

WAKEFIELD PROTEST DROWNS OUT SUPREMACIST - SPEECH AT LIBRARY DISINTEGRATES INTO A SHOUTING MATCH

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WAKEFIELD - Angry protesters clashed with police dressed in riot gear outside the Wakefield Public Library yesterday as Matthew Hale, a nationally known white supremacist, spoke to his followers inside.

Anticipating trouble, police had shut down streets, closed the library and adjacent post office to the public, and brought in about 200 police officers from 70 area communities as backup.

Wakefield police said four people were arrested on disorderly conduct charges and onlookers reported scattered fights and several minor injuries.

Dozens of protesters organized by the Communist Progressive Labor Party in opposition to Hale's appearance carried signs and chanted "Fight back!" on Main Street in front of the library, a newly renovated brick structure fronted by stone columns.

Hale is the leader of the World Church of the Creator, an Illinois-based white supremacist group that has gained national attention in recent years.

With protesters inside, the meeting disintegrated into a shouting match with opponents chanting, "Smash the Nazis; we must unite." Two disruptive protesters were removed from the meeting by police.

Hale's supporters chanted Nazi slogans and performed Nazi salutes. About 40 church supporters, a half-dozen protesters, and 20 police were in the room.

In his speech, delivered in the emotional tones of a preacher, Hale said the protests that his message provoked meant he was "doing something right."

"If you're being killed, you have the right to hate," he said. "If your sister's being raped, you have the right to hate. If your society is being leveled into the ground, you have the right to hate . . . the World Church of the Creator hates in self-defense."

The size of the crowd outside the library grew to several hundred as Wakefield residents came out in droves to watch and take pictures. A few set up lawn chairs in the street, and downtown pizza parlors did a booming business.

"It's a bit of excitement," said Heather Manahan, 27, of Wakefield. "It's interesting, but scary at the same time."

It was unclear why Hale had selected Wakefield to deliver his message. However, letting Hale speak "was the only thing the town could do," Manahan said. "This is America."

About 100 people gathered a quarter-mile away at the Wakefield-Lynnfield United Methodist Church to sing folk songs at a rally called "Love Lives Here."

Hale arrived a half-hour late at the rear of the library, with a small group of supporters in a red minivan. Armed police were stationed on top of a downtown bank and insurance agency. Police holding plastic bullet shields escorted Hale supporters into the library.

Retired businessman Donald Smith was not among them. The 92-year-old New Yorker said it was worth driving hundreds of miles to hear Hale speak, but he left before the meeting started, saying he feared his car would be towed because of its New York plates.

"These aren't Nazis - they're just concerned citizens," he said of those that came to see Hale. "I'm afraid that the white race is going down the tubes."

Blocked from following the church members into the library, a throng of young protesters pressed in on police barricades, chanting "Let us in." Police first said the room's 75 seats were full, but eventually found room for a handful of Hale's opponents, including Stephanie Shurtleff, 18, a Wakefield High School student.

"It's really scary," she said. "They're allowing them to have freedom of speech, but they're not allowing us the same thing. It's our community also."

The World Church of the Creator gained notoriety in 1999, when a member shot two dead and injured nine others in the Midwest. Since then, Hale says his organization's membership has grown. Erica Chase, recently convicted in Boston in a bomb plot with her neo-Nazi boyfriend, Leo Felton, was a member of the church.

Racist pamphlets authored by Hale have been distributed in several Massachusetts towns recently, including Lexington, Bedford, Billerica, Leominster, Marblehead, and Swampscott. Earlier this year, church members clashed with hundreds of protesters when Hale spoke at a public library in Pennsylvania.

"Nobody wants this kind of thing, but we got it, and we have to demonstrate that we're ready," said Doherty, the police chief.

Hale left the same way he came in - quietly, out the back door. Protesters continued shouting in the street until police escorted a few of them inside, to show them Hale was gone. Main Street reopened to traffic less than an hour after his departure.

Jack Welsh, 64, a Wakefield native, said he had to be at the peaceful protest at the Methodist church. "If I sat at home and didn't take part in this, I'd be guilty," he said. "This is my town and I'm outraged."

Caption: PHOTO

1. Supporters of Matthew Hale gave the Nazi salute to a crowd of protesters yesterday in Wakefield. / GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / GEORGE RIZER

2. A couple and a Matthew Hale supporter (left) argued yesterday outside the Wakefield library. / GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / GEORGE RIZER

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