

**"CREATING" A KILLER:  
A BACKGROUND REPORT ON  
BENJAMIN "AUGUST" SMITH AND THE  
WORLD CHURCH OF THE CREATOR**

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*A Special Report For The American Jewish Committee*  
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American Jewish Committee



Center  
for New  
Community

JULY - 1999

*``To want to live in a world where blacks have power over whites, where Jews are in control, I think that's a sickness and I'd like to eradicate that sickness. In some ways it's inevitable - racial holy war.''*

— **Benjamin Smith**

FOREWORD by Kenneth S. Stern, American Jewish Committee specialist on anti-Semitism and extremism

One of AJC's great treasures is its archives. That's where I recently found a letter dated November 5, 1969, from Mr. Ben Klassen to Mr. Robert Welch, founder of the John Birch Society. It was a resignation letter. The Birch Society, Klassen claimed, was not "telling [its] members the whole truth . . . Mr. Welch," the letter continued, "[y]ou know as well as anybody that we are not threatened by a 'Communist' conspiracy, but in [sic] the clutches of a Jewish conspiracy."

Klassen - whose first mention in the archives was as a local chairman in the George Wallace presidential campaign of 1968 - later formed the "Church of the Creator." It was, and is, like no other church. Unlike the Christian Identity movement which believes Jews are the offspring of Satan, the COTC does not find a theological basis for hate by distorting text. Rather it sees white supremacy as a self-evident and natural mission.

"Christianity teaches love your enemies and hate your own kind," a COTC tract says. "We teach exactly the opposite, namely hate and destroy your enemies and love your own kind."

The Church of the Creator clearly sees Jews as its main enemy. Just as Klassen labeled the Birchers' fight against communism a "smoke screen" created by and for the benefit of Jews, he viewed Christianity as another Jewish conspiracy. "The Jews' primary objective in concocting Christianity," Klassen wrote, "was to destroy their mortal enemies, the Roman Empire." And, of course, the COTC believes that the Holocaust never happened, but is a Jewish hoax.

As the world learned in graphic detail over the Fourth of July weekend, COTC was not only anti-Semitic. COTC members call minorities "mud races," below white people, and consider blacks "not far above monkey and chimpanzees."

Carry these ideas to their logical conclusions, and violence is inevitable. Not surprisingly, COTC has a long history of violence, in keeping with its favorite expression "RAHOWA!" short for Racial Holy War. In recent years members have been convicted for killing a black veteran, beating a black man and his son, and robbing and beating a video store owner who they believed was Jewish. They have also been linked to bombing plots, including one targeting a Los Angeles African Methodist Episcopal church and a Washington State NAACP office.

In 1993 Klassen committed suicide, and the Church of the Creator was floundering. A new young leader named Matt Hale resuscitated it in 1996. Through organizing, publications, and material on the Internet, the World Church of the Creator as it is now known has expanded to over forty chapters around the country. It also has a presence abroad.

It is not surprising that someone like Benjamin Smith, a racist and anti-Semite, ended up in the Church of the Creator. COTC gave these ideas structure, and provided a sense of community and power.

There are many things that the American Jewish Committee does to combat hate and hate groups. From the anti-hate curriculum "Hands Across the Campus," to advocacy for hate crime legislation, to monitoring, polling, and publishing, AJC has for 90 years fought bigotry and anti-Semitism. But to do it effectively we cannot do it alone.

Since the late 1980s we have paid special attention to local and regional groups around the country that fight hatred in their own backyards. They are truly our partners in this fight. AJC, for example, aided groups such as the Seattle-based Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment and the Illinois-based Center for New Community by bringing their messages to the national stage. Conversely, these groups are active in small communities where there may not be an AJC chapter, or even a Jewish community. In such small communities hateful ideologies frequently find adherents before those outside are aware.

Knowing the importance of local efforts against hate, we have worked with and supported the Center for New Community in its fight against hate groups in the Midwest. Not surprisingly, when Benjamin Smith was identified as the culprit in last weekend's hate crimes, CNC (like AJC) not only had copies of the hate material that Smith had distributed in the region, but knew more about Smith than any other group in the country. Wherever Smith and his COTC literature had gone, CNC had followed, helping others fight against his bigotry.

It is, therefore, AJC's pleasure to share with you a special report, prepared for AJC, by Devin Burghart of the Center for New Community.

The Fourth of July weekend was marred by a series of racially motivated attacks by an avowed white supremacist. The two-state killing spree took the lives of an African-American and an Asian-American. Six Jews, another Asian-American, and another African-American were injured.

In this background report, the Center for New Community documents the white supremacist activities of the perpetrator - Benjamin "August" Smith of the World Church of the Creator - and traces the origins of this group.

### **A RACIST KILLING SPREE**

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On Friday, July 2, World Church of the Creator (WCOTC) leader Matt Hale lost his well-publicized appeal to practice law in Illinois. Just hours later WCOTC member Benjamin "August" Smith began what would become a three-day rampage of racially motivated violence. July 2 was also the fourth anniversary of the first "church" meeting under Hale's leadership.

Based in East Peoria, Illinois, the World Church of the Creator has become one of the fastest growing white supremacist organizations in the United States. It also has a history of racist violence.

Targeting Orthodox Jews in Rogers Park, Smith wounded six people as they were leaving Sabbath services at Congregation Adas Yeshurun on W. Tuohy Ave. He then traveled north to Skokie where he fatally shot Ricky Byrdsong, former Northwestern basketball coach, as he was walking with his children. Smith then drove his light blue Ford Taurus to Northbrook, where he shot at, but missed, an Asian-American couple.

By midday Saturday, July 3, Smith had made his way to Springfield, where he fired at two black men, missing them both. In Decatur a few hours later, he shot and wounded Rev. Stephen Anderson. At 11:47 p.m., in Urbana, he seriously wounded Steven Kuo, a student at University of Illinois.

On Sunday, July 4, exactly one year after he first distributed WCOTC literature around Bloomington, Indiana, Smith fired into a crowd entering the Korean United Methodist Church. Won Joon Yoon, a graduate student at the University of Indiana, was killed. Smith fled the scene, eventually carjacking a vehicle in Ina, Indiana. Police then chased him into Salem, Illinois, where he took his own life.

### **THE MAKING OF A WHITE SUPREMACIST MURDERER**

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Benjamin Nathaniel Smith was born on March 22, 1978. He grew up on Chicago's affluent North Shore, attending New Trier High School, where he was graduated in January 1997. In the inaugural "Creator Profile" section of the WCOTC newsletter, The Struggle (March 1999), Smith described his "Racial Awakening":

My genesis of racial awakening began in eighth grade. By law, all Illinois students in the eighth grade are forced to learn about the Jewish "Holocaust" in National Socialist Germany. The best way to describe my eighth grade teacher is "dirty Jew" . . .

The Jew teacher began with the "slaughtering" of the Indians by white pioneers and settlers. He then moved to the "evils" of Black slavery and ended with the "murder of six million Jews" . . . The entire class was mind manipulation, pure and simple, but then it happened. . . . The LA Race riots broke out overnight. I saw scenes of niggers burning down the City of Angels and dragging whites from their cars for no reason other than the color of their skin. The experience was brutal and frightening. What if this happened in Chicago? What would Whites do if a full-scale Race War broke out?

In the autumn of 1997, Smith left the North Shore to attend the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign (UI-UC). In October 1997, he started an organization, the Odin Saves Ministry. (Many hardcore white supremacists practice Odinism as a religion.) Smith was expelled from UI-UC in 1998. He had posted flyers on the bulletin boards of the men's wing of the Illinois Street Residence Halls and left a 15-page booklet in the cafeteria. They featured a Nazi SS lightning bolt logo and derivations of the swastika. Smith had also been in trouble with campus police for crimes including drug possession.

Smith expounded on his time at UI-UC in *The Struggle* (March 1999):

What sent me into action was when I was forced to live in the dorms at UIUC. I was from a well-to-do, mostly White area (with significant Jewish infestation), but now, I was living among niggers, mestizos and gooks. Whites were still the majority, but muds were everywhere. . . . The university was going to great lengths to recruit them. This bothered me.

After returning home to the North Shore to work at a construction firm, Smith went back to college in May 1998, this time at Indiana University in Bloomington. He immediately formed the White Nationalist Party of IU,

taking for himself the title of Minister of Propaganda. In the flurry of controversy surrounding his activities on campus, Smith wound up on the front page of the student newspaper. The article featuring Smith also mentioned that WCOTC stickers that had been placed around Bloomington. Already familiar with WCOTC, Smith decided to send the article to WCOTC "World Headquarters" in East Peoria, Illinois. At that point, Matt Hale contacted Smith, who soon joined WCOTC.

By June 1998, Smith was made a "Brother" in the WCOTC and took the name "August" (supposedly out of respect for the Roman Emperor Augustus who, in Smith's words, "brought Pax Romana to his people"). By July, "Brother" Smith was an official WCOTC "Contact Point" (*The Struggle*, July 1998). On July 4, 1998, Smith blanketed much of Bloomington with WCOTC literature.

By this time, Smith was steeped in the white supremacist subculture, including the most hardcore of white supremacist texts. Thus WCOTC was, for Smith, a perfect fit. He told *The Struggle*, "I had read *The Turner Diaries* and *Mein Kampf* and still I did not feel satisfied, but after reading *Nature's Eternal Religion*, I knew at long last I had found what I was looking for."

(The Turner Diaries, written by neo-Nazi William Pierce of the National Alliance, is a fictional story of race war in America. It inspired the 1980s group The Order, which killed Jewish talk-show host Alan Berg, and served as the blueprint for Timothy McVeigh's attack in Oklahoma City. Nature's Eternal Religion is the foundational document of the Church of the Creator. It unabashedly promotes white supremacy and the destruction of Jews and non-whites.)

In August 1998, Smith and another Indiana Creator, David Carne, visited Peoria to pick up 5,000 copies of the racist and anti-Semitic tract, The Facts that the Government and the Media Don't Want You To Know, to

distribute throughout Indiana. By early August over a thousand had already been tossed onto lawns across central Indiana (The Struggle, August 1998).

Smith had also been organizing on campus. After one of his many flier Campaigns, Smith was forced into an agreement with Dean of Students Richard McKaig; Smith would have to follow campus procedures to distribute any more literature.

In late September, Smith returned to Peoria where he crammed another 5300 copies of The Facts into his Chevette and headed back to Indiana. On September 30, 1998, another mass literature distribution "blitz" took place around Bloomington, near the campus of IU.

Smith quickly became a rising star in the WCOTC. The October 1998 issue of The Struggle announced that Smith and Carne were joint "Creators of the Month," a special honor within WCOTC circles, connoting great favor in the eyes of Pontifex Maximus Matt Hale.

Smith continued to distribute literature throughout central Indiana in November, and the next month he debated Bloomington Mayor John Fernandez.

In January 1999, Smith reached the pinnacle of WCOTC stardom. He was named "Creator of the Year" for 1998. Pontifex Maximus Hale showered praise upon Smith and presented him with microfilms of The Racial Struggle, the original Klassen COTC publication. That March Smith was chosen to be the first-ever Creator featured in the new "Creator Profile" section of The Struggle.

But Smith couldn't stay out of trouble. At the end of April, Smith and Christine Weiss were charged with littering for spreading WCOTC literature around the North Side Chicago suburb of Willmette. Smith was also charged with driving under the influence of alcohol (Chicago Tribune, May 12). (The Northern suburbs had been rocked over the previous year-and-a-half by racist graffiti from a neo-Nazi group calling itself the White War Commission. The group had been recruiting at Smith's alma mater, New Trier High School.)

Although Hale told CNN that Smith was a WCOTC member only from June 1998 until May 1999, the WCOTC newsletter clearly contradicts Hale's attempt to distance the organization from the killings. Page two of the June 1999 issue of The Struggle featured a special announcement rejoicing in the fact that Smith "has relocated to central Illinois to assist PM Hale at World Headquarters."

Ironically, Smith extolled the virtues of non-violence to fellow Creators in his Creator Profile article. He stated,

At this stage, it is important to remember that we are fighting the Propaganda War. A few dead jigs in the street will not save our people.

The muds can breed faster than individuals acting alone can kill them. Our main priority is straightening out White people's thinking. Once we do that, the Jews and the muds will not even be an issue. So, remember that legal street actions are the only offense we need right now. We cannot allow the media to portray us as violent and/or murderers.

## **ORIGINS OF THE CHURCH OF THE CREATOR**

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The Church of the Creator was formed in 1973 by Ben Klassen. Although born in the Ukraine and raised in Canada, Ben Klassen found a home in the American far-right. The former Florida state legislator moved quickly through far-right politics, first with the John Birch Society, then the 1968 George Wallace presidential campaign. He finally found his place in white supremacist politics in 1973 when he formed the Church of the Creator, publishing Nature's Eternal Religion, and anointing himself "Pontifex Maximus."

Over the next decade Klassen slowly built his brutally violent, racist empire. By the early 1990's, the organization included chapters in 20 states and eight foreign countries. Klassen's "church" preached that Adolf Hitler was a religious prophet, that Christianity is a Jewish plot, and that it's members should prepare for "RAHOWA!" (Racial Holy War), which it proclaimed as "INEVITABLE. It is the Ultimate and Only solution . . . It is now either them or us. We want to make damn sure it is we who survive. (Rahowa! The Planet is All Ours, 1987).

The violent rhetoric became reality on May 17, 1991, in Florida when COTC "Reverend" George Loeb murdered Harold Mansfield Jr., an African-American Gulf War veteran. Two years later, on July 26, 1993, police in Salinas, California, arrested self-proclaimed Washington State COTC director Jeremiah Knesal, and COTC member Wayne Paul Wooten. While searching their car officers uncovered a cache of weapons, racist literature, and a page from the Portland, Oregon, telephone book listing Jewish agencies and synagogues. Knesal later confessed to involvement in the July 20, 1993, firebombing of an NAACP office in Tacoma, Washington

By 1990 Klassen was ready to anoint a successor. He first selected Rudy "Butch" Stanko, but the heir apparent declined the job when he was released from prison in December 1991, after finishing his sentence for selling tainted meat to school lunch programs. In May 1992, Klassen announced Charles Altvater of Baltimore, Maryland as successor. But Altvater was arrested and convicted later that year of reckless endangerment after placing a bomb on the porch of the home of a Baltimore County police officer.

Klassen took the organization back, then handed it over to Mark Wilson, a Wisconsin skinhead. Wilson officially ran COTC until January 1993. While in charge, Wilson developed a close relationship with the COTC chapter in Toronto, Canada, particularly with George Burdi (aka George Eric Hawthorne) the singer of the band RAHOWA. Wilson and Burdi would go on to form Resistance Records, the largest distributor of white-power music in the United States.

Wilson was replaced by movement newcomer Richard McCarty, who moved the organization's headquarters to Niceville, Florida. Continued legal problems forced McCarty to dismantle much of the COTC empire. Appointing McCarty would be Klassen's final act. With his organization collapsing around him, on August 6, 1993, Klassen committed suicide, at age 75.

After several years of silence in the wake of McCarty's abdication, in May 1996, the COTC "Guardians of the Faith Committee" anointed Matt Hale to lead the Church of the Creator. He changed the name to the "New Church of the Creator," which held its first "church" services on July 2, 1995, in Washington, Illinois. He would later change the name to World Church of the Creator and revive the COTC empire. The World Church of the Creator would share the ethnic-cleansing agenda of COTC. Hale wrote to the Peoria Journal Star in April 1996, "White people need to utilize every legal means possible to fight against the racial treason which has become rampant . . . across the country. The very biological survival of our race depends on us ending this outrage."

Despite his vehement rhetoric, Matt Hale doesn't fit the stereotypical image of a neo-Nazi. A graduate of Southern Illinois University Law School, Hale is young, bright and articulate. He is also a veteran hater. For nearly a decade, he has run neo-Nazi organizations, beginning with his American White Supremacist Party, through the National Socialist White Americans Party and the World Church of the Creator.

In a July 1998 directive to WCOTC members, Hale announced:

Just as Adolf Hitler knew that before he could win Germany, he must first win his home turf, Munich and then Bavaria as a whole, before we can win the world, I fervently believe that we must win our capital, Illinois. . . . Therefore, I am calling on all of you (particularly my most dedicated Brothers and Sisters) to strongly consider moving to Illinois, central Illinois in particular. By doing so, we can thoroughly and finally form the strong and sturdy trunk of our Creativity tree and multiply our impact a hundred fold.

As part of the resettlement initiative, white supremacists from around the country have settled in Illinois. For instance, the New Jersey Neo-Nazi outfit, Day of the Rope Productions moved its headquarters to Illinois. The organization, which took its name from the fictional day in The Turner Diaries when Jews, people of color and "race traitors" hang from lampposts, sells neo-Nazi music paraphernalia, such as T-shirts, videos, and CD's. In a letter announcing the relocation to Carbondale, Day of the Rope leaders also announced, "expect more hardcore racial survival material out of us."

Movement. From his base in East Peoria, Illinois, the "Pontifex Maximus" has increased the number of WCOTC chapters across the country from eight in early 1995 to over forty today. WCOTC has been able to bond aging bigots and young skinheads under the banner of a racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Christian "religion" known as "Creativity" the "white man's religion." Hale and WCOTC are working to create a new generation of neo-Nazis dedicated to carrying the legacy of white supremacy into the 21st century.

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