

PAWNS FOR THE HATE INDUSTRY

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After years of seeding and feeding, the hate industry hit the jackpot with Benjamin Nathaniel Smith.

Smith, 21, was the suspected gunman in a three-day shooting rampage against blacks, Jews and Asians that left two people dead and nine injured in Illinois and Indiana before he killed himself.

Police say they are investigating why Smith did what he did and whether he acted alone. But it is easy to see that he did not act alone. He had many cheerleaders.

Smith spoke the language of "white victimism," a language of "concern for my own people," Smith said in an interview on the Indiana University television station last October. Reports said Smith felt the white man's days were numbered because of the increase of minorities in the U.S.

Young people don't learn that kind of fear and hatred in a vacuum. They have to be carefully taught. In that effort, Smith and others like him have many tutors.

Smith had a reputation for distributing racist literature in Wilmette, his onetime hometown, and at college campuses in Illinois and Indiana. He was closely associated with a "white pride" group called the World Church of the Creator and its leader Matthew F. Hale, 27, who law-enforcement officials say turned the little organization into a fast-growing enterprise.

Until Smith's shooting spree, you could find Hale's group on the Web, offering a potpourri of misinformation that referred to non-whites as subhuman "mud people" and Jews as conspirators against America. It also called for "RAHOWA," an abbreviation for "racial holy war." The Web site shut down as media calls to Hale increased, but I suspect the site will be back once the heat is off.

Smith testified on Hale's behalf in Hale's battle with Illinois officials who denied him a law license, even though he has passed the state's bar exam.

Yet, Hale washes his hands of responsibility for Smith's rampage. "For the same reason the pope in Rome doesn't feel responsible for abortion clinic bombings, I don't feel responsible for these shootings," Hale told a reporter.

But the pope preaches love for everyone, not just his own race. Members of Hale's organization have been linked to several attacks or foiled attempts against blacks and Jews, including the 1991 murder in Florida of a black gulf war veteran and the robbery and pistol whipping in Florida last year of a Jewish video-store owner.

"Everyone hates, though few admit it these days," Hale said on CNN Tuesday. Ah, but, there are many, many different levels of hate.

It is one thing to hate pineapple slices on pizza. It is quite another to hate entire groups of people or, to put it in Hale's terms, to preach "loyalty" to any one race or ethnic group over others.

If Hale is not responsible for feeding Smith's madness, who is? How about all of the other people who preach the message that white people are a new oppressed class?

That's the language you find on the Web sites of former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke and the hundreds of white hate groups that have been identified around the country by civil-rights organizations.

Yes, Benjamin Smith had many cheerleaders. Hate sells, especially if you cloak it in the language of victimization, even white victimization in an overwhelmingly white country.

You hear it from the demagogic radio gasbag who belabors "racial preferences" as if affirmative action was the worst problem facing American society.

You hear it from the political opportunists who turn legitimate issues such as welfare reform, school desegregation, "midnight basketball" or "political correctness" into thinly veiled racial code words.

And, yes, sometimes you hear it from some of my fellow African-Americans and other non-whites. The black hater has much in common with the white hater.

And what about those of us who, instead of attacking other groups, simply remain silent while others do? When justice hangs in the balance, the silent people can be the most dangerous of all.

All of them deserve applause from the David Dukes and the Matthew Hales of this world. All throw kerosene on the flames of anger and hatred in the minds of confused youths.

Yes, the haters hit the jackpot with Benjamin Smith. Once again the nation is shocked, just as it is shocked by school shootings or assassinations.

The high school massacre in Littleton, Colo., led to a spontaneous national dialogue and debate on the roots of school violence. It would be a wonderful tribute to Smith's victims if his rampage led Americans to engage in a long-overdue dialogue on the hatred that festers just beneath the surface of our national tranquility. We need to talk. Our silence is deadly.

Caption: GRAPHIC

GRAPHIC: Them. Us. Illustration by Margaret Scott.

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