

Supremacist Charged in Plot

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The leader of a white supremacist organization based in East Peoria, Ill., was charged today with plotting to kill a federal judge and obstructing justice. Matthew Hale, 31, was arrested at Dirksen Federal Courthouse here, where he was scheduled to appear at a contempt hearing in a civil trademark infringement case involving the World Church of the Creator, which he leads. The organization, which has grown quickly in the past decade, contends that blacks, Jews and nonwhites are "subhuman."

The two-count federal indictment alleges that between Nov. 29 and Dec. 17, Hale sought someone to kill U.S. District Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow, who had been presiding over the trademark case.

"Freedom of speech does not include the freedom to solicit murder," U.S. Attorney Patrick J. Fitzgerald said today when announcing the arrest.

If convicted, Hale faces a maximum of 30 years in prison and \$500,000 in fines.

In May 2000, the TE-TA-MA Truth Foundation in Oregon filed suit against Hale's group for infringing on its registered trademark "Church of the Creator." In November 2002, Lefkow ruled for the Oregon group, ordering that Hale's group notify all of its members within seven days that they were no longer to use the name.

Today's hearing was scheduled so that Hale could show why he should not be held in contempt for not abiding by the ruling. He was arrested instead.

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles, today called Hale "the most dangerous American racist of his generation."

Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University in San Bernardino, agreed. "Matt Hale was someone who tried to walk the line between hateful violent rhetoric and violence itself," Levin said. "In this case, apparently he tripped. That has been a problem for many of these groups. If they merely rely on rhetoric, they risk alienating their constituencies."

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