

Campus Turmoil of 60's Reveals Themes Echoed in Unabom Manifesto

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In June 1967, as the Vietnam War neared the height of its carnage, 43 of the nation's leading mathematicians took to the pages of a professional journal to implore their colleagues to forgo military research.

"We urge you to regard yourselves as responsible for the uses to which your talents are put," the advertisement in Notices of the American Mathematical Society said. "We believe this responsibility forbids putting mathematics in the service of this cruel war."

Among the authors were five math professors from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, including the thesis adviser to a brilliant young graduate student, Theodore J. Kaczynski. The protesters also included top mathematicians from the University of California at Berkeley, which had just hired Mr. Kaczynski to teach math that fall.

Years later this plea for open eyes would find a contemptuous echo in the Unabom manifesto, which says: "Science marches on blindly without regard to the real welfare of the human race or to any other standard."

Mr. Kaczynski, who long ago quit academia for the Montana wilderness, now sits in a cell in Helena, Mont., charged with one Federal count of possessing bomb-making materials. But the authorities suspect him of being the Unabomber, whose bombs over 17 years killed 3 people and wounded 23 others.

If Mr. Kaczynski is the Unabomber, what forces — and what urgings of his own inner demons — pushed his personality over the edge may never be known. Moreover, by all accounts he was cool to the antiwar unrest of the 1960's, showing little interest in the political events swirling around him.

His younger brother, David Kaczynski, said in a recent interview that love of nature rather than hatred of war probably prompted him to quit mathematics and a dazzling career. "A lot of people were dropping out at the time," David Kaczynski said.

Nonetheless, experts say a look at the campus turmoil of this era offers intriguing clues to why Mr. Kaczynski rejected society and reveals themes that are clearly elaborated in the manifesto years later.

Ultimately, it seems unlikely that the math prodigy weathered the antiwar violence — the riots and protests, bloodshed and bombings — without some inner repercussions. The fury of the day centered not only on Vietnam but also on the nuclear arms race, both of which were escalating.

Indeed, a close friend of Mr. Kaczynski's father says it was young Ted's fear that his students would become makers of atomic bombs that prompted him to quit Berkeley in 1969 after two years of teaching, forsaking his life as a strait-laced achiever for that of a near hermit.

"That's essentially the story I heard from his father," said Dr. Ralph K. Meister, a child psychologist who for decades knew the senior Mr. Kaczynski, who died in 1990. "My impression," Dr. Meister said in an interview, "is that they were accepting of his decision to live in the wilderness."

Some of Mr. Kaczynski's peers also believe that his sudden retreat was abetted by the era's scientific turmoil and self-doubt.

“I really think his views are a product of what was in the air,” said Lance W. Small, who was a colleague of Mr. Kaczynski in the Berkeley math department during the height of the antiwar tumult. “You could become infected by this feeling that society had taken a wrong turn. Terrible things were going on, and you couldn’t help but be affected.”

One measure of passions against the war and the mathematical establishment’s ties to it was the bombing on Aug. 24, 1970, of the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin at Madison; the blast killed a researcher and injured four others.

As a rising star at Ann Arbor and Berkeley, even in the monkish atmosphere of the math departments, Mr. Kaczynski was surrounded by the intense debate over Vietnam and the nuclear arms race, and whether scientists and mathematicians should be held culpable, with close colleagues arguing that the university’s ties to the war machine were subverting their ideals.

Eventually, it became a civil war. Mathematicians at Ann Arbor were enlisted to work on military projects, and perhaps half the Berkeley math department had military financing, even as peers on both campuses called for an end to war research.

“A bright graduate student gave up mathematics to become a maker of fine wood furniture,” recalled John W. Addison Jr., chairman of the math department at Berkeley when Mr. Kaczynski resigned. “There was a lot of that” in reaction to the campus turmoil.

Ann Arbor, Mich.: On a Calm Campus, A Gathering Storm

The setting could hardly have been less combative as Mr. Kaczynski arrived in 1962 at Ann Arbor for graduate studies in pure mathematics, a Harvard graduate at the age of 20. The campus was calm and the department was a citadel of cool logic.

But things began to seethe as the United States became more involved in Vietnam and military financing of campus projects picked up. A main target of protesters was the university’s Willow Run Laboratory and its Project Michigan, a large, Army-financed effort to perfect new surveillance gear for waging war in Southeast Asia.

Faculty members and graduate students were recruited for these efforts, including some from the math department. It seems unlikely that Mr. Kaczynski participated, though, since he focused on pure math.

When the United States began a continuous bombing of North Vietnam and a massive buildup of American troops in 1965, student unrest and faculty activism soared. Mr. Kaczynski’s thesis adviser, Allen L. Shield, took public stands nationally against mathematicians aiding the Vietnam War in any way.

By all accounts, Mr. Kaczynski was shy and emotionally isolated from the growing unrest, as well as the day's social trends.

In June 1967, Mr. Kaczynski won a departmental prize for that year's best Ph.D. dissertation, which was on boundary functions, an arcane branch of pure mathematics. He also won a teaching job at Berkeley, a mecca of mathematics and higher education.

Berkeley, Calif.: A Math Department Divided by a War

At the age of 25, Mr. Kaczynski arrived in California at a particularly troubled time in its history. The state, which had recently elected Ronald Reagan to his first term as Governor, was increasingly divided by an unpopular war and had become a magnet for itinerant youth looking for good times and hallucinogenic drugs.

Having won a tenure-track post in one of the world's top math departments, Mr. Kaczynski in 1967 settled down to teaching, his courses including set theory and advanced calculus for chemistry and physics majors, an appropriate class for aspiring nuclear-bomb makers. He still wore a coat and tie, even amid a growing blur of jeans and T-shirts.

The math department in those years was increasingly polarized by the war, with some faculty members calling for the banning of military money for math research. But that, said Murray H. Protter, who helped disburse outside money to the math faculty, "was like asking Niagara Falls to stop running."

The mathematicians debated whether military money and influence were "subverting their ideals," recalled Donald E. Saranson, a Berkeley math professor who went to graduate school with Mr. Kaczynski. Radicals at protest rallies, Dr. Saranson added, kept "trying to point out the corruption."

Dr. Small, who also taught math at Berkeley, said the department of 92 members "was very politically aware and politically active," adding that "the mathematicians were, if anything, more politically active than many departments."

By August 1968, the list of national mathematicians opposing war research that ran in consecutive issues of Notices of the American Mathematical Society had surged to 344 names, up from 43 only 14 months earlier. The list included even more professors from Berkeley, especially among the junior faculty. But it did not include Mr. Kaczynski.

He was quiet and aloof during this ferment, as at Ann Arbor. While the department divided over the war, he masked himself emotionally, apparently having no close friends, no loyalties, no commitments.

Beginning in 1967, the battles over Vietnam were joined by a nuclear dispute that in some ways hit Mr. Kaczynski closer to home.

At issue was a plan of the Johnson Administration, and later the Nixon Administration, to build a missile system to shield the nation from enemy missiles. Its foes regarded it as a costly, futile and pernicious spur to the arms race, arguing that the system would fuel endless measures and countermeasures as East and West sought the upper hand.

Richard L. Garwin and Hans A. Bethe, two nationally recognized arms experts, the latter a Nobel laureate, derided the system in the March 1968 issue of *Scientific American*, a magazine Mr. Kaczynski often read.

The Johnson system, known as Sentinel, was to have rocket interceptors topped by thermonuclear warheads, which in 1968 began to be designed near Berkeley at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, a sprawling center for nuclear arms research.

Livermore, like its counterpart, the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, was and is run for the Federal Government by the University of California.

As the anti-missile work intensified, the relationship between Livermore and the university was increasingly denounced by Berkeley radicals and faculty members. Mr. Kaczynski's views on the issue are unknown. But his parents were strongly opposed to nuclear weapons. Early in the 1968 Presidential race, they campaigned for Senator Eugene J. McCarthy, the Minnesota Democrat who wanted to stop the war and the anti-missile work.

Mr. Kaczynski's father "told me many times that he found it tragic that so many of the nation's best minds, the scientists and thinkers, were being drawn into the nuclear-arms business," recalled Paul Carlsten, a close friend. "He thought it a tragic misuse of resources."

In late 1968, the Army started work on interceptor bases near such cities as Boston and Chicago. Citizens took to the streets in protest as critics argued that the weapon system could obliterate the cities it was meant to protect. Mr. Kaczynski's parents lived in the Chicago suburbs.

In November 1968, Richard M. Nixon was elected President.

On Dec. 19, the quiet of the Nevada desert was shattered by one of the biggest underground nuclear blasts ever conducted there, equal to 1.15 million tons of high explosive. The blast, felt in parts of California, was part of the Livermore work to perfect the anti-missile warheads.

For whatever reasons, Mr. Kaczynski had had enough. On Jan. 20, 1969, the mathematician wrote his terse, two-sentence letter of resignation, with his departure set for five months hence. On the same day, Mr. Nixon was sworn in as President.

Mr. Kaczynski's father "considered Richard Nixon to be the greatest disaster this nation had ever known," Mr. Carlsten recalled, adding that he was sure that young Ted's letter of resignation on Inauguration Day was "no coincidence."

In Mr. Kaczynski's final months at Berkeley, as protests over weapons research and the war reached a climax, the campus was rocked by the crack of police rifles, the roar of helicopters, the hiss of tear-gas canisters and sobs of students over a shooting death.

The campus in early 1969 was basically a war zone, with the National Guard finally called in to regain control. Lincoln, Mont.

An Angry Manifesto That Echoes the 1960's

After leaving Berkeley and traveling around the country, Mr. Kaczynski settled down in a 10-by-12-foot cabin in the Rocky Mountains near Lincoln, Mont., in 1971, and became a virtual hermit. The bombs suspected of being his handiwork started to explode nine years after he gave up math.

Bombs No. 7 and No. 8 hit Berkeley in 1982 and 1985. Both produced serious injuries. These blasts are the only ones in which the Unabomber zeroed in on the same spot twice.

The target was Cory Hall, the site of the university's departments of electrical engineering and computer science. The building is within sight of Campbell Hall, where the math department had its headquarters during Mr. Kaczynski's tenure.

The Unabomber's 35,000-word manifesto, which the Federal authorities suggest was written by Mr. Kaczynski in his tiny cabin, is notable for its detailed attacks not only on scientists and mathematicians but also on the political left, bristling with the anger that comes from great disappointment.

The blind march of science and technology, it says, "is a more powerful force than the aspiration for freedom," and will crush humanity unless stopped.

Echoing the 1960's radicals, the manifesto calls for an uprising, a violent one if necessary. "Reform is insufficient," it says. "Revolution is required."

The Ted K Archive

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The New York Times, June 1, 1996, Section 1, Page 8. <www.nytimes.com/1996/06/01/us/campus-turmoil-of-60-s-reveals-themes-echoed-in-unabom-manifesto.html>

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