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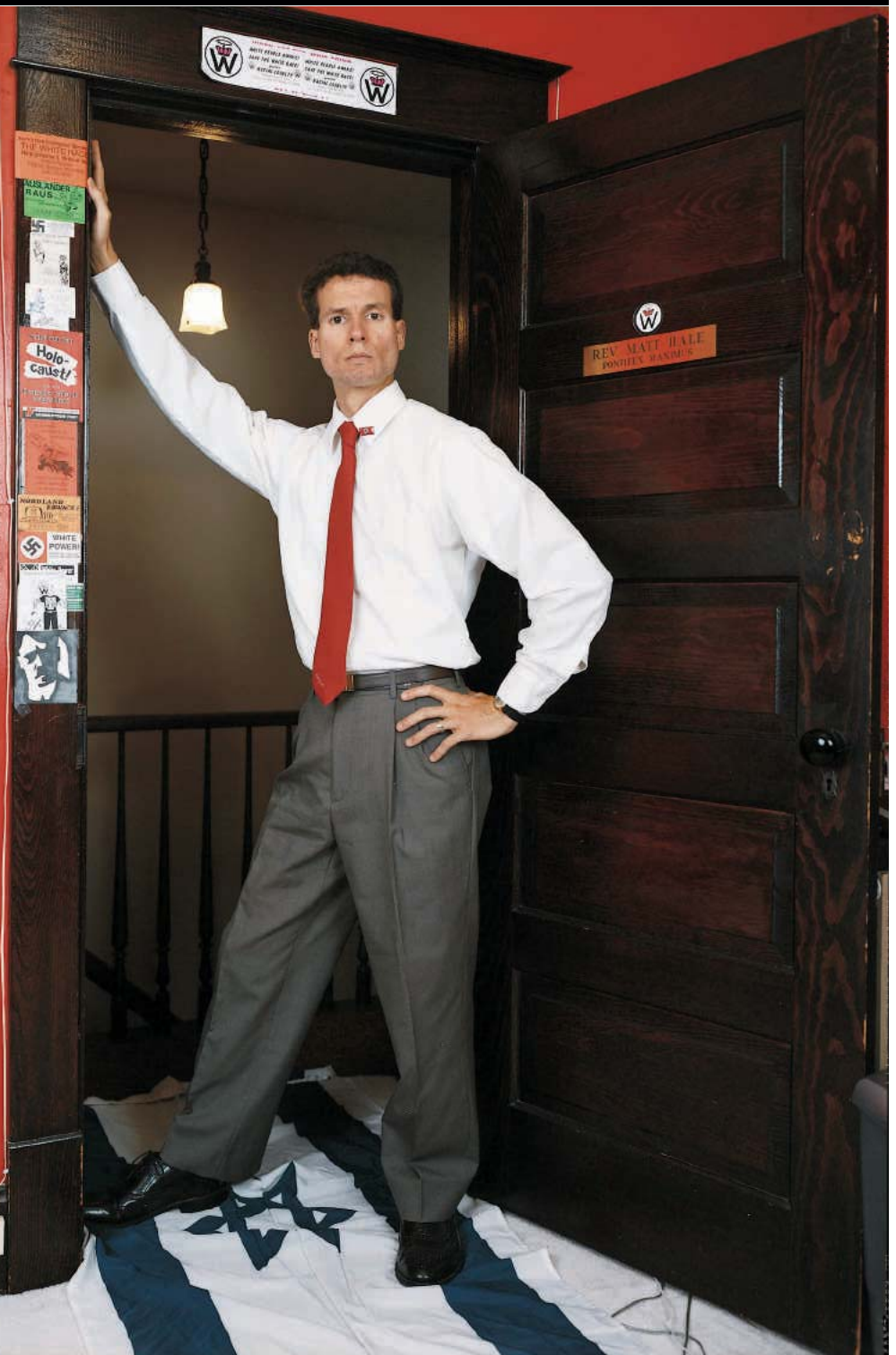
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PHOTOGRAPHS BY REUBEN COX

The New Face of Hate

Matt Hale has been called the scariest hater in America. So how come he still lives with Daddy?

MATT HALE CHECKS HIS HITLER WRISTWATCH AND scans the empty baggage area of Salt Lake City International. His entourage seems to have forgotten him. ¶ “I hope they show,” he says, absently rubbing the Führer’s face. ¶ A few minutes earlier, as we taxied down the runway, Hale had turned petulant when I asked permission to attend a meeting with his followers, the bony tattooed boys and lazy-eyed half-wits who refer to him as Pontifex Maximus. He stared out the window, refusing to look at me. ¶ “I’ll be a fly on the wall,” I’d assured him. ¶ “The problem with that,” Hale explained to his reflection, “is that I don’t like flies. When I see one, I tend to crush it.” ¶ With his acne-scarred chin, Salvation Army khakis, and startled brown eyes, Hale, 31—head of the racist World Church of the Creator, which he runs from his father’s East Peoria, Illinois, home—hardly looks like America’s Scariest Hater. But that’s what the *New York Times* anointed him this summer: a heartland Osama who labels blacks savages, Jews vermin, and interracial coupling bestiality. Investigated by the FBI but never charged with a crime—in 1999, a 21-year-old acolyte killed two minorities and

“THE WHITE RACE IS SHRINKING,” SAYS HALE. “IN 50 YEARS WE’LL BE A MINORITY IN THIS COUNTRY. RAHOWA!”





wounded nine others—Hale believes that a Racial Holy War (RaHoWa!) to eradicate the “mud races” is under way in America. For the past two years, he’s been taking his message on the road, in what he calls his White Civil Rights Speaking Tour. “The white race is shrinking,” Hale likes to rant. “RaHoWa!”

Hale has a Boy Scout’s face and a preacher’s piety. He is spindly and well-spoken, a law-school grad who plays classical violin and spends time in chat rooms with white youths struggling to maintain their hold on lower-middle-class life. On this September weekend—four days before 9-11—he is polishing a speech, already familiar among the Al-Jazeera set, that will blame Jews for the World Trade Center attack. Though the nation would appear to have banded together to fight terror overseas, Hale is here to prove that homegrown extremism is alive and hyperventilating.

At the moment, however, Hale is in need of a lift—

ACADEMIC BRIAN LEVIN CALLS HALE “ONE OF THE BIGGER PUTZES IN THE HATE WORLD.”

HOUSE OF CARDS: HALE WORLD HQ, A.K.A. HIS FATHER’S HOUSE IN EAST PEORIA, ILLINOIS, IS FILLED WITH STUFFED ANIMALS AND SPORTS AN ISRAELI FLAG AS A DOORMAT.

he doesn’t have cab fare. Suddenly he spots a jockish boy in fatigues and a crew cut, skulking by the exits. The kid—blond, strong, clear-eyed—rushes over.

“It’s an honor, Pontifex Maximum,” the boy says, flubbing the title.

“Tomorrow will be a glorious day for us,” Hale intones, raising his chin and setting his lips in stern conviction. The eyes, as always, remain startled.

IT’S NOT HATE THAT GUIDES US, BROTHERS and sisters,” Matt Hale opines on a rainy Salt Lake Saturday to an audience of 40 people in a library basement, his voice amplified by an Aiwa karaoke machine, “but love, love for our white families.”

Hale claims to shun violence (though his Web site tells members that when it comes to “niggers,” they need to “eliminate the problem”). His Holy War, he says, will be won without bloodshed, when his followers get elected to public office and roll back the “Civil Wrongs” legislation. Then, the 80 million nonwhites in this country will be rounded up, put on boats, and sent back to where they came from. “Peacefully,” says Hale—unless they resist. In that case he “reserves the right to defend our race with force.”

It’s unclear how many people actually belong to the WCOTC. Hale claims not to know; if he did, he says, he wouldn’t tell—though he’s remarked that

he has nearly 80,000 followers. The truth is far less impressive. Hale may have as few as 200 paying members (he charges them \$35 a year) spread among 49 states and 28 countries. Mark Potok, of the Southern Poverty Law Center, calls Hale a “neo-Nazi hobbyist who’ll say anything to get publicity.”

Today, only three of Hale’s listeners at Salt Lake library are WCOTC members. Two, including the guy from the airport, have traveled from Wyoming and Idaho to flank him with church flags, which depict a giant W (for “white”) beneath an Imperial Margarine-style crown topped with a halo. Another ten people identify themselves as racist sympathizers. The majority are curious residents.

The crowd listens politely as Hale launches into his 9-11 conspiracy theory, pulling hackneyed rumors from the Web (4,000 Jews fled the Trade Center before the attacks; an Israeli spy was on one of the hijacked jets; eight of the nineteen hijackers are still alive). “What does all this mean?” Hale demands. He’s dressed in black slacks, a crisp white shirt, and a red tie. “Maybe all this stuff about Osama bin Laden hiding in caves is designed to get your mind off the real issues. Blame it on the Arabs so Israel can roll their tanks over the Palestinians!”

“This is boring,” says a heavy-set man in the second row. “I see a little Jewish blood in you,” heckles one woman. “You’ve got a bit of a ’fro going on,” adds a man a few seats down.

“I take offense at being called a mongrel,” Hale says, voice trembling. “It’s a heinous sin.”

HALE WORLD HQ IS A SPARE ROOM ON the second floor of a 92-year-old musty house in desperate need of a woman’s touch. He uses an Israeli flag as a doormat. His father, a retired police officer, lives on the first floor. Hale has no job—he has been denied a law license in Illinois because of his beliefs—and relies on WCOTC membership fees and random acts of charity.

He acquired a taste for hate at age 13, after seeing four black boys making out with white girls at a dance parlor. “I felt nauseous,” he says. “My instinct told me it was wrong, like bestiality. I wanted to attack these Negroes. But they were much bigger than me.”

Hale, whose parents had divorced five years earlier, had already fed his racism with *Mein Kampf*. In eighth grade, he started his first official hate club. At Bradley University, he tried, and failed, to bring his American White Supremacists Party on campus. He did succeed, however, in gaining national media attention; soon he was a regular on the *Geraldo* circuit. In 1995, at 23, just before Hale entered law school, he ran for the City Council on a white-supremacist platform. He came in last, but

took 14 percent of the vote. “If it was a national election,” Hale reasons, “that would have been 24 million people behind me.” After the 75-year-old leader of the Church of the Creator killed himself, Hale got his first big gig. He was 25.

That Hale didn’t create a belief system but stepped into an empty shell of one like a hermit crab is not lost on his detractors. “Hale is one of the



bigger putzes in the hate world,” says Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism at California State University, San Bernardino. “Unlike other haters, who created something, he resurrected the skeletal remains of a group that is still limping. He likes to craft himself as this

“WITH HALE IT’S LIKE THE WIZARD OF OZ,” SAYS ONE INSIDER. “HE’S JUST A SMALL MAN BEHIND A LARGE ELECTRIC CURTAIN.”

HALE HITLER: HE WANTS TO LEAD HIS FOLLOWERS IN A FACIAL HOLY WAR, BUT HIS ORGANIZATION HAS ONLY 200 MEMBERS.

Renaissance man, but really he’s an opportunistic media whore. He’s 31 and lives with his daddy.”

ON A BRIGHT AFTERNOON A FEW DAYS LATER, I attend another Hale speech, this one at a library in Wakefield, Massachusetts. The Rockwellian town square is guarded by 200 cops in full riot gear—not to keep the racists in check but to restrain the twenty or so people who have come to protest Hale’s presence. Many of them are from a Communist group called the Progressive Labor Party, whose followers show up at similar events around the country and actually attack racists.

A beer can is launched from the crowd and strikes a woman dressed in a Hitler T-shirt in the forehead.

As blood flows down her face, she raises her arm in a Nazi salute for a half-dozen TV cameras. The crowd taunts, “I’m glad you’re hurt, you Nazi bitch!”

Later, as a group of three Hale sympathizers walk down the street, the anti-racists follow them, screaming “Fuck you, Nazis.” Three men carrying signs attached to white poles tear off the cardboard and beat one of the Nazis on the back with the poles, as he falls and screams “Help, police! Help!”

The attack takes place just three feet from me, and despite the Nazis’ hateful message, I’m appalled. I run with the crowd, stopping at an intersection to tell a cop what happened. The cop shrugs and a burly man next to him asks, “Was it a good guy or bad guy?” For moment I hesitate and then tell him it was a Nazi. “You’re barking up the wrong tree,” he says, as three equally portly friends—and the cop—laugh.

“HALE MAY BE TRYING TO TAKE OVER THE U.S. one library at a time,” says the SPLC’s Mark Potok. “But there’s no question that he’s dangerous.”

Hale, of course, is not alone in wanting a segregated America, or promoting white rights. Many groups appeal to alienated youth living in competition for minimum-wage jobs while facing the unpleasant realization that white skin, their one advantage in life, turns out to be no advantage at all. Thousands share these concerns, but Hale, it turns out, is not the man to lead the hate movement into battle. He lacks the charismatic energy of Aryan Nations leader Richard Butler and the organizing skills of the late William Pierce, former head of the National Alliance, who called churches like Hale’s a repository for the hate community’s “freaks and

weaklings.” Even David Duke, the former Louisiana Klansman and onetime presidential hopeful who now teaches American history at a college in Ukraine, tells me Hale’s plans are “unrealistic.”

The hate itself, however, is palpable, waiting for the right driver. Fortunately, the hate movement lacks a new Duke, someone charismatic, articulate, politically astute—but younger. Hale is not the man.

“Hale makes himself out to be a great intellect, but he’s not,” says Levin. “Duke in his day was sophisticated, able to sugarcoat his message so he could cross over into new ground and tap the mainstream. Matt Hale is a ten in terms of hate but a zero as a leader. But if the right guy comes along, we could be in big trouble.” ■