

Double talk disguises call to arms - But Hale's seeds of hate took root in his followers

Chicago Tribune - April 27, 2004

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As the architect of a white supremacist group that has long sought a nationwide "racial holy war," Matthew Hale has played both sides when it comes to his position on violence.

"Our church does not condone violent or illegal activities," he said in a television interview during the summer of 1999.

But at the same time, Hale was distributing thousands of copies of the "White Man's Bible," a vitriolic book that routinely encouraged going to battle with Jews and "inferior, colored races" and that included a clear call to arms: "You have no alibi, no other way out, white man! It's fight or die!"

No one likely would have noticed the contrast in Hale's message to the general public and to his followers had it not been for a troubled and angry young man named Benjamin Smith.

Over the 4th of July weekend in 1999, Smith hopped into a light blue Ford Taurus loaded with guns and ammunition and embarked on a three-day, two-state shooting spree that targeted racial and ethnic minorities. Smith, one of Hale's most devoted disciples, succeeded in killing two people and wounding nine others before ending the terror by turning the gun on himself.

Violence, Hale group linked

As victims, law enforcement officials and the public struggled to understand what had led a young man from Chicago's north suburbs on such a violent rampage, one factor increasingly came to light: Smith's association with Hale's East Peoria-based group, the World Church of the Creator.

Hale appeared on television and in newspapers constantly during those first days after Smith's murders, and his unflinching rhetoric was clearly aimed to shock. He said things like, "We do urge hatred. If you love something, you must be willing to hate that which threatens it." He talked of using an Israeli flag as a rug in his headquarters and referred to non-whites as "mud races." And he routinely said he wanted America to be a land occupied only by whites, but always stopped short of explaining just how he and his followers would achieve that end.

"He holds a match next to a gasoline tank and then claims no responsibility for the ensuing fire," Harlan Loeb, then the director of the Midwest chapter of the Anti-Defamation League, said angrily of Hale at the time.

A former World Church member who now travels the country educating schoolchildren about the danger of hate groups agreed with Loeb's analysis when he heard of Hale's conviction Monday.

"He goes all the way up to the line and even spits over it," T.J. Leyden said. "But when you sit there and talk about a racial holy war, what you're basically saying to your followers is, 'Arm yourself and kill.'"

Never shied from fight

Hale, the son of an East Peoria police officer, never had serious trouble with the law until adulthood. In fact, he was drawn to it, graduating from law school. But, in 1999, Hale was denied admission to the Illinois bar because of his racist views.

Hale never shied from a fight. He sued, attempting to take his case to the state Supreme Court, which refused to hear it.

As he gained national notoriety, Hale's problems--as well as the number of his recruits--grew. His organization, with its heavy Internet presence and state chapters across the United States, was believed to be one of the fastest-growing hate groups in the country, according to experts who monitor such groups.

Long before being charged with attempting to solicit the murder of a federal judge, Hale was spending an increasing amount of time in court. He was sued in 1999 by Illinois Atty. Gen. Jim Ryan for not registering as a charity despite the fact the World Church of the Creator was collecting membership dues and selling literature for financial gain.

Then came the suit by an Oregon-based group that had trademarked the name World Church of the Creator. Hale lost and was ordered by U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkow to change his organization's name. He was furious enough to solicit her murder, a jury ruled Monday.

It remains unclear what Hale's imprisonment will mean for his organization. He has not worked from his headquarters--a room in his father's East Peoria home that is painted bright red to symbolize the "pure blood of the white race"--since he was arrested and jailed 15 months ago.

Caption: PHOTO

PHOTO: White supremacist leader Matthew Hale often said publicly that his group did not condone violence, but his message to his followers urged fighting against Jews and non-white races. AP photo.

Memo: RISE, FALL OF MOVEMENT.

Edition: Chicago Final

Section: News

Page: 12

Index Terms: VERDICT ; ANALYSIS ; GROUP ; CHRONOLOGY

Record Number: CTR0404270132

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