

Creativity Movement (Formerly World Church of the Creator)

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The Creativity Movement was one of the most notorious hate groups in the 1990s, gaining publicity for its rapid growth and the violent incidents with which it was associated. Originally founded by Ben Klassen in 1973 as Church of the Creator, the organization fell into disarray in the mid-1990s following the criminal convictions of several of its members, the suicide of Klassen in 1993 and a successful lawsuit brought by the family of a Gulf War veteran murdered in 1991 by a COTC member. In 1996, COTC was reborn as WCOTC with the emergence of the young law school graduate Matt Hale as its leader. Hale's publicity skills, his unsuccessful battle to obtain his law license in Illinois, and a two-state shooting spree by follower Benjamin Smith in July 1999 that left two dead and nine wounded, all kept the WCOTC in the headlines in recent years. In November 2002, the WCOTC lost a copyright infringement lawsuit brought against it by the Te-Ta-Ma Truth Foundation, which had successfully trademarked the name "Church of the Creator" years ago. A federal judge ordered the WCOTC to stop using its name, to give up its Web addresses, and to turn over all printed material bearing its name. Hale refused to comply with the order and in January 2003 had arrived for a contempt of court hearing when he was arrested for soliciting the judge's murder. He remains in jail awaiting trial as members of the WCOTC and other white supremacist groups rally behind him. Currently, Thomas Kroenke, appointed "Hasta Primus" or "Spearhead" of the WCOTC before Hale's arrest, is running some of the group's operations in Wyoming.

Quick Profile

- **Leader:** Matt Hale
- **Headquarters:** Riverton, Wyoming
- **Founded:** 1973 by Ben Klassen; Hale assumed leadership in 1996
- **Publications:** *The Struggle*
- **Other media:** More than 30 affiliated Web sites; online mailing lists, bulletin boards, and chat rooms
- **Ideology:** White supremacy, "Creativity." WCOTC is a white supremacist group that considers itself a religion founded on the proposition that the white race is "nature's highest creation" and that "white people are the creators of all worthwhile culture and civilization." Followers of the WCOTC do not believe in God, heaven, hell or eternal life. They consider Jews and nonwhites, whom they refer to as "mud races," to be the "natural enemies" of the white race.
- **Composition:** Mainly young white males, many incarcerated; the group also courts women and children
- **Connections:** The WCOTC Web site lists contacts in Australia, Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Poland, Russia and Switzerland.
- **Notable propaganda:** *Facts That the Government and the Media Don't Want You To Know*, WCOTC's 32-page anti-Semitic and racist propaganda booklet; *The White Man's Bible*

Race Faith

The Creativity Movement, whose motto is "RaHoWa" (Racial Holy War), proclaims that its belief system, Creativity, "is a racial religion" whose primary goal is the "survival, expansion, and advancement of [the] White Race exclusively." Creators, as members of the group call themselves, do not believe in God, heaven, hell or eternal life. Race is everything: the white race is "nature's highest creation," "white people are the creators of all worthwhile culture and civilization," "every issue, whether religious, political or racial...[should be] viewed through the eyes of the

White Man and exclusively from the point of view of the White race as a whole." Likewise the Creators' version of the Golden Rule: "What is good for the White Race is the highest virtue; what is bad for the White Race is the ultimate sin." Jews and nonwhites (referred to as the "mud races") are considered "sub-human" and deemed "natural" enemies. Ultimately, WCOTC hopes to organize white people to achieve world domination, "free from alien control and free from pollution of alien races....Only on the basis of recognizing our enemies, destroying and/or excluding them and practicing racial teamwork can a stable lasting government be built."

WCOTC attacks Jews, Christians, African Americans and other people of color, although Jews are particularly vilified. In *The White Man's Bible*, published by the group's founder Ben Klassen in 1981 and required reading for all Church members, Jews are the "mortal enemy" plotting to take over the world by "mongrelizing," and thus destroying, the white race. "Working towards the niggerization of America is the Jewish race," Klassen wrote. "Pushing, clawing, propagandizing with a fury unparalleled in history, the Jews are working towards their ultimate historic goal - total enslavement of all the races of the world."

Attacking Christianity

Creators take a harsh view of Christianity as well. Unlike some others on the far right -- notably Identity adherents -- who find biblical justification for their bigotry, Creators see Christianity as a "concoction" of Jews that has been used as a "tremendous weapon in the worldwide Jewish drive of race-mixing." They claim that there is no evidence that Jesus even existed and that the reliance of Christians on faith is merely childish gullibility. Klassen argued, "Jews used Christianity and its horrible concept of hell as a powerful club on the minds of its victims, to frighten, to terrorize and to stampede its gullible victims into submission."

However, because the group must "market" itself to Christians, though disaffected or nominal, its contempt for Christianity goes unmentioned in *Facts That the Government and the Media Don't Want You To Know*, the 32-page conspiratorially anti-Jewish and racist booklet WCOTC followers have dropped on countless

American driveways and lawns during the past several years. Instead, the booklet focuses entirely on denigrating nonwhites and on hoary conspiracy theories about Jewish control of the media and the Atlantic slave trade and about the mythical Kosher "tax."

Origins

The Church of the Creator was founded in 1973 by Klassen, a one-time Florida state legislator born in the Ukraine and raised in Canada. For almost a decade before establishing the group, Klassen drifted among far-right causes, first as a member of the John Birch Society -- which he later denounced as a "smokescreen for the Jews" -- and later as Florida chairman of George Wallace's 1968 independent presidential campaign. In 1973, Klassen formed the COTC with the publication of a 511-page tome entitled Nature's Eternal Religion. The book was a call to "completely reject the Judeo-democratic-Marxist values of today and supplant them with new and basic values, of which race is the foundation." As his title indicates, Klassen believed that race had transcendent meaning. It embodied absolute truth; Christianity, by contrast, he disdained as a "suicidal religion."

Over the next decade, Klassen appeared to attract few converts to his faith, and his contribution to the radical right consisted mostly of occasional propaganda pamphlets. In 1983, he began publishing a monthly tabloid called Racial Loyalty, from which he anthologized articles into a number of books, the best known of which is *Rahowa! This Planet Is All Ours* (1987). In characteristic language, Klassen declared:

RAHOWA! In this one word we sum up the total goal and program of not only the Church of the Creator, but of the total White Race, and it is this: We take up the challenge. We gird for total war against the Jews and the rest of the goddamned mud races of the world -- politically, militantly, financially, morally and religiously....We regard it as a holy war to the finish -- a racial holy war. **Rahowa!** is **INEVITABLE**. It is the Ultimate and Only solution.

While extreme and bizarre, Klassen's battle cries attracted increasing numbers of white supremacists around the world. Enjoying active members in Sweden, Canada and South Africa, COTC became one of the few American hate groups with international followers. South Africa's COTC chapter drew particular attention in 1992: two professed members of an undercover police unit reported that they had been instructed by superiors to join COTC in order to recruit South African racists into a "dirty war" against the African National Congress.

Klassen's stridency also attracted hard-core bigots, and through their activities the seeds were planted for COTC's eventual demise. Most significantly, on May 17, 1991, George Loeb, a COTC reverend with a history of racist harassment, murdered a black Gulf War veteran, Harold Mansfield Jr., in a Neptune Beach, Florida, parking lot following an alleged dispute between the two men. Loeb was sentenced to life with no possibility of parole for 25 years. In March 1994, the family of the murdered sailor, represented by the Southern Poverty Law Center, filed a lawsuit against COTC seeking \$1 million in damages and the dissolution of the organization for vicarious liability in the murder.

Klassen appeared to anticipate this lawsuit and spent the last year of his life in an effort to unload COTC assets and divest himself of responsibility for the organization. In September 1992, he sold the North Carolina compound that housed his headquarters to William Pierce, head of the neo-Nazi National Alliance. Pierce, who paid Klassen \$100,000, almost immediately placed the land back on the market for \$299,900. According to court records, the compound was sold in 1994 for approximately \$185,000 to a buyer who had no ties to the hate movement.

Succession

In addition to unloading his assets, Klassen, in his 70s, searched for a successor to lead his church. His leading choice, Rudy "Butch" Stanko, was serving a six-year prison sentence at the time for selling tainted meat to public school cafeterias. Klassen changed his mind at some point and instead selected Charles Altvater, a Baltimore, Maryland, pizza delivery man. Even before Altvater could take control

of the church, however, the indecisive Klassen appointed yet another successor, Mark Wilson (who was also known as Brandon O'Rourke), a Milwaukee skinhead leader who in fact ran COTC for six months, until January 1993. (Altvater, who remained a loyal COTC member even after his demotion, was arrested in 1992 and convicted of reckless endangerment for placing a bomb on the porch of a Baltimore County police officer's home.)

Perhaps sensing that the Milwaukee skinhead's propensity for reckless behavior made him difficult to control, Klassen abruptly dismissed Wilson and replaced him with Richard McCarty, a telemarketer previously unknown in hate group circles. Klassen's letter introducing McCarty to COTC members was virtually the last public act he performed in connection with the organization: on August 6, 1993, Klassen committed suicide, at the age of 75, by swallowing four bottles of sleeping pills.

COTC Under Richard McCarty

The Church that McCarty inherited from Klassen continued to spiral out of control in 1993, even before Klassen officially introduced McCarty as the group's leader. On July 15th, eight individuals with ties to COTC - as well as to Tom Metzger's White Aryan Resistance and to a local gang called the Fourth Reich Skins -- were arrested in Southern California on charges of plotting to instigate a race war by bombing the largest black church in Los Angeles and assassinating Rodney King, whose videotaped beating by white police officers in 1991 spurred national controversy (and, after the officers were acquitted of criminal charges, the 1992 Los Angeles riots). Eleven days later, police in Salinas, California, arrested two skinheads on shoplifting charges -- one of them, Jeremiah Gordon Knesal, described himself to the F.B.I. as the Washington State director of COTC. During a search of the suspects' car, officers uncovered a cache of weapons and ammunition, hate literature and a page from a Portland, Oregon, telephone book listing Jewish agencies and synagogues. Questioned by federal agents, Knesal confessed to his involvement in the July 20, 1993, firebombing of an N.A.A.C.P. office in Tacoma, Washington; authorities stated that the Tacoma bombing, for which a third skinhead was also arrested, was part of a larger conspiracy to attack

Jewish and African American institutions, military installations, gay and lesbian gathering places and radio and television stations.

Meanwhile, McCarty floundered as the group's leader, lacking Klassen's fire and talent for fashioning nearly nihilistic yet rousing rhetoric to excite followers. When, less than a year after Klassen's death, the Southern Poverty Law Center filed suit against the organization seeking its dissolution, McCarty quickly acquiesced. The lawsuit in turn proceeded against William Pierce; in May 1996 a Federal jury in North Carolina ruled that COTC had sold its property to Pierce only in order to avoid paying damages in connection with the pending suit, and that Pierce would therefore have to turn over to the Mansfield family the \$85,000 profit he earned from the resale.

WCOTC Reborn: The Rise of Matt Hale

The COTC had a violent reputation, though little energy, when a young and avid white supremacist named Matt Hale hitched his star to the group. Born in 1971, Hale had been an avowed racist since the age of 12, when he became fascinated with Adolf Hitler and National Socialism after reading *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* and, later, Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. From the 8th grade through his college years, Hale had been active in a variety of (usually tiny) racist organizations: The New Reich, the American White Supremacist Party, the National Association for the Advancement of White People and the National Socialist White Americans' Party. He discovered COTC in the early 1990s while attending Bradley University in Peoria, but he did not focus his energy on the group until 1995, when he saw an opportunity for leadership. The following year, on July 27, 1996, his 25th birthday, a group of church elders known as the Guardians of the Faith Committee "anointed" him Pontifex Maximus (meaning "highest priest") of the renamed World Church of the Creator.

Hale revitalized the organization; it began to attract hundreds of mostly young male followers -- as well as a considerable amount of media attention due to the legal and illegal actions of a handful of dedicated members. Hale and his supporters propagated their message through aggressive pamphleteering, the

proliferation of WCOTC-affiliated Web sites, newsletters, a public-access cable show ("White Revolution") that has aired in three states and highly publicized, albeit often sparsely attended, public meetings.

Hate on the Internet

WCOTC has made extensive use of cyberspace. The Internet "has the potential to reach millions of White People with our message and we need to act on that immediately," Hale states. "We call on all Creators and White Racial Comrades to go to [Internet Discussion Groups] and debate and recruit with NEW people." He adds, "post our URL [Universal Resource Locator, i.e., Web site address] everywhere, as soon as possible."

The group's main site is extensive, updated frequently and designed to make membership easy: visitors are provided a membership form, a list of local "churches" and a lengthy membership manual that explains Creativity and covers topics like the WCOTC wedding ceremony, advice on dealing with law enforcement and a "Child Pledging Ceremony."

Linked in a "Creator Webring," more than 30 WCOTC subsidiary sites share substantial content with the main site but also serve a variety of more specific purposes. Several are operated by WCOTC chapters in different states, including Arkansas, Michigan, New York and Ohio. Other sites are designed for skinheads, women and children. WCOTC also has an international Web presence, with sites representing chapters in Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Poland, Russia and South Africa.

Outreach to Women and Children

Unlike most other hate groups, WCOTC makes a concerted effort to reach out to women. It offers two venues for women -- The Women's Frontier and The Sisterhood of the WCOTC, each with its own Web site and newsletter. Although church ideology does not consider men and women to be equal, women do play a central role -- they are not only encouraged to become members but also to become leaders, "While the Church first and foremost views women's most natural and important role to be that of mother to beautiful White children and loving

wives to our glorious White men, our women members, just as our male Creators, can become ordained Reverends and rise to positions of influence." At present, the WCOTC Web site lists two contacts for The Sisterhood and two for The Women's Frontier. The Sisterhood advertises itself primarily as a place to "provide an outlet for [white women] to express their feelings of racial loyalty in positive ways," such as writing poetry and providing support for other "white sisters," while The Women's Frontier focuses on direct racial activism, such as distributing WCOTC propaganda and attending meetings and rallies.

The WCOTC also actively recruits children. The WCOTC Kids! site (subtitled "Creativity for Children") utilizes youth-friendly graphics to attract young Web users. The main page explains that "the purpose is to make it fun and easy for children to learn about Creativity." Instead of going into detail about the group's racist ideology, children are offered "games and stories and stuff," like crossword puzzles with the following clues: "The _____ are the deadliest enemies of the White Race" or "_____ was the greatest White Leader that ever lived." The answers, "Jews" and "Hitler," are provided on a separate page.

Recruitment Within the Prisons

WCOTC expends considerable effort recruiting and maintaining members in prison, many of whom are violent criminals. In fact, roughly 30 percent of the domestic contact points for the WCOTC are prisoners.

Additionally, one of the contact points for The Sisterhood, "Sister Anne," is specifically designated as the "Prisoner Support Contact." On The Women's Frontier Web site, a page has been devoted to "Political Prisoners"; according to the site, "a political prisoner is a man or woman who has taken conscious action for our Race, resulting in their persecution, arrest, and imprisonment." Two of the five prisoners who had been listed are convicted murderers (the site notes that "the WCOTC does not necessarily condone the actions of all individuals on this list").

Money

The best recruitment tool for the organization is Hale himself. Always promising to be controversial, he has been frequently quoted in periodicals and has appeared on numerous radio programs and on tabloid television shows hosted by Jerry Springer, Ricki Lake and Leeza Gibbons. In July 2000 he was interviewed by Tom Brokaw for an NBC report titled "Web of Hate"; additionally, in September 2000 he was included on an MSNBC panel addressing "Race in America."

Despite Hale's talent for keeping his name and the WCOTC in the spotlight, however, the church is best known for the actions of its 1998 "Creator of the Year," Benjamin Nathaniel Smith. By all accounts, Smith (b. 1978), who grew up on Chicago's affluent North Shore, had been troubled and angry for some time before first encountering WCOTC and its teachings. Only a college sophomore (at Indiana University, where he transferred after a stormy year and a half at the University of Illinois), he had already tried to establish a white supremacy group when, in the spring of 1998, he noticed a flier with Hale's number tucked under the wiper blade of his car. The two later met for dinner. Smith energetically devoted himself to Hale's cause, distributing WCOTC booklets and fliers. In January 1999 he gained his "Creator of the Year" laurels for attracting "more media attention to the Church than any other Creator resulting from his massive distribution of Facts That the Government and the Media Don't Want You To Know." Hale encouraged other WCOTC supporters "to view Brother Smith's activism as an example to follow."

Later that year, Hale earned a law degree from Southern Illinois University and passed the Illinois bar exam. He was denied a license to practice by the state bar, however, due to his bigotry. At a subsequent hearing in April, testifying before the bar's Character and Fitness Committee, Smith praised his new mentor: "He's given me spiritual guidance...When I first met him, I wasn't really sure what I wanted to do with my life, what direction I was going to go." On July 2, 1999, a separate state panel turned down Hale's application. He released a statement declaring, "I have been denied my most precious rights of speech and religion. If the courthouse is closed to 'NON APPROVED RELIGIONS,' America can only be headed for violence." That night -- the beginning of the July 4th weekend -- Smith went on a 40-hour

shooting spree that left two dead and nine wounded before the young gunman fatally shot himself in a stolen van as police pursued him through the Illinois countryside. The victims were all members of racial and religious minority groups, including African Americans, Asian Americans and Jews.

Hale initially claimed that he scarcely knew Smith, then conceded that the two were closely associated and had in fact met days before the shooting. He continued to disavow any prior knowledge of Smith's plans.¹ He told The New York Times, when asked if he thought Smith's actions were connected to the Illinois State Bar's decision: "I do. I very much do." To date, Hale has avoided any liability in the case, although several suits have been filed against him.

Record of Violence

We of the CHURCH OF THE CREATOR are not hypocrites. We openly state that some people need killing, that killing has always been with us and will always be with us....Killing our enemies, too, is under certain circumstances a necessary measure for the survival of our own race. Therefore we condone it, and it, too, is no sin in our religion." (Ben Klassen, The White Man's Bible)

Despite the WCOTC's longstanding and deserved reputation as one of the most violent white supremacist groups in the United States, Hale has consistently maintained that the group's ultimate objective -- the survival, expansion and advancement of the White Race -- can be achieved through legal and nonviolent means -- unless, he says, the "Jewish Occupied Governments of the world use force to violate our right to freely practice our religion." If this "violation" occurs, Creators believe that they have "every right to declare them ["the Jewish Occupied Governments of the World"] as open criminals violating the Constitution and the highest law of the land...and we can treat them like the criminal dogs they are and take the law into our own hands." Accordingly, the group has not condemned the violent actions of its followers; following Smith's rampage and subsequent suicide,

Hale portrayed the gunman as a martyr. "As far as we're concerned," Hale said of the carnage, "the loss is one white man."

The record of violent and criminal behavior by WCOTC followers includes these examples:

- In August 1997, an African-American father and son leaving a rock concert in Miami were accosted by a group of WCOTC skinhead members distributing the group's literature. According to the Miami Herald, about 11 skinheads participated in the beating, kicking the pair in the back, chest and face, and smashing beer bottles on their heads. In April 1998, WCOTC Florida State Director Jules Fettu and fellow Creators Donald Hansard and Raymond Leone were arrested and charged in the attack. According to the arrest affidavit, Fettu yelled "white power" and racial epithets and raised his hand in a white power salute during the beating. Hansard and Leone pleaded guilty; Fettu was convicted after a trial and sentenced to five years in prison. Additionally, Guy Lombardi, the group's Southeast Regional Director at the time, pleaded guilty to charges that he tried to intimidate a witness in the case.
- Leone and Hansard were also charged in another WCOTC-related crime in Florida. They and two other members, Angela King and Dawn Witherspoon, were indicted on hate-crime conspiracy charges stemming from a March 29, 1998 armed robbery of a Hollywood, Florida, adult video store and assault of the store's owner. According to the indictment, the four chose the target "because the defendants...believed that media outlets were controlled by 'Jews,' and that it was permissible to steal from 'Jews.'" The WCOTC members reportedly patterned the robbery after a similar incident in William Pierce's The Turner Diaries, and planned to send the money from the heist to WCOTC's Illinois headquarters. All of the defendants pleaded guilty, and Witherspoon was sentenced to 13 months in jail, Hansard to four and a half years, King to six years and Leone to more than eight years. Leone and King's sentences were later reduced after they turned state's evidence and helped bring about the conviction of Florida WCOTC leader, Jody Lee Mathis. Mathis

was convicted for selling a stolen shotgun but spent only five months in prison, allegedly because he gave authorities information about the group's leadership.

- Two California brothers, Matthew and Tyler Williams, have been charged with the July 1999 double murder of a gay couple in Redding, California, and are also facing a trial in federal court for the June 1999 arson of three Sacramento-area synagogues. Following their arrests, investigators searched their Redding, California, home and found ammunition and literature from the WCOTC.
- In August 2000, two Connecticut members of the WCOTC, Bruce Silvernail and Brian Davis, were arrested in upstate New York with a carload of guns and ammunition as they allegedly traveled to an illegal firearms training session in Washington County, New York. Silvernail, a former member of the Ku Klux Klan, was charged with possession of stolen property and criminal possession of a weapon, both felonies because of a previous felony conviction, and faces up to two years in federal prison. Davis, one of three individuals named 2000 WCOTC "Creator of the Year," was charged with one count of drinking while driving and two counts of having a loaded firearm in a car, both misdemeanors. He pleaded guilty and paid a \$2,000 fine.

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Matt Hale receives 40-year prison sentence.

¹Smith mailed a certified letter to Hale on July 2, 1999, formally breaking off his ties with the WCOTC. In the letter, Smith stated: "Although I have not been a member of the Creativity Movement since April 1999, due to my past public support of that legal religious organization run by Matt Hale, I find it necessary to formerly [sic] break with the Creativity Movement because I am unable + unwilling to follow a legal Revolution of values."