

SHOOTING VICTIM SUES WHITE SUPREMACIST

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Attorneys for a Decatur pastor who was wounded last summer by Benjamin Smith during a hate-driven shooting spree filed a federal lawsuit today against white supremacist Matthew Hale and his World Church of the Creator.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Chicago on behalf of the Rev. Stephen Anderson, alleges Hale and the World Church conspired with Smith, a member of the group, to "conduct a racial holy war" against African-Americans, Jews, Asians and other minorities. Anderson is black.

During the rampage over the Fourth of July weekend, Smith killed two people -- including former Northwestern University men's basketball coach Ricky Byrdsong -- and injured Anderson and eight others in Illinois and Indiana before taking his own life. All of the victims were Jewish, black or Asian.

Speaking at a news conference today, Anderson said he filed the lawsuit to help stop hate crimes. He also described the attack by Smith on the afternoon of July 3rd as he and several members of his family, including young children, gathered outside his home in Decatur.

"I was standing in front of my home when Benjamin Smith stopped his vehicle and began to shoot," he said. "I thought that I was dying because we were so close together. I was right up next to his car."

Smith fired four times, hitting Anderson once each in the right arm, waist and upper buttock, according to the lawsuit. Anderson said his injuries have made him "very uncomfortable," but he declined to elaborate.

The lawsuit, brought under a federal civil rights statute known as the Ku Klux Klan Act, and the Illinois Hate Crimes Act, alleges that on July 2, after the Illinois State Bar denied Hale's petition for a law license, Smith "began a rampage of genocidal violence." It asks for unspecified punitive damages.

The lawsuit alleges Hale and the World Church helped Smith plan the killing spree. It also charges that Hale failed to prevent the killings and to notify the police.

In replying to the lawsuit, Hale said, "I learned in law school the first week that anyone can file a lawsuit. That doesn't make it valid or legitimate."

Hale, who has not been charged with any crime related to the shooting, said he also found it ironic that a constitutional rights organization was leading "an effort to destroy our constitutional rights." Anderson filed the lawsuit with the help of the Center for Constitutional Rights, a New York-based civil rights group.

Pamela Armour, an attorney with the center, dismissed claims that the suit was frivolous.

"We believe that there is plenty of circumstantial evidence to link Benjamin Smith and Matt Hale and the World Church of the Creator," she said. "They have to be accountable for their actions. They have to be accountable for their words."

This is the second lawsuit attempting to hold Hale and his East Peoria-based group at least partially responsible for the acts of Smith.

A civil lawsuit that claims Hale "ordered" Smith to go on the shooting spree was filed last summer by the parents of Ephraim Wolfe and Nossen Cohen, two Orthodox Jews who were shot at as they walked to a synagogue on Chicago's Far North Side on July 2. Wolfe was shot in the leg. Cohen was not injured.

Last month, a Cook County Circuit Court judge threw out a portion of the lawsuit that alleged that Smith's parents were responsible for his actions. Hale has filed a motion to dismiss the case against him, saying that he cannot be held liable in the Smith slayings.

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