

Unabomber Suspect Discussion

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A discussion of the Unabomber suspect Theodore Kaczynski after his capture.

Charlie Rose: He had lived there for years as a recluse. His name was Theodore J. Kaczynski. He is a former professor, a graduate of Harvard and the University of Michigan. The so-called Unibomber had eluded federal authorities for 17 years while he had carried out a bombing campaign mostly against scientists and academics who worked in technology. The Unibomber had killed three and injured 23 others. What motivated him, how did he choose his victims, and could investigators have identified him sooner are just some of the questions being asked. Joining me now for a look at those questions, from Washington, JOHN DOUGLAS. He had a 25-year career with the FBI, where he pioneered psychological profiling methods that they use today to catch serial criminals; also, ELAINE SHANNON of Time magazine. She has been covering this case. Here in New York, JAMES GLEICK, who is a columnist for The New York Times Magazine and has written about technology. I begin with ELAINE SHANNON to update us on this story. Tell me what the Justice Department has, has found so far, Elaine, and what it is that they will indict him for.

Elaine Shannon: (Washington, D.C.) Well, we don't know what he will eventually be indicted for. Today they just held him on one charge, which is possession of an explosive device. They found what they say is part— a partly made pipe bomb in his little eight by ten cabin. They also found a whole bunch of chemicals which are used in explosives and little other things, and they found - this interested me a lot— three— 10 three-ring binders with a lot of sketches of explosives devices, wiring diagrams — written in English and Spanish. The chemistry written in Spanish they found out that he can speak Spanish, and it's all kind of coded. There are, there are wires paraphernalia, which you can argue I suppose are innocent household things, but put together the agents wanted to hold him. They don't want to say yet he is the Unibomber. They tell me they are moving with glacial speed because they worry about triggering an explosion or a booby trap.

Charlie Rose: Tell me about this defendant, this man who they are holding, Professor Theodore J. Kaczynski, Harvard graduate, graduate degree in mathematics from the University of Michigan and living in a one-room cabin in Montana. What do you know about him?

Elaine Shannon: Well, we know that he fits...

Charlie Rose: Well, that's my next question. You tell me what we know about him, and then I'll ask Douglas if that fits the profile.

Elaine Shannon: Yeah. We know that he grew up in the Chicago area, as they expected. He comes from, from a working class family. He went to Harvard on scholarship. Supposedly did very well in mathematics — I think got a graduate degree at Michigan. His— he was turned in— well, first he worked for a short time in the late '60s in Berkeley teaching math, then he kind of dropped out of the picture. The records

show that he bought this place where he's now living up in— on the continental divide in Montana in about 1971. He built his own cabin there. It has no plumbing. He was using his own excrement for fertilizer, reportedly. He was getting water, I suppose from the streams. He had a bicycle, no car. He was living off the land. So there's one mystery yet to be solved: How did he get packages with bombs in them to San Francisco, to the Bay area, to northern California and mail them to people who were then hurt or killed.

Charlie Rose: John, does it match the profile that you might have drawn up 10 years ago of this Unibomber?

John Douglas: (Washington, D.C.) Yes. I did the first profile back in 1978, but it's kind of like the expression "I was country when country wasn't cool." And so the FBI really didn't kind of listen to the analysis that I was doing because I was going into the penitentiaries and conducting interviews with various types of killers and arsonists and bombers. But I felt all along that this would be a white male. Back then he would have been in his— I felt, in his late 20s. There would be an affiliation with a university. Generally, the nature of the beast is, is to perpetrate your first crime in areas where you feel the most comfortable, so you have to focus your attention in the Northwestern University, Chicago University area. But a profile is— that's one thing you can do, but many times the characteristics can fit a lot of people in a community. How I thought this person could be apprehended — in fact, a lot sooner — was to be much more proactive, not— what I mean by that is rather than sit back and react or posture, I think we should be doing things— and particularly providing information to the public about his pre-offense behavior leading up to the crime, what got him started, and particularly his post-offense behavior because a person like this just doesn't fall out of space. He has a family, people that have recognized certain characteristics and traits when he was back in college in 1995, 1996. So when I left the bureau, I became very vocal, and I was describing many of these characteristics publicly, and I just wonder if maybe even the family may have heard me speak and saw some of these characteristics in, in him.

Charlie Rose: Do you have indication to know that they did or didn't?

John Douglas: I haven't, I haven't heard yet. I understand they may have seen some communiques, but I also felt this person would have had a, a room off to himself. He's an obsessive-compulsive personality, but only when it comes to making his devices, his bombs. The rest of the house, and I think they'll find this— he's a real slob in his personal hygiene, personal appearance. This area would have been off-limits — off-limits to family or if he was with a woman or any other associate. If you would have taken a look in there, if you ever took a peek, you'd see that he has the instruments, the artifacts, the devices related to the— to his bombs, plus you'll find all his earthly possessions, every newspaper clipping, every Time magazine article or whatever, he'll have these. And if he was suspicious that there was a surveillance on him — they don't destroy it; they'll just secrete it a lot deeper because this is his, his accom-

plishment. This is, this is for now, for the first time, he is a somebody. He's no longer an insignificant nobody.

Charlie Rose: Are you surprised at the way he was— that this suspect was uncovered?

John Douglas: I was hoping it would be this way because— and that's what I was saying. And, and I know sometimes some of the people in the FBI may not have liked me saying this publicly when— in the last six months, but I felt that a family member at the very least would come forward if they knew the characteristics of the type of person that we're looking for because this, over the years I've used these techniques to draw in rapists and other types of murderers. And that's what he is, too. He's nothing more than a serial, serial murderer.

Charlie Rose: Th manifesto and the publishing of the manifesto, that obviously was a mistake on his part, was it not?

John Douglas: Right. I thought for the first time now that once that was— once we published that or once we received that, we had something. At least we have— we can figure out some type of a motivation even though you're dealing with an extremely paranoid individual. But at least we had something now and someone would be able to recognize not only maybe the content because over the years his personality has changed, from the '70s now into the, the '90s. But certainly the style— people would recognize that style of writing, so hopefully when the investigators went out they were also— you know, concentrated on the content, but also look at the style of writing. That, that would be a constant over the years.

Charlie Rose: Let me turn to Jim Gleick, and— at about— you write about technology. Any consequences of, of this kind of incident in terms of technology and the implications of thinking about technology?

James Gleick: His manifesto, of course, was just a, a hodgepodge of ideas that are floating around, and we've heard them before. He certainly didn't have any influence on the way we think about these things. But, but it's also true that he reflected a sort of odd current that's in our culture just in the past few years, but also goes back for a century — a hatred of technology. Even before the manifesto, it was clear that he, he didn't like computers. He seemed to be targeting people who had something to do with computers. He didn't like universities, I guess, or some, some part of universities that he seems to have associated with the evils of the industrial age. There are a lot of people who aren't making bombs who, who share some of those sentiments. You know, we all— we've all noticed that there are ways in which computers maybe dehumanize us or seem to make our lives drier.

Charlie Rose: So you're saying that his animosity to technology is a view that's shared by a lot of people.

James Gleick: In a way, yeah. It's shared by all of us. Now, I'm somebody who, who likes technology, I guess. I mean, I'm a little embarrassed to admit it, but—

Charlie Rose: Why are you? I'm very much—

James Gleick: Oh, you're pro-technology.

Charlie Rose: Yeah. Of course.

James Gleick: Well, I, I write a column about technology, and I try to write about good things that technology does, and I certainly believe that on balance, it's, it's made our lives better. We all look around, and we see that, you know, automobiles have, have ruined some parts of human life that, that used to be much more pleasant. And technology brought us the atomic bomb, and, and gave us the power to destroy our planet. And—

Charlie Rose: Let me go to— back to Elaine and talk about this particular defendant. Why did it take them so long to find him?

Elaine Shannon: Well, he, he was, as— was, as expected to be, very careful. He was a loner. He didn't have a lot of people— as far as we know, anybody in his life for a long time. He didn't write anything. He didn't reach out. There were— there was a minimal note here and there, but very little. And he was, he was a very good bomber. He was just not— he was not a very social individual, but I think John made a very important point: He wa— he claimed that if his manifesto was published, he wouldn't bomb again, but here we know he was building another bomb. And John, you and I have talked about this a lot. This guy needs to kill people.

John Douglas: Yeah, I felt that— yeah, even though the manifesto was published that this would not satisfy him because what you're dealing with here is a delusional personality, and the older they get, the worse they get. So he'll be looking for some type of excuse in the future to go out and to kill and maim again.

Charlie Rose: What do you mean when you say the older they get, the worse they get?

John Douglas: They begin to break down, their personality begins to break down. They become much more desperate. They have to be constantly stimulated, and if we just kind of forget about them and— he has to do something, wants to become— You know, if you would interview him, he would probably say he feels like one grain of sand on a beach with billions upon billions grains of sand, and how can this insignificant nobody become a somebody? Well, he became a somebody by publishing the manifesto, you know, and months go by again, he's back to being insignificant. So he will look for some excuse to, to bomb again, and I always believe in that.

Charlie Rose: Elaine, did anybody in the media know about this surveillance before the arrest?

Elaine Shannon: Yeah. The rea— I'm told the reason they, they went with it— with the case when they did is because Jim Stewart was, was moving with the story and had it over the weekend.

Charlie Rose: From

Cbs: Yes.

Charlie Rose: —going to go with it, and therefore, they had to go ahead and arrest—

Elaine Shannon: Or they felt that security had been breached. They knew that. They got calls, and so they had to move ahead, and so there'll be some finger pointing and probably a leak investigation.

Charlie Rose: What's the most interesting thing about this guy for you?

Elaine Shannon: I still don't know that he did it because he hated technology. I, I'm with John here – or maybe John's hypnotized me – but I think that some place early in his life he got very angry, and it may have been a, a slight by a man, a slight by a woman, a slight by a teacher or a slight that had nothing to do, but then he decorated his anger with, like, a magpie gathering glittering bits of ideas here and there and created something that other people would read and say, "Oh, this guy's very intellectual," and that-

Charlie Rose: In other words, he needed a- he found a reason as to why he was serving his need to kill.

Elaine Shannon: I think so.

Charlie Rose: Do you agree with that, John?

John Douglas: Right. I mean, they never will accept full responsibility. They can justify what he did. In fact, if you were to polygraph him early on, just as a potential suspect, he probably would have passed the polygraph, the lie detector test because, because he won't react to this. He has no feelings towards the, the victims, nev- it's like interviewing a rapist. When you interview a rapist and they always project the blame. You know, our penitentiaries are full of innocent people. They've been railroaded. "That woman there, she shouldn't have been wearing that short dress. She was loo- looking for it." So this guy had a highly systematized delusional system and ha- trying to hang his hat on something. And loosely hang his hat on something. And because of his intelligence level- you know, you catch the dumb ones early on. This guy's intelligence level was such that, that he could make these bombs. And these bombs, I mean, they're- you have to-

Charlie Rose: If Kaczynski is in fact the Unibomber, then he had- he, Kaczynski, had the requisite intelligence to do this.

John Douglas: That's right. And you have to have- you have to have the expertise. And you'd better be obsessive-compulsive because this isn't like the Oklahoma City type of bomb. This one here, you- this bomb could blow up in your hands, in your face very very easily. So you know, he- if he's not the guy, this is the type of person that we're looking for, if he isn't the Unibomber.

Charlie Rose: Okay, let me make certain summaries here. One, you believe that the FBI could probably, if they'd listened to the profile that you offered and others- and had been more, in a sense, focused, they probably could have found him earlier than they did?

John Douglas: I believe, I believe that, and I know the people that worked for me believe that. It would have- if we would have been more proactive, I think we could have cut him off at the pass.

Charlie Rose: Secondly, the whole business about technology was simply a ruse because he really had some deep psychological need to, to have some power over people and to kill them. If that's true, wha- how did he choose his victims, assuming that- I mean, what, what do these victims have in common, and why would they – forget

whether it's Kaczynski or not, because he fits the profile – why would this Unibomber choose these victims?

John Douglas: I don't know. I think that was the most difficult part for the FBI because they– at times there were a common denominator that if we knew we could have prepared potential, potential victims. You know, what you try, what you try to do is we sit here thinking rationally trying to think like they think, but you're dealing really with someone irrational, someone who's not very very logical and that's what makes it so, so difficult to, you now, to figure out. And you know, only he knows why this victim or why that victim.

Charlie Rose: It's obvious to say this now, Elaine, but I assume that the FBI and the Department of Justice are hard at work trying to build a case.

Elaine Shannon: Yes. And let's don't leave out the postal inspectors who were on this case before the FBI was and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms. There, there are a lot of agencies that have worked on this task force very long and hard, and they're out there now trying to put together exactly who this man is and if they can figure out what really drove him.

Charlie Rose: Last word, Jim.

James Gleick: His hatred of technology, there's obviously no way to go rationally from that kind of intellectual belief to this kind of behavior.

Charlie Rose: Yeah.

James Gleick: But it also wasn't simply a ruse. He– this was a man, if it was Kaczynski, who was living a kind of life without telephone, without electricity, without running water– more sincerely living a hatred of technology than most of us ever can.

Charlie Rose: Yeah.

James Gleick: And yet, the ultimate irony here is that the, the one place in his life where he found room for high tech equipment and chemicals and wiring was when it, when it came time to turn technology to the service of evil.

Charlie Rose: Hm. Thank you very much. Thank you, James. Thank you, Elaine.

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