



The Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King Lecture Series on Race and Nonviolent Social Change

proudly presents



Morris Dees

Co-Founder and Chief Trial Counsel of the Southern Poverty Law Center

Eighteenth Annual Lecture

“With Justice For All”

Few people are more qualified to address some of the key issues facing our country caused by the September 11 tragedy than Morris Dees. He has successfully tracked and fought domestic terrorists for 20 years. He knows what America faces in its war against terrorism. He also has a powerful tolerance message to stem the tide of hate crimes against those who resemble the terrorists. His message is one of hope, and of turning this tragedy into America’s finest hour.

Over the course of his career, Dees has done much to promote diversity. His efforts have resulted in many achievements, including the Civil Rights Memorial, lawsuits that bankrupted the KKK and imprisoned perpetrators of hate crimes, and increased awareness of radical militias. He is chief trial counsel for the Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit group he co-founded in 1971, which specializes in lawsuits involving civil rights violations, domestic terrorists, and racially motivated crimes.

When Klan members lynched an African-American man in Mobile, Alabama, in 1981, civil rights lawyer Dees – and the Southern Poverty Law Center – launched an historic lawsuit. They sued the Klan for inciting violence and won a \$7 million precedent-setting judgment. In 1990, Dees won a \$12.5 million verdict for the family of an Ethiopian murdered by skinheads in Oregon. In 1998, he obtained a \$37.8 million verdict against the Christian Knights of the KKK for the burning of the Macedonia Baptist Church in South Carolina. This was the largest civil award ever won for damages in a verdict.

In the courtroom yet again, Dees won another landmark trial – this time his victim was the Aryan Nation. On September 7, 2000, a jury awarded \$6.3 million to a woman and her son, saying that white supremacist leader Richard Butler was negligent in letting guards from his Aryan Nations compound chase down and shoot at Victoria Keenan and her son Jason in 1998.

Using the law like a sword, Dees continues his battles as chief trial counsel and chair of the executive committee of the Center. He has devoted his time to developing ideas for “Teaching Tolerance,” the Center’s well-regarded education project.

To help educate young people about the civil rights movement, Dees pushed for the construction of the Civil Rights Memorial. Designed by Maya Lin, the monument, bearing the names of 40 men, women, and children who lost their lives during the civil rights movement, was dedicated in 1989 in Montgomery, Alabama.

Over the years, Dees has devoted his time to educating people about America’s radical militia movement. In his brilliant 1996 expose, *Gathering Storm; America’s Militia Threat*, Dees explores the dangers these groups represent.

A graduate of the University of Alabama Law School, Dees has received numerous accolades in conjunction with his work at the Center. His honors include being named a “Trial Lawyer of the Year” by the Trial Lawyers for Public Justice, and receiving the National Education Association’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Award.

In addition to *Gathering Storm; America’s Militia Threat*, Dees has written two other books: his autobiography, *A Lawyer’s Journey*, and *Hate on Trial: The Case Against America’s Most Dangerous Neo-Nazi*.

A made-for-television movie about his life, *Line of Fire*, aired on NBC on January 25, 1991, actor Corbin Berenson playing Dees. Dees was portrayed by Wayne Rogers in *Ghosts of Mississippi*, a feature film released in 1996 about the life of slain civil rights worker Medgar Evers. HBO premiered a documentary, titled *HATE.com*, in the fall of 2000, hosted by Dees; it covered the issue of hate crimes on the internet.

Thursday, January 27, 2005 at 7 PM
Alumni Recreation Center, Siena College

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