

## FIGHTING IGNORANCE

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Much has been written and said about Benjamin Smith's hatred and how it played itself out on our streets. We have mourned the dead, made promises to be more tolerant of each other, held our interracial marches and are already moving on. Through the din of it all one refrain keeps surfacing, that something went terribly wrong with a man who was raised with every advantage--that somehow he wandered into a dark angry place that left two people dead and nine more injured before killing himself.

Blame has been laid at the doorstep of the Church of the Creator and its leader, Matthew Hale. The truth, however, is that he and Hale are but fleeting reflections of a deeper darkness.

That darkness is ignorance, that most corrosive of social toxins in any democracy. We live in a nation of strangers, and we must face up to the fact that racist xenophobes are not changelings dropped among us from some alien world to devour the troubled and feeble-minded. They are creations of our public-discourse society and institutions. No amount of intelligence or advantages can protect us from ourselves. Only we can do that.

We must accept that the ignorance that falls and has fallen from the lips of Matthew Hale, Benjamin Smith and their creed, and left bodies on the streets, can be heard in every racist joke and deeply held family and religious mores of separation.

It is, in a real sense, on each and every one of us.

Caption: GRAPHIC

GRAPHIC: John Overmyer.

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