

Trump Justice Department purging civil rights division to repurpose it for state repression

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Trump Justice Department officials are overseeing a mass purge of the department's civil rights division to repurpose the agency from its official mandate of opposing discrimination in education, voting and housing as well as curtailing police abuse, to encouraging police repression, targeting Trump's political opponents, stepping up attacks on campus protests, and intensifying the drive to impose government control over universities under the pretext of combating antisemitism.

The civil rights division was established under President Eisenhower in 1957, during the early stages of the civil rights movement and following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of that year.

Under Trump loyalists Attorney General Pam Bondi and recently confirmed head of the civil rights division Harmeet K. Dhillon, both of whom prominently supported Trump's "Stop the Steal" conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election, the division is being transformed in accordance with the plan laid down in the pro-Trump Project 2025 blueprint to pursue a police state agenda and suppress the "radical left."

Dhillon was interviewed last Saturday on right-wing commentator Glenn Beck's podcast, where she boasted, "Now, over 100 attorneys decided that they'd rather not do what their job required them to do, and I think that's fine." She continued: "We don't want people in the federal government who feel like it's their pet project to go persecute" police departments.

When Trump took office in January, there were 380 lawyers in the civil rights division. Under Bondi and now Dhillon, the division changed mission statements across its sections to focus less on racial discrimination and more on fighting diversity initiatives. Department

officials reassigned more than a dozen career staffers, including chiefs of sections overseeing police brutality, disability and voting rights cases, to areas outside their legal expertise.

The division's voting section has been ordered to drop all ongoing cases, and senior managers have been dismissed.

Last week, Dhillon announced the division was withdrawing court filings in two cases related to transgender prison inmates. Weeks earlier, Bondi said the Justice Department would drop a Biden-era lawsuit that charged that a 2021 Georgia law overhauling election procedures was discriminatory.

According to the *New York Times*, inside the division there are discussions about scrapping long-established consent decrees with police departments and instead bringing cases against liberal cities to loosen their gun restrictions.

Lawyers in the division have been sent to the Department of Health and Human Services with orders to investigate antisemitism related to campus protests against Israel's US-backed mass murder and ethnic cleansing in the Gaza Strip. Those investigations are to focus on medical schools, because the government can withhold huge sums of grant money that goes to them.

Another group of civil rights lawyers have been assigned to work on cases for Trump's goal of preventing transgender students from playing women's sports.

The immigration and employee rights section is now primarily focused on ensuring that foreign workers are not favored over US citizens for job opportunities.

In one of her first acts, Dhillon changed the mission statements of many division offices to align with

Trump executive orders such as “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling,” “Keeping Men Out of Women’s Sports” and “Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias.”

In her interview last Saturday, she told Beck, “These are the president’s priorities. This is what we will be focusing on. Govern yourself accordingly.”

The wave of departures has accelerated in recent days, as the administration has restarted its “deferred resignation program,” allowing employees who resign to continue receiving pay until September. The offer, for those who work in the civil rights division, expires Monday evening. More than 100 are expected to take the offer, on top of earlier departures, in what amounts to the decimation of the division.

It’s expected that 140 or fewer attorneys will be left in the division, and that support staff departures will be roughly as high. “It’s been a total purge,” a senior lawyer from the division told NBC News.

Vanita Gupta, who ran the division during the Obama administration and served as a senior Justice Department official during the Biden administration, said:

This is not simply a change in enforcement priorities—the division has been turned on its head and is now being used as a weapon against the very communities it was established to protect.

David Becker, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Election Innovation and Research, said, “The ability of the Justice Department to enforce laws that protect the American people from discrimination, from fraud, from illegal activity, is being decimated.”

Stacey Young once worked in the division as a lawyer and is now the executive director of Justice Connection, an organization of former department officials. She said:

With the reckless dismantling of the division, we’ll see unchecked discrimination and constitutional violations in schools, housing, employment, voting, prisons, by police

departments and in many other realms of our daily lives.

The gutting and purging of the civil rights division in line with Trump’s fascist agenda has evoked virtually no response from the Democratic Party. Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee have sent a pro forma letter to Dhillon, Bondi and Department of Justice Inspector General Michael Horowitz raising concerns over what they call the “politicization” of the civil rights division and asking Dhillon to schedule a briefing for the Judiciary Committee’s Subcommittee on the Constitution.



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