

FBI Releases Letter in Unabom' Case

Howard Kurtz & John Schwartz

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The serial bomber in the "Unabom" case appears to be motivated by a deep resentment of college graduates, scientists and advances in computer research, according to a letter made public yesterday.

FBI officials in San Francisco released a letter, which they believe is from the bomber, that was sent last week to David Gelernter, a Yale University computer scientist who was severely injured by a package bomb in June 1993.

"People with advanced degrees aren't as smart as they think they are," the letter said. "If you'd had any brains you would have realized that there are a lot of people out there who resent bitterly the way techno-nerds like you are changing the world and you wouldn't have been dumb enough to open an unexpected package from an unknown source."

The purported bomber, who has struck 16 times since 1978 and killed three people, continued: "In the epilog of your book, *Mirror Worlds*, you tried to justify your research by claiming that the developments you describe are inevitable, and that any college person can learn enough about computers to compete in a computer-dominated world. Apparently, people without a college degree don't count.

"In any case, being informed about computers won't enable anyone to prevent invasion of privacy (through computers), genetic engineering (to which computers make an important contribution), environmental degradation through excessive economic growth (computers make an important contribution to economic growth) and so forth. . . .

"If the developments you describe are inevitable, they are not inevitable in the way that old age or bad weather are inevitable. They are inevitable only because techno-nerds like you make them inevitable. If there were no computer scientists there would be no progress in computer science. . . . But we do not believe that progress and growth are inevitable."

Jim Freeman, head of the FBI's San Francisco office, told reporters: "This is the first time in 17 years we've had any degree of discussion by the Unabomber." He said the letter to Gelernter makes clear that his motivation is "because the doctor is a computer scientist" and the bomber "vehemently objects" to the direction of Gelernter's research.

Freeman said the FBI, which believes the Unabomber is a white man in his early forties, has no evidence the killer is working with others.

Gelernter said yesterday that the FBI had asked him not to comment on the letter. He said that his book, *Mirror Worlds*, sold fewer than 20,000 copies.

The letter to Gelernter is one of four, all postmarked Oakland, Calif., sent by the self-described "anarchist" last week. Two others went to individuals who have not been previous victims and whose names were not made public. The fourth was sent to the *New York Times*, which published it yesterday.

In that letter, which also indicated a desire to publicize his grievances, the writer demanded that a national newspaper or magazine publish a lengthy manuscript. The purported terrorist told the paper that "we will permanently desist from terrorist activities" if a manuscript of 29,000 to 37,000 words "is published in the *New York Times*,

Time or Newsweek, or in some other widely read, nationally distributed periodical. . . . Alternatively, it can be published as a small book. . . . If the answer is unsatisfactory, we will start building our next bomb.”

The writer said that “the article will not explicitly advocate violence. There will be an unavoidable implication that we favor violence to the extent that it may be necessary, since we advocate eliminating industrial society and we ourselves have been using violence to that end.”

The Times received the letter Monday, shortly before a package bomb killed Gilbert B. Murray, a timber industry official in Sacramento, Calif. It was postmarked Thursday, the day after the explosion in Oklahoma City. Some officials have speculated the bomber was seeking renewed attention in the wake of the Oklahoma City tragedy.

The Times, which received a brief, similar letter two years ago, withheld certain identifying details at the FBI’s request. One federal investigator said the letters showed the bomber was becoming more emotional and might be prone to make a mistake.

Robert K. Ressler, a 20-year FBI veteran who now runs a law enforcement consulting firm in Fredericksburg, Va., said the letters, if they are from the bomber, “could be a basis for assessing his personality.”

Ressler, who helped develop the FBI’s methods for “profiling” – creating a psychological and physical description of suspects – said the letters show a man whose ego is driving him into the limelight. “He’s playing a dangerous game. He’s now moved from anonymity to seeking great publicity in demands for getting this material published. . . . He wants public acknowledgment and social changes. He’s setting rules that make him more important in his mind.”

The writer’s demand for space in a national publication poses a conflict between a news organization’s natural instinct to maintain editorial control and its desire to cooperate with authorities.

The Times quoted Publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. as saying that while the paper “can’t be held hostage by those who threaten violence . . . we’ll take a careful look at it and make a journalistic decision about whether to publish it in our pages.”

Robert J. Haiman, president of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, said that “this group, by its behavior so far, does not engender much confidence that they’re honorable, trustworthy people. They’re killers. I’m very nervous about newspapers making deals with killers.”

But Sanford J. Ungar, dean of American University’s School of Communication, said that “if 20,000 words might save lives and everyone knows why it’s being printed, I think it’s a pretty good deal.”

If his manuscript is published, the writer said, he would renounce terrorism (“intended to cause injury or death to human beings”) but not sabotage (“intended to destroy property without injuring human beings”).

News organizations have occasionally provided a forum for criminal suspects. During the 1993 siege of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Tex., radio stations across the state

agreed to a government request to broadcast a 58-minute harangue by cult leader David Koresh.

In 1977, Jimmy Breslin, then a New York Daily News columnist, consulted with police before publishing a letter from the "Son of Sam" serial killer, David Berkowitz. Ressler said that Berkowitz, in a prison interview, said that "when he saw his letters in the paper it really sent his ego out of control. Seeing these letters . . . probably escalated his murderous activities."

A year earlier, The Washington Post, New York Times, Chicago Tribune and Los Angeles Times published a statement by Croatian nationalists who had hijacked a Chicago-bound airplane and threatened to kill its 92 passengers. The hijackers later surrendered in Paris after receiving an ultimatum from authorities.

"We just didn't consider the possibility that we were being blackmailed," said Benjamin C. Bradlee, then The Post's executive editor and now a company vice president. "None of us had the guts to read the story that said umpteen American hostages were killed today because Benjamin C. Bradlee refused to publish. . . ." Today, he said, "my overwhelming feeling would be not to do it." Special correspondent Jackie Spinner contributed to this report.

A critique of his ideas & actions.



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