

Unabomber Manuscript is Published

Public Safety Reasons Cited in Joint Decision by Post, N.Y.
Times

Howard Kurtz

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After weighing the question for nearly three months, The Washington Post and New York Times have agreed to publish in today's Post a 35,000-word manuscript submitted by the Unabomber, the serial mail bomber who has promised to halt his deadly attacks if either newspaper ran his lengthy critique of industrial society.

Donald E. Graham, The Post's publisher, and Arthur O. Sulzberger Jr., publisher of the New York Times, said they jointly decided to publish the document "for public safety reasons" after meeting last Wednesday with Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis J. Freeh. The papers are splitting the cost of an eight-page insert, which will appear only in The Post because it has the mechanical ability to distribute such a section in all copies of its daily paper.

"From the beginning, the two newspapers have consulted closely on the issue of whether to publish under the threat of violence. We have also consulted law enforcement officials," Graham and Sulzberger said in a joint statement. "Both the attorney general and the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation have now recommended that we print this document for public safety reasons, and we have agreed to do so."

The FBI has been investigating the man known as UNABOM since 1978, when officials believe he launched the first of 16 attacks that have killed three people and injured 23 others.

"Neither paper would have printed this document for journalistic reasons," Graham said in an interview. "We thought there was an obvious public safety issue involved and therefore sought the advice of responsible federal officials. We are printing it for public safety reasons, not journalistic reasons."

"It's awfully hard to put too much faith in the words of someone with the record of violence that the Unabomber has," Sulzberger said. But, he said, "you print it and he doesn't kill anyone else; that's a pretty good deal. You print it and he continues to kill people, what have you lost? The cost of newsprint?"

"This is not a First Amendment issue. This centers on the role of a newspaper as part of a community."

Graham said that publication of the special section, at a cost of \$30,000 to \$40,000, will not necessarily set a precedent. "I think this is a singular case," he said.

Graham added that "clearly the FBI knows more about this man than we do. Their feeling is there is some reason to believe he will do what he says."

In an April letter to the Times, the Unabomber said he would renounce terrorism – which he defined as "intended to cause injury or death to human beings" – if his manuscript were published. But he reserved the right to engage in sabotage "intended to destroy property without injuring human beings."

If the Times or another widely read publication did not print his manuscript, the self-described anarchist said, he would "start building our next bomb."

At the end of June, The Post and the Times received copies of a 56-page, single-spaced text, plus 11 pages of footnotes and other material. The Unabomber said he would wait three months for a decision. Both papers promptly turned the material over to the FBI.

The publishers' meeting with Reno and Freeh was also attended by Leonard Downie Jr., The Post's executive editor, and Joseph Lelyveld, executive editor of the Times. It was the second time in three months that the papers' executives had met with Reno and Freeh to discuss the Unabomber's request, and the publishers agreed early on to reach a joint decision. Justice Department officials declined to comment yesterday.

Media analysts have been divided on whether the newspapers should print the Unabomber's treatise. Some have said that publishing 35,000 words is a small price to pay for the possibility that the killer would halt his attacks. Others have warned that the newspapers have no way of knowing whether the terrorist will keep his word, and that accepting his terms could encourage violent groups to make similar demands.

Sulzberger said he was not moved by the "copycat" argument because the Unabomber's 17-year record of violence was unique. He said federal and private experts had advised the publishers "that this man does tend to keep his word."

In his April letter to the Times, the Unabomber asked the paper to publish three shorter follow-up pieces over the next three years. Graham and Sulzberger said no decision had been made on that request. The Post and the Times published excerpts from the manuscript of about 3,000 words on Aug. 2 but did not say whether they planned to print the entire document.

The Unabomber's manuscript is a densely written manifesto that calls for worldwide revolution against modern society. He argues that the technological age has robbed people of their "autonomy," saying: "The industrial revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race," forcing people "to behave in ways that are increasingly remote from the natural pattern of human behavior."

Although the Unabomber writes as if he were a member of a group, the FBI believes the killer is a white man in his early forties who has acted alone. He conducted his attacks in silence for years but abruptly changed tactics on April 20, the day after the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City.

The terrorist mailed four letters that day and began to detail his political philosophy and resentments, prompting some experts to suggest he may have felt upstaged by the Oklahoma City blast. The terrorist also sent a package bomb that five days later killed Gilbert Murray, a timber industry executive in Sacramento.

An FBI task force, after scrutinizing the manuscript, has concluded that the bomber was probably exposed to the history of science, or some related discipline, in the late 1970s in the Chicago area. The bomber's legacy of terror began there: A package bomb injured one person at the University of Illinois Chicago Circle campus on May 25, 1978; another person was injured at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., on May 9, 1979.

FBI agents began sending copies of the manifesto to Chicago-area professors and questioning them to see if any remember a student making such arguments or matching the description of the Unabomber.

At least 80 agents are working on leads generated from the 20,000 calls to the UNABOM hot line. About 50 of those agents are focusing on the San Francisco area, with the others dispersed in such areas of interest as Salt Lake City and Chicago.

FBI officials believe the Unabomber moved to the Salt Lake City area in the early 1980s, and then to Northern California. In October 1981, law enforcement officials disarmed a bomb in a business classroom at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. Bombs severely injured professors of computer science at the University of California at Berkeley in 1982 and 1985.

The only credible sighting of the bomber came in 1987 outside a Salt Lake City computer store. The Unabomber disappeared for six years, surfacing again in June 1993 when, two days apart, bombs injured professors at Yale University and the University of California at Berkeley.

In his April letter to the Times, the terrorist mocked the FBI as "surprisingly incompetent" and unable "even to keep elementary facts straight." He said that "people who willfully and knowingly promote economic growth and technical progress, in our eyes they are criminals, and if they get blown up they deserve it."

He also sent a letter to David Gelernter, the Yale computer scientist severely injured by a package bomb in 1993. "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 bomber wrote.

The last high-profile publication in the face of threatened violence occurred in 1976, when 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.

Staff writers Pierre Thomas and Serge F. Kovalski contributed to this report.

The Ted K Archive

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