

Incitement posing as free speech - From the mouth of a hate-monger, words can kill

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As white supremacist Matthew Hale sits on trial for solicitation to kill a federal judge, the testimony and evidence bring back vivid memories of our July 4th, 1999 weekend. During those 36 hours, Benjamin Nathaniel Smith, an avowed white supremacist and one of the leaders of a fiercely anti-Semitic and racist organization known as the "World Church of the Creator," engaged in a two-state shooting spree that claimed two lives and injured nine other people. The victims were all members of racial and religious minority groups including African-Americans, Asians, and Jews. Smith was so consumed by the hate rhetoric espoused by his organization that he surrendered his own life. Recordings recently played in court were particularly painful to us because Hale was reveling in the shootings of two close friends of ours.

Much like drug addicts who become slaves to their addictions, Smith, too, was willing to take his own life in pursuit of the perfidious white supremacist objectives of the hate group to which he was absolutely devoted, and to Hale, its "Pontifex Maximus." .

It is beyond dispute that Smith was so influenced and inspired by Hale's racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric that he was willing to embrace martyrdom. In eulogizing Smith's suicide to the media, Hale recalled bestowing a Leadership Award on him for his zealotry in distributing the organization's hate rhetoric. Smith was credited with distributing over 45,000 pieces of hate literature throughout Chicago's northern suburbs. After the shootings, Hale cited Smith as one of the heroes of the organization for his martyrdom in "pursuit of the cause."

The virulently anti-Semitic and racist Hale has been twice denied admission to the Illinois Bar by the Illinois Supreme Court's Committee on Character and Fitness. He advocates a total separation of the races in order to protect the genetic integrity of whites from the threat posed by the so-called "mud races," in which he includes Jews, African Americans, and all other racial and ethnic minorities.

Smith's very close and loyal relationship with Hale is supported by much of the testimony during the current trial for solicitation. Additionally, Hale noted in the aftermath of Smith's shooting rampage that he did not mourn the victims because their lives were as inconsequential as those of dogs or insects.

Hale has always, and sometimes legitimately, cloaked his racist and anti-Semitic will under the democratic protections of free speech and other civil liberties. Indeed, until the 1999 shooting spree, he was an unchallenged beneficiary of one of the most important guarantees of our Bill of Rights.

But Hale's invectives were ingested by Smith in doses so high that violence was the only outlet for Hale's "emotional call to arms."

In 1999, we tried to assemble a wrongful death case against Hale, but the link that the Anti-Defamation League and others believed existed between Hale's white supremacist doctrine and Smith's shooting spree was not sufficiently clear through admissible evidence to ensure that the case would go to a jury. Hale now faces the possibility of a considerable jail sentence based on the recordings and testimony of some of his former "top lieutenants."

In emotional terms for those of us who view Hale as a fugitive, including dear friends who were either victims or lost loved ones at the hand of Smith, this trial represents the resuscitation of a case that should have been brought almost 5 years ago.

Although Hale's trial touches on the continuing debate on the limits of hate speech, the hate-inspired shooting spree and solicitation charge demonstrate that the hate speech debate can no longer be consigned exclusively to the precincts of 1st Amendment theory. The Hale case challenges us all to recognize that the constitutional limits of dissent end when violence begins.

Though Hale insists that he supports only a "lawful" ethnic, racial and religious cleansing of the U.S., his rhetoric and hateful codes cannot now be mistaken for anything other than incitement. While hate is the instrumentality through which Hale caused injury and death, we can be sure that Hale is on trial--not hate.

Caption: PHOTO

PHOTO: The racist and anti-Semitic rantings of Matthew Hale , the self-appointed "Pontifex Maximus" of the World Church of the Creator, may have incited one of his followers to go on a killing spree. Tribune photo by Kari Shuda.

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