

40-Year Term for Supremacist in Plot on Judge

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Author: JODI WILGOREN

Matthew Hale, the white supremacist convicted last year of plotting to assassinate a federal judge, was sentenced Wednesday to 40 years in prison for what the sentencing judge described as an "egregious act against the rule of law in the United States."

"I consider Mr. Hale to be extremely dangerous," the judge, James T. Moody of Federal District Court, said in imposing the maximum sentence.

The crime, Judge Moody said, "undermines the judiciary's central role in our society and strikes at the very core of our government."

Mr. Hale, 33, leader of a white power movement now called Creativity, was found guilty of soliciting his security chief, an F.B.I. informant, to kill Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow, who was presiding over a trademark case involving his group's use of the name World Church of the Creator. The police focused on Mr. Hale's followers after Judge Lefkow's husband and mother were murdered in their home Feb. 28, but 10 days later a litigant unconnected to the movement, Bart A. Ross, confessed to the killings and committed suicide.

Acting as his own lawyer in a courtroom under extraordinary security, Mr. Hale made an anguished, rambling plea Wednesday for a shorter sentence, repeatedly declaring his innocence, asserting that he and Judge Lefkow were "on the same side" and suggesting that his high-profile prosecution might be partly responsible for Mr. Ross's "horrible crime against her family."

"What if these people are dead today because of these liars?" Mr. Hale asked, turning to face the prosecutors and F.B.I. agents seated behind him. "What if this guy thought to himself, 'I'm not the only one who wants her dead'?"

In a two-hour speech, Mr. Hale, who graduated from law school but was denied admission to the bar because of his racial views, quoted Thomas Jefferson, invoked Latin legal phrases, recited a couplet from "The Star-Spangled Banner" and stopped several times to swallow a sob. He attributed his conviction to his lawyer's shortcomings, insisted that he had refused the informant's overtures toward violence, compared the F.B.I. to the Gestapo and said he would rather be sent to a Siberian work camp than return to solitary confinement and "die in a hole."

"If she's here, if somebody could please tell her, tell this poor woman it's a lie," Mr. Hale said of Judge Lefkow, who did not attend the hearing.

"What punishment is appropriate for the innocent?" he asked. "I should be home by now. I should be apologized to."

Patrick J. Fitzgerald, the United States attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, denounced Mr. Hale as a domestic terrorist, and took particular offense at the suggestion that his office was in any way responsible for Mr. Ross's criminal acts.

"He shows he's not man enough to take responsibility for what he did," Mr. Fitzgerald said at a news conference after the hearing. "I put no stock in his claims, now crocodile tears, that he didn't do anything wrong."

Judge Lefkow, who has not yet returned to work, said in a telephone interview that she had skipped the sentencing so as not to distract attention from the proceedings,

and that she spent the afternoon at the Chicago Police Department, thanking the officers who investigated the murders. She declined to respond to Mr. Hale's comments, saying only: "I respect the judge's decision. I'm sure that he took all the factors into account and made a fair decision."

Asked how she was doing, Judge Lefkow replied: "Carrying on day by day. I stay busy during the day; I have a lot to do. Sometimes nighttimes are harder."

Mr. Hale's mother, Evelyn Hutcheson, cried several times during her son's statement, declaring after the hearing, "Matt is the only one in that damn room who told the truth."

In addition to the metal detectors in the courthouse lobby, a second metal detector and a bomb-sniffing dog were outside Courtroom 1903, where Judge Moody, of the Northern District of Indiana, was sitting so as to avoid the conflict of a colleague of Judge Lefkow. At least four extra armed guards were inside..

Mr. Hale spoke passionately about growing up as the son of an East Peoria, Ill., police officer who never let him touch his badge lest he tarnish it. He said his graduation from the Southern Illinois University law school and Judge Lefkow's granting of the motion he wrote urging dismissal of the trademark case were the best days of his life. Judge Lefkow's decision was overturned on appeal, but Mr. Hale emphasized that she had originally supported his side, saying he had hardly wanted to kill her but had instead been looking forward to arguing a new motion before her.

He went over and over details of e-mail messages and taped conversations between himself and his security chief, arguing that in discussing the "Jew rat" he was referring to prosecutors, not Judge Lefkow, who is Episcopalian, and quoting himself as saying, "I cannot be a party to such a thing." Prosecutors contend that these protestations were intended to provide Mr. Hale deniability and that he nonetheless encouraged the security chief to act on his own.

"Mr. Hale is not concerned with actually taking someone's life, but how to do it and not get caught," Judge Moody said in handing down the sentence.

He called Mr. Hale "manipulative," "calculating" and "a highly educated, intelligent individual who surrounds himself with troubled individuals who feed his enormous ego."

While ignoring Mr. Hale's pleas for a shorter sentence, Judge Moody did grant him two other requests: keeping him in Chicago's Metropolitan Correctional Center, where he has an electric typewriter, for six months so he can work on his appeal, and recommending that the rest of his term be served in Pekin, Ill., near his parents' homes in East Peoria.

Caption: Photo: Matthew Hale 's brother, David Hale, mother, Evelyn Hutcheson, and father, Russell Hale, at the federal courthouse in Chicago yesterday. (Photo by Jenny Warburg for The New York Times)

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