

## Midwest Gun Spree Suspect Is Dead - Man Shot Himself, Pursuing Police Say

Washington Post - July 5, 1999

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A bizarre and murderous string of drive-by shootings that apparently were motivated by racial and religious hate dramatically escalated today before the suspected gunman shot himself and died tonight in Salem, Ill., authorities said.

Benjamin Nathaniel Smith, 21, shot himself in the chin as Salem police chased him in a van the FBI said he stole at a truck stop. The van crashed, and he was pronounced dead at a hospital.

Smith is thought to have killed a black man and wounded six Orthodox Jews here Friday before shooting at six Asians and two blacks in Illinois on Saturday and killing a 26-year-old man of Asian heritage outside a Korean church in Bloomington, Ind., today.

In addition to the three dead, including the gunman, the dozen shootings wounded seven people.

The Bloomington shooting occurred about 12 hours after one of six Asian students was injured when three or four shots were fired at them near the University of Illinois campus in Urbana just before midnight Saturday, and 24 hours after two black men were shot at in Springfield, Ill., but not hit.

While the FBI said it would need fingerprints to positively identify Smith, Bloomington Police Chief Jim Kennedy said the body in Salem had a chest tattoo that said "Sabbath Breaker," which Smith was said to have. Kennedy also said guns consistent with the shootings in Bloomington and Chicago were with the body, and that the light blue 1994 Ford Taurus registered to Smith in Bloomington, where he had attended college, was also at the scene, the Associated Press reported.

"It looks like our guy," the AP quoted Doug Garrison, an FBI spokesman in Indianapolis, as saying.

Police conducted a multistate manhunt for Smith, who has ties to a white supremacist, antisemitic group, after he fired toward the crowd outside the Korean United Methodist Church today and sped east toward Nashville, Ind. The hunt ended in Salem, about three hours west of Bloomington.

"He was apparently parked at the corner and waited for these people to come out of the church and then fired," Kennedy said. Won-Joon Yoon, 26, was fatally shot twice in the back. The pastor of the church said he was a doctoral student at Indiana University.

Urbana and Bloomington are university towns, homes of the University of Illinois and Indiana University, both of which Smith attended before reportedly returning to Illinois in May. According to enrollment records, Smith was from Northbrook, Ill., where one shooting occurred the first night of the rampage.

Ashley Shelby, an editor at the Indiana University student newspaper, told a Chicago radio station that Smith, who was a junior majoring in criminal justice, was well known on the Bloomington campus for distributing "racist fliers" from the World Church of the Creator, a neo-Nazi organization based in East Peoria, Ill.

Police said he distributed racist leaflets last year on the Fourth of July, and Smith's ex-girlfriend noted that the timing of the shootings this weekend is no coincidence.

"This is his Independence Day from the government, from everything," Elizabeth Sahr told the Daily Illini, the student newspaper at the University of Illinois. "He is not going to stop until he's shot dead. He's not going to surrender," the Associated Press reported her as saying. "He's not going to give up until he leaves this world."

The shootings shattered the calm of America's weekend celebration of freedom and unity. On the same weekend that black professional golfer Tiger Woods won the Western Open in a southwest Chicago suburb, the violence served as a brutal reminder that some of the nation's citizens remained deeply alienated because of issues of race and religion.

Kennedy said the material that Smith distributed in Bloomington "represents extreme right-wing views. It's very anti-minority and antisemitic, and it certainly alarmed the people in this community."

Matthew Hale, head of the World Church of the Creator, told Chicago radio station WMAQ-AM that Smith joined the group in June 1998 but quit in May. Hale described Smith as "thoughtful and dedicated" and said he "never had information or an inclination that he would do anything illegal or violent."

In December, an Illinois state hearing board rejected Hale's appeal for a law license, ruling that his beliefs and character made him ill-suited to practice law. Hale was quoted by the Associated Press as saying, "If you are a racist, as am I, then they're saying you don't have the right to say what you believe and be a lawyer. That's denial of free speech."

Police have not called the shootings in Chicago and the suburbs of Skokie and Northbrook hate crimes because they said the gunman was not heard making any reference to the race or religion of his intended victims, the legal standard for such a classification. But as a clear racial and religious pattern to the shootings emerged, authorities inched closer to calling the assaults hate crimes.

"If you look just at the victims he has targeted, I suppose you could look at it as a hate crime," said Chicago Police Commander William Hayes.

"This man is on a spree," he added. "He's just shooting people around the state and out of the state. He's shooting people all over."

Harlan Loeb, counsel for the Chicago regional office of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), said Smith's "Sabbath Breaker" tattoo is a "white supremacist, extremist symbol, one that we've seen before."

The World Church of the Creator opposes "Christianity, Judaism, blacks and immigrants with equal vehemence" and has declared a "holy war" on minorities, the ADL said.

All of the victims in the drive-by rampage were members of racial or religious minority groups. It began at 8:20 p.m. Friday in Chicago's quiet West Rogers Park neighborhood, home to the largest concentration of Orthodox Jews in the city. In six separate incidents along the narrow, tree-lined streets of modest brick bungalows, six Orthodox Jewish men were wounded as they strolled toward synagogues for Sabbath evening services.

From West Rogers Park, the gunman drove north into the heavily Jewish suburb of Skokie. There he fired seven shots at Ricky Byrdson, the black, former head

basketball coach at Northwestern University, who was out walking with two of his children. Byrdsong, 43, was struck once in the back and died.

From Skokie, the gunman drove northwest to Northbrook, where he fired four shots into the car of an Asian couple as it passed his vehicle. There were no injuries in that incident. Except for the first incident in West Rogers Park, the gunman fired at his intended victims through his car's side passenger window, which was shattered by gunfire.

The supremacist group that Smith joined was founded by Ben Klassen in 1973 in Florida; it languished after Klassen's suicide until Hale was elected head of the church three years ago, according to the ADL.

This year, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported 44 World Church of the Creator branches nationwide, with 10 in California, seven in Washington state, four in Illinois and four in Florida, where five members were arrested in the past year for violent hate crimes and one, George Loeb, is serving a life sentence for murdering a black sailor in 1991. There are no known branches in Maryland, Virginia or the District.

Although the ADL's southern area director, Arthur Teitelbaum, has decried the organization as "one of the most violent groups of the right-wing extremists," the ADL supported Hale's appeal after he was denied a law license out of concern that the precedent could endanger aspiring lawyers who hold unpopular opinions.

According to the ADL, the church "has been responsible for, or connected to, at least one Florida murder, two conspiracies to commit hate crimes on the West Coast, and planned secret police action against the African National Congress conducted in the waning years of South African apartheid," as well as a Florida video store robbery.

Special correspondents Kari Lydersen in Chicago and L. Christina Talcott in Washington contributed to this report.

Shootings begin Friday in Chicago.

11:30 a.m. Saturday: Two black men fired upon; neither is hit.

11:34 p.m. Saturday: Six men of Asian descent fired upon; one hit in leg.

11:04 a.m. Sunday: Man of Korean descent killed.

Asian Americans fired upon

Ex-Northwestern University basketball coach slain

Orthodox Jews wounded

NOTE: All times are local.

Caption: INFO-GRAPHIC TWP PHOTO MUG AP

The suspect at an earlier booking.

Edition: FINAL

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Index Terms: News National ; Bio ; Benjamin Smith

Dateline: CHICAGO, July

Record Number: 070599PA01MI0659

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