

This isn't Montana, this is UNALAND

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26 Apr 1996

When I was younger I used to whine no end about the tyranny of having to live in this godforsaken one-horse-state we affectionately call Montana. To these complaints my father would always tell me that one day I would be proud of this heritage; one day I would beam with joy as I told a new acquaintance “I’m a Montanan.” Suddenly, this day is at hand.

Before I go any further I should set some things straight: 1) I do not in any way excuse the Unabomber for senselessly murdering several innocent people and I don’t make any pretenses that he shouldn’t go to prison or, as the case may be, the looney bin. 2) I do not condone the alleged white supremacist overtones of the Montana Freemen movement.

However, I have not and will not join the ranks of those fellow Montanans who shuffle their feet and turn down their eyes when asked their state of residence. I’m out and I’m proud. I am a Montanan.

Montana has a shadowy reputation to carry. We are the boonies, the Wild West, the home of the original vigilantes. Yet, since the end of the Gold Rush we’ve been working to prove ourselves as an icon of modern civilization. I do it too. Several times I’ve angrily explained to out-of-staters that I do not wear spurs and ride my horse to school or go out looking for dinner with my shotgun. These, I thought, were the things of Montana myth. But Ted Kaczynski and the Freemen are proving me wrong. These guys are the vigilantes of our time.

“This is, after all, the state in which highway patrol officers carry the sign of frontier vigilantism with them, in the ‘7-7-77’ on their insignias — honoring the date that locals in Bannack sentenced the Plumber Gang to death,” wrote Bill Chaloupka in the April 11 issue of the *Missoula Independent*. But this fertile reputation of ours goes back further than 1877. This is the state whose earliest white settlers were deserters of the Confederate army. This is the state where the first ranchers wrote incoherent accounts of going mad with loneliness. And we’ve still got a town full of bigamizing Mormons. Montana seems like the perfect place for these infamous cooks we’ve got. If I were in the FBI, this would’ve been the first place I looked for the Unabomber.

So they’re a little misguided. The Unabomber wants us all to return to some kind of primitive, hunter-gatherer-esque society, and he’s willing to use explosions to get us there. The Freemen want to make Montana into a new republic, although they still accept crop subsidies from the federal government. But really, is the Unabomber feeling any disgust that all of us haven’t felt as we grapple with the mysteries of the Information Superhighway? Is the Freemen’s plan any wierder than Pal Buchanan’s “wall around Mexico” idea? And are any of them more dangerous than the child molesters and homicidal rapists who are arrested everyday in this country’s major cities? I think not.

While it is important for us, as Montanans, to remember that the Unabomber and the Freemen are our “lunatic fringe,” it is also okay to bask in the gaze that America casts our way as she labels us her “wild child.” And to those who would call all 850,000

of us a bunch of crazies, I would like to quote a popular Montana bumper sticker “Hey, at least our cows are sane.”

The Ted K Archive

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The Hellgate (Lance, Missoula, MT.), 26 Apr 1996. <mthspublic.newspapers.com>

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