

White Supremacist Is Held In Ordering Judge's Death

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Abstract: Matthew Hale , white supremacist, is arrested in Chicago on charges that he solicited someone to kill federal judge presiding over copyright case regarding name of his organization, World Church of the Creator; arrest comes shortly after Hale denounces Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow, saying she is biased against him because she is married to Jewish man and has biracial grandchildren; Lefkow has presided over trial stemming from lawsuit against Hale's church filed by TE-TA-MA Truth Foundation; dozen members of Hale's church attend Hale's arraignment, some raising their arms in Nazi salute; arrest revives memories of 1999 incident when one of Hale's followers, Benjamin Smith, went on three-day rampage, killing black man and Korean man, and injuring 9 other Jews, Asians and blacks before committing suicide; Hale claims he is innocent; photo (M)

A white supremacist was arrested this afternoon on charges that he had solicited someone to kill a federal judge presiding over a copyright case regarding the name of his organization, the World Church of the Creator.

The man, Matthew Hale , 31, who calls himself the church's supreme leader and Pontifex Maximus, was taken into custody at the federal building in downtown Chicago as he headed to a conference on the copyright case in the courtroom of Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow of Federal District Court. The arrest came shortly after Mr. Hale denounced Judge Lefkow in a news conference, saying she was biased against him because she was married to a Jewish man and had grandchildren who were biracial.

Law enforcement officials with Chicago's Joint Terrorism Task Force said Mr. Hale had crossed the line when he asked another person to "forcibly assault and murder" Judge Lefkow.

"Certainly freedom of speech and freedom of religion are important in our society here in America," Thomas J. Kneir of the F.B.I. told reporters in announcing Mr. Hale's indictment. "But the threat of physical violence will not be tolerated."

Patrick J. Fitzgerald, the United States attorney here, added, "Freedom of speech does not include the freedom to solicit murder."

About a dozen World Church of the Creator members stood when Mr. Hale entered a federal courtroom this afternoon for his arraignment, several of them raising their right hands in what they called a Roman salute but is more commonly known as a Nazi salute. Mr. Hale pleaded not guilty to the solicitation and obstruction of justice charges and will remain in custody until a detention hearing on Monday afternoon.

"This is totally bogus -- it's in our Constitutional rights to believe in a religion," said Shawn Powers, 21, a member of Mr. Hale's movement. "We are a bona fide religion, and they are trying to take that away from us. Matt Hale is not a violent man, he doesn't advocate violence."

The arrest revived memories of the Fourth of July weekend in 1999, when one of Mr. Hale's followers, Benjamin Smith, went on a three-day rampage in Illinois and Indiana, killing two men, one black and one Korean, and injuring nine other Jews, Asians and African-Americans before committing suicide.

Those who monitor white supremacist and other hate groups said Mr. Hale had been brilliant in using the Internet to recruit young members, luring them through a network of 30 Web sites featuring compelling graphics and interactive games. His

church, "dedicated to the survival, expansion and advancement of the white race," claims 70,000 members in 49 states and 28 countries, though some experts say the movement has just a few hundred adherents.

"Matt Hale has been allowed with impunity to engage in terrorist-like activity for four years now," Richard S. Hirschhaut, director of the Anti-Defamation League's Midwest office, said today. "He has had blood on his hands for more than four years. He is now where he should be."

Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish human rights organization based in Los Angeles, said in a statement that Mr. Hale's arrest "could remove the most dangerous American racist of his generation."

Mr. Hale's path crossed Judge Lefkow's after an Oregon organization known as the TE-TA-MA Truth Foundation filed a lawsuit to block Mr. Hale from using the term "Church of the Creator," which it had registered as a trademark. Judge Lefkow originally ruled in favor of Mr. Hale but was overturned on appeal, and in November she ordered his group to stop using the name on the Internet and to destroy any printed materials including it.

Mr. Hale later sued Judge Lefkow, 59, who was appointed to the district court by President Bill Clinton in 2000, claiming her order violated the Constitution by requiring the destruction of the group's bibles.

"If federal judges are to sit in judgment of the people, the people must be able to sit in judgment of them," he said at the time. On various Web sites, Mr. Hale has urged followers to picket Judge Lefkow's church, and has referred to her as "a white woman married to a Jew with three mixed grandchildren."

Glenn Greenwald, a lawyer for Mr. Hale, said the charges filed today might stem from a misinterpretation of a statement by his client on the Internet that "we are in a state of war with Judge Lefkow."

"They are probably trying to take things he said along the lines of political advocacy and turn it into a crime," Mr. Greenwald said. "The F.B.I. may have interpreted this protected speech as a threat against a federal judge, but it's probably nothing more than some heated rhetoric."

Mr. Fitzgerald, the prosecutor, would not provide details about Mr. Hale's case, including whom he had solicited for the murder, whether money was involved, how officials discovered the plot or whether Judge Lefkow was in danger.

Caption: Photo: Matthew Hale , leader of the World Church of the Creator, and two followers yesterday in the Chicago federal building before his arrest. (Jennifer Warburg for The New York Times)

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Page: 16

Page Column: 1

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