

# Justice Department begins retaliatory investigation against Trump victim E. Jean Carroll

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CNN and several other news outlets reported Thursday that the federal Department of Justice has opened an investigation into writer E. Jean Carroll, who won civil court judgements against Trump for sexual abuse and defamation.

The DOJ is considering whether to charge Carroll with perjury—not in her testimony about Trump’s sexual assault 30 years ago, but about a detail of how her long-running lawsuit was funded.

Carroll said in a sworn deposition in 2022 that no one else was paying her legal fees in her lawsuit against Trump for defamation. Her lawyers filed papers a year later declaring that Carroll “now recalls that at some point her counsel secured additional funding from a nonprofit organization to offset certain expenses and legal fees.”

The nonprofit organization which paid for some of Carroll’s legal expenses was set up by Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn and a large donor to the Democratic Party and Trump critic. There is no suggestion that Hoffman’s assistance to the suit was improper, and a federal judge ruled that the issue was not relevant to the merits of the lawsuit.

A federal appeals court upheld that ruling, finding: “Ms. Carroll plausibly represented that she had forgotten about the limited outside funding counsel obtained in September 2020 when this question was first posed to her in 2022, and the additional discovery did not indicate otherwise. Rather, it showed that Ms. Carroll simply was not involved in the matter of who was or was not funding her litigation costs.”

Carroll had publicly discussed her allegations that Trump raped her in a department-store dressing room in the 1990s, when both were in their early forties.

After Trump denied her claims and accused her of lying to boost sales of a book, Carroll filed suit in 2019, while he was in his first term as president. The lawsuit was only possible, given the long period of time since the event, because of a recently passed New York state law, the Adult Survivors Act, which gave those subjected to sexual assault as adults a one-year window to file suits over offenses for which the statute of limitations has expired. The law did not permit criminal charges to be brought against alleged perpetrators, so Trump faced no criminal liability.

After Trump left office but continued to denounce Carroll on social media, she filed a second lawsuit in 2022, charging Trump with both sexual assault and defamation.

The second lawsuit went to trial in May 2023, and Trump’s attorneys did not put on a defense, confining themselves to cross-examining Carroll and challenging her credibility. The federal jury found in favor of Carroll, awarding her \$5 million in damages for sexual abuse. Contrary to Trump’s claim that the jury found him not guilty of rape, New York state law limits rape charges to cases of penetration, and Carroll had fought off her attacker and forced him to retreat.

The first lawsuit went to trial in January 2024, with the jury limited to assessing damages, since defamation had been proven in the earlier trial. The jury awarded Carroll \$83 million. A court of appeals panel upheld both civil judgements and the total amount of the awards.

Trump has appealed both decisions to the Supreme Court, where they are now pending. As late as Wednesday, May 27, the court deferred any decision on whether to take up the appeal. As long as it delays,

Trump can avoid paying the judgements.

The investigation of Carroll is yet another example of Trump using the Department of Justice to target his enemies, personal and political. There are multiple conflicts of interest, given that Trump's attorney in the Carroll lawsuits, Alina Habba, was later appointed US Attorney for the northern district of New Jersey, although she was never confirmed by the Senate and is now relegated to the role of an "adviser" to the department.

Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche did some legal work on the Carroll case and has recused himself, but Justice Department attorneys who work for him are overseeing the investigation, and both Blanche and Trump are undoubtedly kept up to date on the case.

The investigation is reportedly run by the US Attorney's office in Chicago, headed by Trump appointee Andrew Boutros. Since last fall, Boutros's office has been heavily involved in prosecuting immigrants' rights protesters who have demonstrated outside the ICE detention center in the Chicago suburb of Broadview, as well as defending agents who engaged in violent attacks and then lied in court about their actions.

At the time of the jury verdicts against Trump, the WSWS explained that he was undoubtedly guilty of the civil charges brought against him, but that the case was being promoted by the Democratic Party and their media allies as a substitute for charging Trump with the crimes he committed as president. We wrote:

The Democrats have consistently refused to conduct a struggle against Trump for mass social and political crimes ranging from attacks on immigrants, as in the separation of children from their parents, to the attempted political coup of January 6, 2021, when he sought to overturn the outcome of the 2020 election, mobilizing his fascist supporters in a violent assault on Congress. More than two years after the attack on the Capitol, the chief instigators still walk free and face no criminal charges.

That said, there is no argument about the reality of Trump's crude and brutal treatment of women. This is underscored by the speed with which the jury brought back a unanimous

verdict, including one juror whom Carroll's lawyers tried unsuccessfully to disqualify because he regularly listens to ultra-right podcasts.

Even this limited accountability collapsed after Trump won the presidency a second time in November 2024. One month later, ABC paid \$16 million to settle a lawsuit brought by Trump against the network and news anchor George Stephanopoulos, for comments Stephanopoulos made during an on-air discussion, in which he referred inaccurately to Trump being "convicted of rape" in the Carroll case, when it was in fact a civil judgement for sexual abuse.

Now the Trump Justice Department is investigating and seeking to harass or even prosecute the 82-year-old Carroll for having the temerity to tell the truth about his private conduct and his public smear campaign against her.



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