



## Morris Dees Fact Sheet

While sitting in my doctor's waiting room, I was rummaging through the magazines, trying to kill time. You can always tell how successful your doctor is by the dates on the magazines [and whether the subscription labels have his name or it looks like he's been dumpster-diving.] My doctor, of course, had all the latest, and all in his own name. Amongst the heap of glossy paper was a copy of the Southern Poverty Law Center's curiously-named periodical Intelligence Report, Spring 2002 issue. I immediately opened it up and wouldn't you know...there were all my good friends. I was inspired by that viewing to make the following available to you...thanks to the good folks at [Aw,Shucks!](#). --LG

### "'Til the Cash Comes Flowing Like a River..."

**Full Name:** Morris Seligman Dees, Jr.

**Born:** 16 December, 1936 in Shorter, Macon County, Alabama

**Education:**

- Graduated from Sidney Lanier High School in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955
- Received B.A. & J.D. Law degree [1960] from University of Alabama

In an article titled *Poverty Palace*, Morris Dees told journalist John Edgerton that "I had a traditional white Southerner's feeling for segregation." [The Progressive, July 1988 - Edgerton, John. *Poverty Palace, How the SPLC Got Rich Fighting the Klan*]

Dees made a fortune selling cookbooks by mail in partnership with Millard Fuller [who later founded Habitat for Humanity.] [Fuller, Millard. Bokotola. New Century Press: 1977]

Fuller has this to say about his 8 year association with Dees:

Dees and Fuller formed the law firm of Dees & Fuller in Montgomery, Alabama in 1960.

"Morris Dees and I, from the first day of our partnership, shared one overriding purpose: to make a pile of money. We were not particular about how we did it; we just wanted to be independently rich. During the eight years we worked together we never wavered in that resolve."

"But everything has a price. And I paid for our success in several ways. One price I paid was estrangement from the church."

Dees served in 1958 as state campaign manager for segregationist attorney general candidate McDonald Gallion and also worked for George C. Wallace. Fuller stated: "We wanted to be sure of having friends in

high places."

In 1961 when Freedom Riders were beaten by a white mob at a Montgomery bus station, Dees [and Fuller] expressed openly his sympathies and support for what had happened at the bus station.

When one of the men charged with beating the Freedom Riders came to their office for legal representation, Dees and Fuller took the case. The legal fee was paid by the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizen's Council. [Fuller, Millard. *Love in the Mortar Joints*. New Century Press: 1980 and *The Progressive*, July 1988]

Dees founded the Southern Poverty Law Center in 1971 with Joseph Levin [who left the SPLC in 1976] and Julian Bond [resigned late 1970's.] [Articles of Incorporation. Southern Poverty Law Center, Inc.]

Acted as Chief fundraiser for George McGovern's 1972 presidential campaign in return for the campaign's mailing list. Raised \$20 million for McGovern. [*Burlington Times*, July 30, 1975. *The Progressive*, July 1988.]

Arrested and removed from court in 1975 for attempting to suborn perjury [bribing a witness] in the Joan Little murder trial in North Carolina. Little, a black convict, was accused of killing a prison guard with an ice-pick. The felony charge against Dees was subsequently dropped, but the presiding judge, Hamilton Hobgood, refused to re-admit Dees to the case. The refusal was upheld on appeal after the Supreme Court of the United States refused to hear Dees appeal. [Ibid.]

"The great untold story of the JoAnn Little trial was the role of the Communist Party, through its National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, in controlling the entire political movement surrounding the case. Angela Davis, a leading figure in both organizations became the most frequently quoted movement figure and constant companion of JoAnn Little... Party members were visible and influential on the defense committee, and the party frequently set up rallies of support around the country." [*Columbia Journalism Review*. Pirskey, Mark. March/April, 1976.]

Fund-raised for Jimmy Carter in 1976 hoping to be named Attorney-General, but was unenthused by the campaign for its middle of the road appeal " You've got to have a candidate who is way out on the extremes!" [*The Progressive*, July 1988.]

Acted as a fundraiser for both Ted Kennedy's 1980 and Gary Hart's 1984 presidential campaigns and received their mailing lists as reward. [Ibid.]

Perhaps explaining the SPLC's 'Gay' rights activism, Dees was cited in 1979 by his ex-wife with a homosexual encounter during their marriage. She also cited numerous affairs with women including his daughter-in-law and underage stepdaughter. [Alabama Court of Civil Appeals CIV 2114, 1979]

The SPLC's fundraising practices have provoked the disapproval of watchdog groups that monitor charities: In 1993, the American Institute of Philanthropy assigned the SPLC a 'D' grade on a scale of A to F. [American Institute of Philanthropy xxxx 1993 *Charity Watchdog Report*]

"By frequently mailing out such persuasive appeals, Dees and his associates have drawn financial support from about half a million Americans [by 1988.] The number of contributors and the amount they have given are probably greater than any left-of-center group has recorded in a comparable period in the history of American philanthropy." [*The Progressive*>, July 1988.]

Randall Williams who formed Klanwatch in 1981 as part of the SPLC's said in 1988: "We were sharing information with the FBI, the police, undercover agents. Instead of defending clients and victims we were more of a super snoop outfit, an arm of law enforcement. Randall and four staff attorney's resigned from the Center in 1986. [Ibid.]

In 1994 the Montgomery Advertiser won a journalism award for a series of incisive and penetrating investigative articles exposing the unethical fundraising practices of Dees and the Southern Poverty Law Center including:

Since August 1, 1984, the Law Center has taken in about \$62 million in contributions and yet only spent about \$21 million on actual programs, according to federal tax records.

In a series of fund-raising letters the Law Center implied it forced the United Klan's of American to pay \$7 million to the mother of lynching victim Michael Donald in 1987. Beulah Mae Donald actually received only \$51,874.70 from the Klansmen. The Law Center collected millions as the result of fund-raising letters about the case.

*The Montgomery Advertiser* conducted a "random sampling of donors - people who receive a steady stream of fund-raising letters and newsletters - showed they had no idea the Law Center was so wealthy."

"They're drowning in their own affluence," Pamela Summers, a former SPLC legal fellow told *The Montgomery Advertiser*. "What they are doing in the legal department is not done for the best interest of everybody [but] is done as though the sole, overriding goal is to make money." "I think people associate the SPLC with going to court. And that's why they get the money. And they don't go to court." There have only been a handful of court cases over the years, many of which remain unresolved.

The SPLC which has crusaded for the rights of blacks for 23 years, is controlled by whites. It has hired only two black staff attorneys in its history, both of whom left unhappy. 12 of 13 former Black employees interviewed by the Montgomery Advertiser complained they experienced or observed racial problems during their employment. Several said the SPLC was "more like a plantation." [*The Montgomery Advertiser*. Feb. 13-14, 1994.]

In 1986 the entire SPLC legal staff resigned in protest of Dees refusal to address issues such as poverty, homelessness, voter registration and other issues they considered more pertinent to poor minorities rather than to get rich fighting a Klan chimera. [Harpers Magazine. Silverstein, Ken. *The Church of Morris Dees*. November 2000.]

The Birmingham News has also investigated Dees and the SPLC in 1994 and found the following:

Christine Lee, a Harvard Law School alumna who interned at the Center in 1989, "I would definitely say that there was not a single black employee with whom I spoke who was happy to be working there." "As I was told [at the SPLC,] they don't need Black people telling them how to handle Black issues," Lee said.

Dees responded by saying, "We don't have black slots and white slots. Probably the most discriminated people in American today are white men when it comes to jobs because there are more of those who had more education opportunities and who the test scores show are scoring better and on paper look more qualified. That's why you have so many reverse discrimination cases around." [*Birmingham News*. Feb. 17, 1994.]

*USA Today* reported in 1996 that Dees' Southern Poverty Law Center was the "nation's richest civil rights organization" with \$68 million in assets. [USA Today. Aug. 3, 1996] Today it is closer to its stated goal of a \$100 million endowment.

In the same article Stephen Bright, one of Dees' numerous former associates told a reporter that Dees is "a fraud who has milked a lot of very wonderful, well intentioned people." [Ibid.]

At a news conference in Washington in April 1996, Dees announced that "Those [black] churches that have been burned in the South were certainly burned by racists." After subsequent investigation revealed there was no rash of black church burnings, many newspapers, including *The Charlotte Observer*, concluded that Dees "misinformed" the press. [*Charlotte Observer*. October 10, 1996.]

Dees has actively campaigned for laws in which "associations of two or more persons" who train in the use of firearms for defensive purposes are declared "illegal militias." [Selected Speeches and Writings of Morris Dees.]

Dees is well known for putting 'Hate on Trial' in the 1990 Portland, Oregon civil trial of extremist Tom Metzger. One of the witnesses in that trial, Greg Withrow, now accuses Dees of suborning perjury by paying witnesses [and then hush money for another 5 years] for their testimony. [*San Diego Times Union*. August 25, 2002.]

Dees & the SPLC defames the entire Southern Heritage Community by labeling them 'Neo-Confederates.' [SPLC Intelligence Update. Summer 2000]

Dees assaulted an elderly journalist at a symposium sponsored by the University of West Florida, Pensacola, Florida on January 12, 2002. The journalist had asked Dees a 'bad question.' Dees then had the journalist physically hauled out of the building by two policemen. [*The First Freedom*. February, 2002.]

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*"If ye love wealth greater than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest for freedom, go home and leave us in peace. We seek not your council nor your arms. Crouch down and lick the hand that feeds you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen."*

--Samuel Adams

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