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Ben Klassen's Church of the Creator

Florida's Ben Klassen founded the Church of the Creator (COTC) in 1973. The racist ideology driving the group was based on books written by Klassen, including *Nature's Eternal Religion* and *The White Man's Bible*. Klassen named his theology "Creativity" and appointed himself "Pontifex Maximus," or "highest priest."

Creativity boils down to worshipping the white race. It teaches that white people are the "creators of all worthwhile culture and civilization." It views the white race as nature's finest creation, while "racial treason," which encompasses practically any interaction outside the white race, "is the worst of all crimes." Those following Creativity and active in COTC are called "Creators." What they deem beneficial for the white race is viewed as the highest virtue, and "what is bad for the White Race is the ultimate sin." COTC believes that Creativity is the only salvation for the white race, and that Christianity is a lie perpetuated by Jews. Creativity refers to people of color as "mud races" and claims Jews are engaged in a conspiracy against the white race. An integral part of COTC doctrine is RAHOWA, an acronym standing for "Racial Holy War." It is used to describe a worldwide ethnic cleansing that will leave white people as earth's only inhabitants. COTC views Adolph Hitler as a religious prophet.

Klassen led COTC throughout the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. During that time, Creators established a propensity towards violence. A Florida "Reverend" murdered an African-American Gulf War Veteran. A Washington Creator firebombed a regional office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Another Creator was arrested for placing a bomb on the front steps of a law officer's home in Maryland. The history of violence has continued.

Starting in 1990, Klassen began searching for a successor. Before getting the successor situation stabilized, Klassen committed suicide in 1993. Instability plagued the group until Matt Hale took over in 1996.

Matt Hale's World Church of the Creator

Under Hale's leadership, the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC) became one of the most active hate groups in the country. It held public meetings at libraries, aired programming on public access television, and held public rallies. Hale's combination of blatant racism, clean-cut appearance, and law school education translated into his appearance on many national news programs.

The violence began during Klassen's reign continued after Hale's takeover. In 1999, Creator Benjamin Smith went on a shooting spree in the Midwest. Targeting people of color and Jews,

Smith killed two people and wounded eight others before committing suicide. Prior to the spree, Smith had been named "Creator of the Year" for his racist activism and had moved to Illinois to help out at WCOTC's headquarters. Hale refused to condemn Smith's actions, saying Smith with a "pure heart and pure will struck back against the enemies of our people." WCOTC began selling shirts commemorating Smith stating "Judaism must be destroyed" in Latin.

In January 2003, Hale was indicted for trying to arrange to have a federal judge killed. U.S. District Court Judge Joan Lefkow was presiding over a trademark infringement case involving WCOTC. In November 2002, Judge Lefkow ruled that Oregon's Te-Ta-Ma Truth Foundation has a trademark on the term "Church of the Creator." She ruled that the hate group could no longer use the term or acronyms like WCOTC and COTC. In response to the ruling, Hale moved the group's headquarters to Riverton, Wyoming. Hale said Judge Lefkow's ruling "places our Church in a state of war with this federal judge." According to authorities, this statement was not just rhetoric.

The indictment against Hale claims that, between November 29, 2002 and December 17, 2002, he tried to get someone to "forcibly assault and murder" Judge Lefkow. It was during this time that Hale moved the group's headquarters to Wyoming. Prosecutors have referred to a recorded conversation between Hale and an FBI informant discussing the need to "exterminate the rat [Lefkow]." It has also been reported that Hale wanted to get home addresses for Judge Lefkow and the attorneys representing the Te-Ta-Ma Foundation.

Matt Hale and Montana

Matt Hale's reign as Pontifex Maximus began in Montana. He was named the group's leader at a 1996 meeting in Superior, Montana. This was the first of many trips Hale would make to Montana as WCOTC's leader. The group held annual meetings in Superior, and Hale gave a presentation at the University of Montana in 1999. One of Hale's first actions as Pontifex Maximus was renaming the organization. First he changed Church of the Creator to "New Church of the Creator" and then settled on "World Church of the Creator."

Another connection to Montana was Hale's pursuit of a license to practice law. He graduated from Southern Illinois University's Law School and aggressively fought to obtain a license to practice law, eventually applying to the Montana Bar Association. He first applied to the Illinois Bar, but he was rejected by the Bar's Character and Fitness Committee, which stated Hale had a "gross deficiency in moral character." Hale appealed the ruling to both the Illinois Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court. Both refused to hear the case.

In September 2000, Hale announced that he had applied to the Montana Bar. A Character and Fitness subcommittee denied his application in 2001. The full committee decided to review the application; however, according to Hale, this review would not be conducted until litigation involving him in Illinois was resolved. That never happened.

Hale faced litigation stemming from Benjamin Smith's shooting spree, along with lawsuits questioning WCOTC's tax status. Hale was also busy filing a lawsuit against the Illinois Bar Association and Illinois Supreme Court for denying him a law license. Finally, there was the

