

HATE GROUPS USE RECENT SHOOTINGS AS RECRUITING AID

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Author: Karen Brandon and Michael J. Berens, Tribune Staff Writers. Tribune staff writer Karen Brandon reported from Hayden Lake, Idaho, and staff writer Michael J. Berens wrote this report from Chicago.

From the backwoods compounds of the Christian Identity movement to the one-room Illinois headquarters of the World Church of the Creator, white supremacy organizations are stepping up recruitment efforts to capitalize on recent hate-related violence, watchdog groups warn.

The murky world of hate groups--popularly but inaccurately dismissed by many as disjointed bands of tattooed young men who idolize Adolf Hitler--is increasingly bolstered by a sophisticated marketing machine that relies on video and book publishing and slick multimedia Internet sites updated daily in hopes of luring new members.

On a Web site touting the published works of a prominent white supremacist, Michael A. Hoffman II, are declarations aimed at a Chicago audience, including, "Where is the outrage in Chicago over the 70,000 gang members in that metropolis who commit hundreds of hate crimes against whites which go unreported or are whitewashed as random muggings and rapes."

Increasingly, this kind of rhetoric is being wrapped in a religious context. Holding the Bible up as their handbook, many of the largest hate groups--and among the most violent, experts and scholars say--are diminishing their use of swastikas and Hitler portraits for a more appealing, more insidious message that promises membership in an elite army for God.

Speaking after last week's shootings in Los Angeles at a Jewish community center, Ken Toole, executive director of the Montana Human Rights Network, predicted that the violence will "energize" members of these hate groups. "The scary thing is that those who draw inspiration from this, and there certainly are people who will draw inspiration from it, are the ones who are closest to the edge of doing something similar," he said.

For many the epicenter of this hate is in the north woods of Idaho, not far from the Washington state home of Buford O. Furrow Jr., who is charged in the lethal rampage in Los Angeles. Nestled amid towering pine trees and wildflower fields, the Aryan Nations maintains a compound that makes no pretense of subtlety, marked by a giant swastika painted on the roof of a building.

As children played among the trees last week, a sign nailed to a tree served as a reminder to all with a declaration, "Whites only."

It was within these woods, among the residential buildings of the group's stronghold, that Furrow found a home and the respect and stature that led him to proudly wear the distinctive Aryan Nations uniform beginning in 1995, law-enforcement officials say.

Aryan Nations leader Richard Butler, 80, who also heads the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, stops short of directly advocating violence and denies any recent contact with Furrow, but he also says that whites are under attack.

"I advocate whatever it takes to survive," he said. "(White people) should at least have the dignity to defend themselves." Butler has stepped up his public appearances in the wake of the Los Angeles shootings.

Toole said hate groups picked up a lot of new people through the early 1990s, with the growth of the militia movement. But many people left after the Oklahoma City federal building bombing.

"What was left behind were the hardest of the hard. The reasonable people have been drifting away," he said.

In Illinois, the self-described leader of a white supremacy group, Matthew Hale, is not bashful about parlaying violent events into a recruiting bonanza, although he says he adamantly opposes criminal acts.

"There is a subsidiary effect to the movement in that it has tightened," said Hale, 28, the founder of the East Peoria-based World Church of the Creator. "It's certainly true that all these type of things do increase the notoriety of the church, and, in a sense, no publicity is bad publicity."

Last month, Benjamin Smith, once a member of Hale's group, went on a rampage that left two people dead and nine injured before Smith killed himself.

Of particular concern to the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and other organizations that track hate groups is an emerging breed of domestic terrorists who are rooted in hatred for non-whites but who call themselves Phineas Priests. There is no formal membership in the male-only priesthood, no headquarters, no meetings and no way to count those who are self-initiated through an act of violence, according to the monitoring groups.

Law-enforcement officials said Furrow may have been prompted, in part, by his desire to join the Phineas group, whose members have been linked to dozens of bombings, bank robberies and several shootings. A book written by the founder of the Phineas Priest movement, Richard Kelly Hoskins, was found in a van driven by Furrow.

Furrow has been charged with the murder of a Filipino-American postal worker, apparently targeted because he was non-white and a federal worker, and with attempted murder in the shooting of five people, including children, at the North Valley Jewish Community Center near Los Angeles.

The crime family aspects of the Phineas group, whose name is based on a biblical passage in the Book of Numbers in which the grandson of a priest kills a prince of Israel for marrying a woman of another tribe, is the kind of clandestine brotherhood steeped in symbolism that appeals most to the mentally unstable or vulnerable, experts said.

Information about the Phineas Priests emerged in 1991 with the arrest of Byron de la Beckwith, who was later convicted for the 1963 slaying of civil rights leader Medgar Evers. The FBI says it uncovered evidence that Beckwith, a Christian Identity member, had become a Phineas Priest.

The priesthood emerged again in April 1996 when pipe bombs were set off at a Spokane, Wash., newspaper office and a bank, resulting in the theft of \$100,000.

The masked bombers left Christian Identity literature marked with references to the priesthood. More bombing and robberies followed until three men were arrested in October 1996. Dozens of other incidents nationally have been linked to suspects who identify themselves as members, law-enforcement officials said.

Pastor Dave Barley, 45, runs America's Promise Ministries, a Christian Identity organization based at the Lord's Covenant Church in Sandpoint, Idaho. He said no one in the Christian Identity movement condones violence.

Barley said he is coming to Chicago in September to officiate at a wedding and speak at a suburban Christian Identity church.

Although he would not call his trip a recruitment drive, he would not provide specific locations, saying: "I don't know anyone preaching out there who doesn't want to convert people. We're out there to plant seeds and preach God's word."

Rabbi Marvin Hier, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, said he is deeply concerned that Furrow did not act alone, especially as law-enforcement officials now believe the center and other nearby Jewish-operated facilities were scouted as targets months before the community center attack.

Heightened efforts by hate groups to capitalize on one man's actions may incite emotionally disturbed individuals into acts of violence, Hier said.

"They get to be somebody," he said. "They get to be king for a day."

Caption: PHOTOS 3

PHOTO: (Buford O. Furrow Jr.) PHOTO: Police lead children away from a community center near Los Angeles Tuesday after Buford Furrow (top) allegedly shot five people there. AP photo taken from television image. (Chicagoland edition, news section, Page 3.) PHOTO: Richard Butler (center), head of the Idaho-based Aryan Nations sect, is one of the leaders of the Christian Identity movement, which seeks to cloak its message of racial hatred in the veil of religion. AP file photo. (Chicagoland edition, News section, Page 3.)

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