Brands “Klanwatch” As “The Intelligence Project,” Reflecting The Growing Scope Of The Group’s Work.**

- “The SPLC creates Klanwatch to monitor Ku Klux Klan activity across the country. It is renamed the Intelligence Project in 1998 after it expands its mission and begins monitoring other hate groups.” ([SPLCenter.org](#), Accessed 7/7/17)

### **2000: SPLC Reports Net Assets Of Roughly \$120 Million.**

- “Today [in 2013] the SPLC’s net assets total more than \$256 million ... That represented a more-than-doubling of the \$120 million in net assets that the SPLC reported in 2000, which was itself more than a doubling of the \$52 million in net assets that the SPLC reported during the mid-1990s.” (“King Of Fearmongers,” [The Weekly Standard](#), 4/15/13)

### **2001: SPLC Finishes Construction Of Its Brand-New, \$15 Million Headquarters That Critics Label The “Poverty Palace.”**

- “The building—a six-story postmodern edifice that could be the outhouse for Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao—is the most architecturally striking structure in downtown Montgomery.” (“Has A Civil Rights Stalwart Lost Its Way?” [Politico Magazine](#), July 2017; Erdy McHenry Architecture [Website](#), Accessed 6/27/17)

### **2003: SPLC Wins Lawsuit Against Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore To Force Removal Of Ten Commandments Monument From Court Grounds.**

- “Winning a lawsuit against Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore to enforce the constitutional separation of church and state, the SPLC forces the removal of a three-ton Ten Commandments monument from the state Supreme Court building.” ([SPLCenter.org](#), Accessed 7/7/17)

### **2010: SPLC Adds “Anti-LGBT” And “Anti-Muslim” Categories To Its Hate Map.**

- “The SPLC began adding anti-gay-rights groups to its list in 2010.” ([The Chronicle Of Philanthropy](#), 12/22/16)
- “Anti-Muslim hate groups are a relatively new phenomenon in the United States ... Beginning in 2010, anti-Muslim legislation increased and opposition to the development of an Islamic Center in lower Manhattan made headlines.” ([SPLCenter.org](#), Accessed 7/7/17)

### **2012: SPLC Comes Under Scrutiny After Armed Gunman – Who Later Cited SPLC As Information Source – Attacked Family Research Council Headquarters.**

- “The shooter of an unarmed security guard at the Family Research Council headquarters last summer was on a mission to target organizations he viewed as anti-gay, and he obtained a gun days before he tried to carry out a plan to kill ‘as many people as possible,’ according to

newly disclosed court documents. ... A detail sure to reignite the culture wars that erupted around the shooting is the fact that [shooter Floyd] Corkins told FBI agents that he identified the Family Research Council as anti-gay on the Web site of the Southern Poverty Law Center.” ([The Washington Post](#), 2/6/13)

### **2013: SPLC Reports Net Assets Of Over \$250 Million.**

- “Today [in 2013] the SPLC’s net assets total more than \$256 million ... That represented a more-than-doubling of the \$120 million in net assets that the SPLC reported in 2000, which was itself more than a doubling of the \$52 million in net assets that the SPLC reported during the mid-1990s.” (“King Of Fearmongers,” [The Weekly Standard](#), 4/15/13)

### **2017: SPLC Reports Net Assets Of Over \$350 Million.**

- For the year ending October 31, 2016, SPLC reported endowment assets of roughly \$319.2 million and operating assets – including real estate, cash, accounts receivable, and similar assets – of roughly \$33.9 million. (Southern Poverty Law Center, [Financial Statements](#), 10/31/16, p. 5)