

Ted Kaczynski We Hardly Knew Ye

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On June 10th, 2023, a madman died alone in his cell at the age of 81 in a federal prison medical center in Butner, North Carolina. This morbid list of details wouldn't exactly be considered news if it wasn't for the fact that this lone madman also happened to be named Theodore Kaczynski. Better known as the Unabomber, Ted was quite possibly the most notorious domestic terrorist in American history, dueling with the FBI in a 17-year game of cat and mouse that would ultimately become the longest and most expensive investigation in that agency's history by the time of his arrest at his one room shack in rural Montana.

However, even with those legendary stats and all the hyped-up true crime mythology that comes with them, at the end of another crowded news day, Ted Kaczynski was still just another number in America's perpetually swelling human zoo and after the world took a moment to spit on his grave with the cameras rolling, they gleefully returned to their business-as-usual of masturbating to celebrity car crash footage while setting the rainforest on fire. Maybe I'm the sick one here, but I just can't seem to bring myself to join them back in the daily grind. Something about leaving that broken old man hanging in his cell gives me a dull ache in the pit of my heart.

I won't sit here and try to pretend that Ted Kaczynski was some kind of folk hero. He was a killer and most of his victims were just innocent civilians. So, why then should I mourn the death of such a ghastly creature? If I had to answer this vexing question in the simplest of terms, I would say that it's because Ted was a fellow outsider and in spite of all his many sins, he was also right about far more things than any truly evil person ever could be. Burn me at the stake if you must but I feel that this lonesome bastard has at the very least earned himself the right to one obituary that acknowledges the uncomfortable fact that he was indeed a human being.

Theodore Kaczynski was born to a working class Polish American family in Chicago on May 22, 1942, and it didn't take very long for the world around him to recognize that he was different. Ted was a childhood mathematic prodigy with an IQ of 167. He entered Harvard at 15, completed his PHD in mathematics at 25, became the youngest professor to be hired in the history of UC Berkley that same year and went on to publish several successful mathematical treatises before the age of 30.

On paper Kaczynski appeared to be riding high but just beneath the surface he found himself chafing against the restraints of the academic rat race that he felt forced into by birthright. These feelings of loneliness and disconnection were only exacerbated when young Ted found himself a guinea pig in what appears to have been an MKUltra study on the power of cruelty as a weapon for social engineering. For at least once a week over a period of three years, Kaczynski, who was still a teenager at the time of the study, met with Harvard psychologist and OSS veteran Henry Murray to be brutally berated and humiliated with an onslaught of verbal abuse while hooked up to machines only to have those traumatic encounters recorded and played back for him on a loop.

Under these circumstances, it can hardly be considered shocking that Kaczynski developed an intense repulsion to academia, authority and human beings in general. By

1969, Ted had enough. He left his illustrious career and three years later he attempted to leave civilization altogether. Deciding to devote himself to self-sufficiency and simple living, Ted moved to a remote cabin near the small town of Lincoln, Montana with no electricity and no running water, and for a moment he actually appeared to have found peace.

This is the most fascinating part of Ted Kaczynski's story and it's the part that generally gets glossed over by the media in favor of the more incendiary details. For nearly a decade, between the years of 1971 and 1978, Ted lived in virtual harmony with his harsh surroundings. After years of praise and celebrated material achievements from modern society, he had gladly erased himself from existence and found contentment in absolute isolation. In hindsight, I believe that Ted was well aware of his violent tendencies and went as far out of his way as humanly possible to divorce himself from the problem. Like a growing number of modern-day American misfits, Kaczynski found himself allergic to society, so Ted tried to make society go away. But society would not let Ted be.

It began with commercial airliners flying over his cabin and hunters piercing the peace and quiet of his beloved woodland surroundings with the staccato puncture wounds of their bullets. This slow-motion invasion of the modern world on Ted Kaczynski's self-imposed exile escalated with bulldozers and pavement, overpasses and strip malls. Ted initially only gave into acts of petty vandalism and construction site monkey-wrenching, but a freeway thrown through his favorite meadow seemed to break Ted's already fragile spirit and he chose to devote himself entirely to a one-man campaign for revenge against the modern world.

Ted taught himself how to build explosives by hand using untraceable scraps of metal and wood that he had foraged on his property and between the years of 1978 and 1995 he carried out a veritable jihad of 16 bombings, killing 3 people and injuring 23 others. His targets were diverse; airlines, universities, academics and executives, but they were all people who in Ted's eyes symbolized the rapacious advance of technology on the natural world.

The FBI used the case identifier UNABOM, standing for University and Airline Bomber, but the press dubbed him the Unabomber and here a legend was born. A legend of an untraceably cagey mad bomber outwitting the experts and shaking the world with his seemingly random campaign of violence. Ted chose to exploit this legend for the sake of getting his message out to the masses. In 1995 he sent a letter to the New York Times promising to cease and desist his campaign under the condition that either they or the Washington Post agree to publish a manifesto.

Under the urging of an increasingly desperate federal government, the Washington Post agreed, and it took less than a year for Ted's own brother to recognize his prose and supply the FBI with everything they needed for a bust. After firing his lawyers for trying to convince him to plead not guilty by reason of insanity, Ted Kaczynski pled guilty to 8 consecutive life sentences and spent the last 25 years of his life rotting in an artificially lit concrete tomb at ADX Florence Supermax.

As I've noted above, nothing excuses Kaczynski's undeniable savagery. I remain steadfast and committed to my opposition to any form of initiatory violence, but I am also a fellow casualty of civilized society. After twenty years of having meddlesome adult authority figures poke and prod and humiliate me in their attempts to shove me into a constricting modern gender construct that clearly didn't fit, I finally broke beneath the pressure and spent the first 6 years of my twenties as an agoraphobic hermit, and the last 8 years struggling to recover from the damage I did to myself in a misguided attempt at self-defense.

It was during this period of post-traumatic turbulence that I first discovered Ted Kaczynski's then-infamous manifesto, *Industrial Society and Its Future*, and decided to take the time to do what most of Kaczynski's loudest condemners in the vaunted fourth estate have never even bothered to do. I actually read the goddamn thing. What I discovered was startling and it only seems to become increasingly startling with every passing year.

Kaczynski lays down an airtight case against civilization in general as an existential foe of individual liberty and technology in particular as a steroid that has grown that invention to downright apocalyptic proportions. Ted's basic argument was that technology makes an already toxic civilization truly lethal by reducing the individual to a product with a barcode number.

This epic drive towards technological slavery and endless expansion has become more massive than any other single human construct including politics and thus any attempt to use politics or technology to reign this runaway system in only serves to make it stronger. The only hope that humanity has for its salvation is to find a way to push this unsustainable machine to its inevitable collapse before it can completely destroy the planet and then exploit the resulting momentary ceasefire in "progress" to enlighten people on the dangers of the system before it can reboot.

But perhaps Kaczynski's most prophetic analysis was his assessment of the nature of human violence during which he seemed to have accidentally caught a glimpse of himself in the rearview mirror of his own skewed perception. Ted posits that technological civilization has resulted in the creation of a superstructure that cannot function without total capitulation to conformity. Humanities inevitable inability to live up to the rigid standards of such a constraining system leads to a growing plague of increasingly crippling social sicknesses.

Symptoms of these sicknesses may include school shootings, suicidal ideation, workplace rampages, self-mutilation, child abuse, agoraphobia and of course terrorism. I am a survivor of this plague and society has chosen to label me mentally ill for the trauma it resulted in. That term is just one of a number of convenient labels that civilization has chosen to utilize to silence its discontents, and another is Unabomber.

What Ted Kaczynski did was undeniably evil, but it was also inevitable considering that it is precisely what civilization commits every single day on a massive scale with its infernal police-warfare machine. Ted's biggest mistake was foolishly believing that he could somehow liberate himself and the rest of us by matching the cruelty of our

shared tormentors and speaking to us in the language of terrorism which they invented. Our biggest mistake, if we so choose to make it, is to disregard Ted's lessons simply because the messenger lost his soul to deliver them to us. I have to believe that it's not too late to make sure that all of this death is not in vain and that includes the madman who died alone in his cell.

Unlike Ted, I don't believe that I have all the answers, I don't think anybody does, but I do believe that his initial instinct to simply drop out of this disease we call civilization was a much more revolutionary solution than simply blowing people the fuck up the way the state does. The only problem was Ted dropped out alone. The real revolution only begins when we all pull the plug together.

One man alone in the wilderness is a hermit, one Billion is a wildfire that no superstructure can contain. Just call this eulogy a spark and pass it along.

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The Ted K Archive

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