

White supremacist group suspected in killing of Chicago judge's family

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On Monday, February 28, US District Court Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow found her husband, Michael Lefkow, 64, and her mother, Donna Humphrey, 89, dead in the basement of the North Chicago home where the three lived. The two had been shot execution style in the forehead during the day.

While investigations are ongoing, immediate suspicion has focused on supporters of white supremacist leader Matthew Hale. In 2004, Hale was convicted of soliciting his security guard to murder Judge Lefkow, and he is currently going through the sentencing phase of his trial. Hale targeted Lefkow because of her involvement in a copyright infringement case involving his group, known as the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC).

Police have released sketches of two individuals who were seen near the house the day before the killings. Police are examining fingerprints and DNA evidence collected at the scene, and they have not ruled out the possibility of alternate motives. Lefkow has been placed under the protection of US Marshals in a secret location.

Lefkow said that the murder “was just cold-blooded. Who would do this? If someone was angry at me, they should go after me. It’s not fair to go after my family.” She has said that she is convinced that the attacks were a targeted killing.

There is good reason to believe that supporters of Hale were involved in the killing. The group has a history of violence, mainly directed against racial minorities. Michael Potok, the head of the hate group monitoring project at the Southern Poverty Law Center, has closely followed the WCOTC. He noted, “This is a group with a really remarkable record of criminal violence. The members of this group have been involved in murder, bank robbery, innumerable beatings and aggravated assaults.”

The group, originally known simply as Church of the Creator (COTC), was formed in 1973 by Benhardt

Klassen, a former state legislator in Florida who served as the state chairman for the 1968 presidential campaign of George Wallace. Building on Wallace’s racism, Klassen promoted the concept of Racial Holy War, and since that time the group’s greeting between members has been “Rahowa.”

For most of its existence, the COTC was a fairly small outfit, attracting the most sociopathic elements. In 1991, George Loeb, a “reverend” in COTC, was convicted for the murder of a black Gulf War veteran, and in 1993 members of the group set off bombs at the Tacoma, Washington branch of the NAACP and at a Seattle gay bar. The group has carried out numerous violent acts since this time.

Matthew Hale became the head, or “Pontifex Maximus,” of the organization in 1996. He moved the headquarters of the renamed WCTOC to the home of his father in Peoria, Illinois. Hale had a long history of participation in white supremacist and neo-fascist groups. At one point he was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of White People, run by David Duke.

WCTOC achieved national headlines in July 1999, when one of its members—Benjamin Smith, a close associate of Hale whom Hale named “Creator of the Year” in January 1999—went on a shooting spree against blacks and Asians. Smith killed two people and injured nine more before killing himself. Neither Hale nor any other members of WCTOC were convicted of involvement in the killings; however, evidence suggests that Hale knew beforehand of Smith’s plans. Smith launched his killing spree a day after Hale was denied a position in the Illinois bar.

As a result of the publicity generated by the case, the WCOTC grew to include 88 chapters nationally by 2002. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, this made it the neo-Nazi group with the largest number of chapters

in the country.

Hale's association with Lefkow began in 2000, when the Judge took up a copyright case brought by a church in Oregon that claimed the exclusive legal right to the name "Church of the Creator." Lefkow originally ruled in Hale's favor, finding that "Church of the Creator" is a generic name and that therefore the original copyright was void. An appeals court eventually overruled her decision, sending the case back for review.

Lefkow issued a new ruling against Hale in late 2002, ordering that the group change its name and pay a \$200,000 fine. Hale responded by initiating a vicious campaign against the judge, posting her address on Internet sites and denouncing her as a "Jew lover." He called for his members to distribute fliers in her neighborhood and stage protests at her house.

Hale was arrested in January 2003 after several conversations with his security guard—who was an FBI informant—in which Hale suggested that Lefkow be killed. He was convicted in early 2004 and is due to be sentenced in April of this year.

Group members and other white supremacists have responded with evident delight at the latest killings. One posting on Vanguard News Network web site said, "While I certainly understand we are not supposed to be advocating illegal activities, there is nothing illegal or harmful in being happy about this incident. I can barely contain my glee."

The killing of Lefkow's family members highlights the extraordinary danger posed by right-wing outfits such as the WCOTC, which is hardly alone in advocating a neo-fascistic outlook. Before the attacks of September 11, 2001, right-wing extremists had carried out the bloodiest terrorist incidents in the United States.

In addition to the killings carried out by members of the WCOTC, right-wing groups have been involved in numerous attacks over the past several decades. The organizers of the Oklahoma City federal building bombing in 1995, which killed 168 people, were connected to the extreme right. The anthrax attacks of 2001 were likely carried out by individuals with ties to right-wing extremist groups, although no arrests have ever been made in connection with the incidents. Fascistic individuals and groups have also been involved in terrorist attacks on abortion clinics and the assassination of doctors who perform abortions.

Despite this record, these groups continue to operate and have never been the subject of a "war on terrorism" from the U.S. government. The Homeland Security

Department has never targeted them. The response to the killing of Lefkow's family has been notably muted, largely disappearing from the national news after only a day. No doubt if the principal suspect had been a Muslim extremist the response would have been very different.

Many of these organizations have ties to sections of the Republican Party. The dirty secret of American politics is that a significant section of the Republican Party "base" consists of racists and neo-fascists.

James Hart, who was the 2004 Republican Party nominee in the 8th Congressional District in Tennessee, is a notorious white supremacist and opponent of integration. He advocates a program of eugenics to eliminate racial minorities, which he associates with the poor and working class. His outlook is not far removed from that of Hale.

Major figures in the Republican Party—such as Mississippi Senator Trent Lott and the long-time Senator, now deceased, Strom Thurmond—have had long-standing associations with racist organizations. Lott has spoken before, and has had his writings published by, the Council of Conservative Citizens, the "more respectable" version of the Ku Klux Klan. Lott was forced to step down as Senate Majority Leader after he praised Thurmond's 1948 presidential campaign, when he split with the Democratic ticket to run as a third-party candidate on a segregationist platform.

The growth of openly racist tendencies in the Republican Party has its roots in the "Southern strategy" of the 1968 campaign of Richard Nixon, a strategy that was in part an adaptation to the program of George Wallace, who ran as third party candidate. It was out of leading members of the Wallace campaign that Hale's organization was originally formed.



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