

Unabomber's Gift Makes His Life a Study in Anarchy

Michael Taylor

Dec 17, 2000

Contents

Prosecutor Unimpressed	4
Killed for the Sake of Killing	5
Guilty Plea in 1998	6

Theodore J. Kaczynski, Ph.D., federal prisoner No. 04475-046, the former mathematics professor known more infamously as the Unabomber, is on the rise again.

Sitting in his maximum security cell, Kaczynski, now 58, appears to be trying to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of his public – he gets tons of fan mail, he has tried to get his 500-page book published (it was turned down because of potential libel problems), he was the subject of a lengthy scholarly article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and, in a rare nod to the press, which he has said he hates, he had a big interview spread in *Time* magazine.

But Kaczynski's most unusual, and perhaps most ironic move is this: He has returned to academia by contributing 15,000 of his personal papers to a special collection at the University of Michigan, where he got his doctorate 23 years ago and later mailed a bomb to one of the university's psychology professors.

"This rehabilitation is just like the rehabilitation of Richard Nixon," said Vermont Law School Professor Michael Mello, referring to President Nixon's climb from the political depths, through writing books and chatting up foreign leaders, after his resignation from the presidency in August 1974. Mello acted as Kaczynski's legal adviser for a while and later wrote a book about him.

"It's a lot like Nixon in one respect – the calculatedness of it," Mello said. "Ted is just obsessed with his public image. He wants to know everything anyone has said about him at any time, ever."

A lot of what people said about him and to him – reams of press clippings, thousands of letters and birthday cards – can now be found at the University of Michigan's Labadie Collection, the foremost archive of anarchist papers in the United States. The Labadie's curator has dubbed this trove the "Ted Kaczynski Papers."

To compound the irony, Kaczynski, according to court records detailing his private journals, "first formed a desire to kill while still a graduate student at the University of Michigan in 1966. . . ."

His papers, housed in the university's library, take up five linear feet of space and are being accorded all the academic solemnity that, say, Churchill's papers received when they went to Cambridge. Kaczynski is a self-proclaimed anarchist and since his arrest, he has had the moral support of several members of the world's anarchist community.

"He's the most contemporary and the most notorious person we have here (in the collection)," Labadie curator Julie Herrada said. "The core of our collection is anarchy, and if you're interested in social protest movements, this is the collection for research purposes." So far, the Kaczynski collection has attracted a smattering of curious Michigan students, but the university hopes more will come have a look at the Unabomber cache.

Prosecutor Unimpressed

One who probably won't have a look – he's already seen the 22,000-page Kaczynski private journal, which is not on file in the Michigan collection – is Assistant U.S. Attorney R. Steven Lapham, who helped prosecute the Unabomber in the late 1990s.

"This is all hogwash," Lapham said recently, when told about Kaczynski's new flirtation with the groves of academe. "The guy's nothing but a serial murderer, and I don't know why we're giving him the time of day."

One of the core truths about Kaczynski, aside from the mayhem and tragedy he caused his victims and their families, Lapham said, is that despite Kaczynski's public posture of being an environmentalist and anti-industrial crusader, his own private writings, which are part of the court record, showed that he cared not a whit about all that highfalutin stuff and simply liked killing people.

Killed for the Sake of Killing

In his public manifesto, "he claimed that he 'had to kill people' to get a 'message before the public' that technology was destroying mankind," the government said before Kaczynski was sentenced. In his private journals, however, Kaczynski said all that was window dressing and the truth was that he simply liked killing for the sake of killing.

Like many notorious people who have fallen from grace – with Kaczynski, of course, grace might not be the most precise word – and then climbed back up, Kaczynski was vilified in the mainstream press after his arrest in April 1996 in Lincoln, Mont., where he had been holed up in the hills making bombs and writing incessantly about it in his journal.

The news media quickly branded him a lunatic hermit – a description greatly helped by the widely distributed wild man photo of Kaczynski taken hours after his arrest, showing him dressed in rags, his crazed face topped by unkempt hair. When his case came to court, his attorneys, over his objections, tried to mount a "mental disease or defect" defense to save him from the death penalty and a court-appointed psychiatrist found him to be a paranoid schizophrenic.

Guilty Plea in 1998

Ultimately, Kaczynski pleaded guilty in January 1998 to federal bombing charges in connection with the deaths of three men and injuries to two others. He also admitted to being the Unabomber, the long-sought, will-o'-the-wisp terrorist responsible for 16 bombing incidents all over the United States from May 1978 until April 1995, killing three and injuring 23 others. He was caught by the FBI after his brother, David, and David's wife, Linda Patrik, recognized his anti-technology prose in a 35,000-word manifesto that the Unabomber convinced the New York Times and Washington Post to jointly publish in September 1995.

He is now serving life without the possibility of parole in the federal "Supermax" prison in Florence, Colo.

Since he was caught, Kaczynski has received thousands of letters from correspondents all over the world and has kept copies of some of the letters he wrote back to them. And academics and writers have come courting, writing pieces that try to probe the serial killer's mind and wonder how he got this way.

For former federal prosecutor Stephen Freccero, who wrote the government's Unabomber sentencing memorandum, there isn't much of a puzzle when it comes to figuring out Kaczynski.

"At the end of the day, no matter what you say about how fascinating, how educated, how unique Kaczynski is," Freccero said, "he is a murderer. That's what he stood for. He enjoyed taking other people's lives because he could."

"The only reason his papers are at the University of Michigan, and the only reason the intelligentsia write pissy little articles in the Atlantic Monthly (about him)," Freccero added, "is because he shed blood. Otherwise, he is someone no one would pay attention to."

The Ted K Archive

Michael Taylor
Unabomber's Gift Makes His Life a Study in Anarchy
Dec 17, 2000

sfgate.com

www.thetedkarchive.com