

Hale calls murders 'heinous' - Police quiz supporters; hate groups regard him as living martyr

Chicago Tribune (IL) - March 4, 2005

Author: Brett McNeil, Tribune staff reporter. Tribune staff reporters Jane Fritsch, Jeff Coen, Ray Long, M. Daniel Gibbard, Michael Higgins, David Heinzmann, Matt O'Connor and Tom Rybarczyk contributed to this report.

White supremacist Matthew Hale released a statement through his mother Thursday condemning the killings of a federal judge's husband and mother, calling the murders a "heinous crime."

Despite Hale's attempt to distance himself from the killings, his name remained at the center of the investigation as FBI agents and Chicago police detectives fanned out across the region interviewing people with any connection to Hale.

They tracked down his followers and relatives and even went so far as to interview reporters who had covered the 2004 trial in which he was convicted of seeking to have U.S. District Judge Joan H. Lefkow murdered.

The judge returned to the courthouse for the first time Thursday to meet with fellow judges as authorities continued their hunt for whoever killed her husband, Michael F. Lefkow, 64, and her mother, Donna G. Humphrey, 89.

Though investigators were not calling Hale and his followers suspects, they were aware that white supremacists have come to regard Hale's legal battles as a rallying point for their cause.

Hundreds of tips poured in to a hot line set up by police, and many dealt with hate groups and offshoots of Hale's organization, sources said.

Hale's mother, Evelyn Hutcheson, said she spoke to her son by phone Thursday and he dictated the following statement to be disseminated to the press:

"There is simply no way that any supporter of mine would commit such a heinous crime. I totally condemn it and I want the perpetrator caught and prosecuted. I only hope they sincerely wish to apprehend the animal instead of railroading the innocent. Only an idiot would think that I would do this. My sentencing date is April 6."

Hale has been moved out of his cell to an isolated location, federal authorities said. His mother said Hale told her everyone on his floor was interviewed by investigators.

Yet even isolated inside the Metropolitan Correctional Center, Hale has become a larger figure within the white supremacist movement than he ever was as leader of the now-defunct World Church of the Creator.

Hale is now considered a living martyr by thousands of neo-Nazis and other hate groups who see his conviction last year of plotting to kill Judge Lefkow as proof the federal government is conspiring against them.

Hale's legal battles are, in some circles of the racist fringe, akin to the standoffs at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, or at Ruby Ridge in Idaho. Those events galvanized the militia movement in the 1990s and, in the case of Waco, led to the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh.

"Ideologically, yes, [Hale] is a rallying point," said Tom Metzger, founder of the California-based White Aryan Resistance, a group whose Web site last year

publicized Lefkow's home address. Government officials "just want to get him out of action. That's what they want to do to all of us because we're a threat to the government."

Monday, the day the judge's husband and mother were killed, was the 12th anniversary of the start of the Waco standoff. Experts said the date has not been an important one in white supremacist circles but said that other anniversaries, like April 19, when the Branch Davidian compound burned down in 1993, are considered meaningful.

Chip Berlet, who monitors hate groups for the Massachusetts-based non-profit Political Research Associates, said Hale has emerged as an important icon among white racists.

"Hale's involvement with the legal system and his continuing losses in the legal system have become a cause celebre among neo-Nazis and white supremacists in the United States," Berlet said.

As a woman and a federal judge erroneously described as Jewish on white supremacist Web sites, Judge Lefkow "crystallizes all of the hatred of these groups," Berlet said.

He said Lefkow is seen as representing what these groups view as a "global Jewish conspiracy that operates throughout the federal government."

In enforcing an appellate court ruling against Hale during a trademark-infringement lawsuit, Lefkow also was seen as an aggressor, said Devin Burghart, director of the Building Democracy Initiative at the Center for New Community, an Oak Park organization that monitors hate groups.

"They thought she was out to destroy the World Church of the Creator," Burghart said.

"In the movement, [Hale's 2003 arrest] was seen as a critical moment," said Heidi Beirich, deputy director of the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center. "It's been a simmering issue."

Experts said there's no way to tell if that issue would have driven other white supremacists to murder Lefkow's husband and mother, but the movement has a violent history that celebrates and even venerates killers.

Benjamin Smith, a former follower of Hale who killed two people and wounded nine before killing himself during a 1999 shooting spree, is considered a righteous racial holy warrior by neo-Nazis, experts said.

So is Buford O. Furrow Jr., who told police that he wounded five people inside a Jewish community center and later killed a Filipino-American mail carrier in 1999 to send a "wake-up call to America to kill Jews."

And so is Joseph Paul Franklin, a white supremacist who killed at least nine people during the 1970s in hopes of sparking a race war.

All three men are known within the white supremacist movement as "lone wolf" vigilantes, experts said--free agents who don't need to be ordered to kill, but do so out of a sense of duty to what believers call "the struggle."

In the case of many neo-Nazi and white supremacist organizations, that struggle is an effort to foment an apocalyptic race war in order to destroy the government, seen as a worldwide Jewish cabal that controls what hate groups call the Zionist Occupational Government in the United States, and all non-white minorities, experts said.

"They believe history is the struggle of the white race to be free of what they would refer to as the mud races, which is any minority," said Adam Schupack, associate director of the Anti-Defamation League in Chicago.

To free themselves from minorities, white supremacists believe they must destroy the federal government, Berlet said.

"The enemy is the government because the government makes you live among blacks and Jews and keeps the white race down," he said.

As investigators continued their work Thursday, they were considering statements that some inmates said Hale made in the weeks before the shootings, specifically that Hale said, "The day is coming."

But investigators cautioned that Hale often speaks to other inmates about "the apocalypse" and said they wonder if some of the jailhouse tips might be bogus as inmates try to win a lenient deal for themselves.

In a letter to Atty. Gen. Alberto Gonzales, Sen. Dick Durbin Thursday asked Gonzales to re-evaluate security measures in place for federal judges.

"These cruel and cold-blooded killings are attacks not only on two innocent individuals, but on our criminal justice system as well," Durbin wrote.

Caption: PHOTO

PHOTO (color): `There is simply no way that any supporter of mine would commit such a heinous crime. I totally condemn it and I want the perpetrator caught and prosecuted. I only hope they sincerely wish to apprehend the animal instead of railroading the innocent. Only an idiot would think that I would do this. My sentencing date is April 6.' --Statement by Matthew Hale (right), as dictated to his mother, Evelyn Hutcherson.

Edition: Chicago Final

Section: News

Page: 1

Index Terms: PROBE ; CHICAGO ; FEDERAL ; OFFICIAL ; FAMILY ; MURDER ; REACTION ; PROFILE ; VIOLENCE ; GROUP

Record Number: CTR0503040201

Copyright (c) 2005, Chicago Tribune Company. All rights reserved.