

It's Hale who owes us the apology

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Egad! Could we actually owe Matthew Hale, the white supremacist windbag, an apology? No way.

I admit that the thought did cross my mind for a nanosecond upon hearing that a disgruntled and deranged Chicago man with no apparent ties to Hale was the likely killer of U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkowitz's husband and mother.

Until convincing evidence linked Bart Allan Ross to the killings, my suspicions locked like a laser beam onto Hale and the other haters in his carnival of bigotry formerly named World Church of the Creator, based in East Peoria.

Hale is cooling his heels in jail, awaiting sentencing after his conviction last year for plotting to have Judge Lefkowitz murdered. Lefkowitz's husband, Michael Lefkowitz, 64, and mother, Donna Humphrey, 89, were found murdered in the judge's home on Feb. 28.

The tragedy echoed the 1999 shooting spree of Benjamin Smith, a former Hale follower who killed himself before he was arrested.

So did the death of Ross, 57, a self-employed electrician and Polish immigrant, who shot himself in the head Wednesday when a police officer stopped him in West Allis, Wis. Ross' notes and DNA tie him to the murders of Lefkowitz and Humphrey, and it appears Ross had no apparent ties or sympathies with white supremacists, police said.

What a relief to Hale, who said earlier, with his usual level of understatement, that "only an idiot" would think he had anything to do with the killings.

Of course, being called an "idiot" by Hale is like being called ugly by a monkfish. Even locked away in his dungeon with limited outside contacts, Hale's history should have made him a "person of interest," as federal investigators put it so delicately. Only an idiot would have ruled him out.

No, instead of receiving apologies from the civilized world, Hale should be apologizing to us.

- He should apologize to all Americans for adding fuel to the fires of domestic terrorism.

- He should apologize to white people for being a discredit to his race.

- He should apologize to the racial and religious minorities he has exploited in building an organization of people who have so little to live up to that they feel they must put others down.

- He should apologize to organized religion for desecrating the word "church."

At best, we owe Hale a particle of gratitude for reminding us of how easy it is to presume the guilt of some people even when there's no hard evidence. That's something to which a lot of non-white men could respond, "Welcome to my world!"

Still, some characters manage to draw nothing from this whole tragic episode but compassion for Hale and the white supremacist community. "Say you're sorry!" blares

a headline on a white-supremacist Web site based in Arkansas, calling on federal authorities and the media to apologize--as if Hale had done nothing to warrant suspicions.

As much as such racial extremists say they are organizing around love for their group, it is hatred for other groups that really puts the spice into their stew. When Malcolm X realized that trap, he turned away from Black Nationalism to Orthodox Islam, a religion of all races. Matt Hale shows no similar signs of growth. He'd rather swim in the sewage of a movement that wallows in its own perceived racial victimization.

Unfortunately, such movements have a history of violence about which the rest of us are quite justified in remembering. The Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks swept aside our national concerns about the neo-Nazis, militant militias and new wave Ku Klux Klan. Osama bin Laden's killers reminded us Americans of how we have a lot more in common than our surface differences reveal.

Still, we don't know where the next Timothy McVeigh or Eric Rudolph will come from. We need to pay attention to people like William Krar, a reputed Texas militia member who was arrested in 2003 with 25 machine guns, a quarter-million rounds of ammunition, 60 pipe bombs and enough sodium cyanide to kill thousands, authorities said.

It is still unclear as to what he planned to do with his weapons of mass destruction. But it should not take a horror like the Lefkow murders to remind us that most of our nation's terrorist threats have not come from overseas.

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Caption: PHOTO

PHOTO: Matthew Hale , 33, is scheduled to be sentenced next month for trying to arrange the murder of U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkow. Tribune file photo.

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