

# Esoteric Wedge of Academia Is Roiled by Hunt for Bomber

William J. Broad

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Last October an agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation showed up in New Orleans at the annual meeting of The History of Science Society, the main professional gathering for academics studying the origins of science and how it has transformed the world.

The agenda featured esoteric items like a discussion of 19<sup>th</sup>-century social attitudes toward the germ theory and a detailed analysis of the inks that Galileo used in one of his manuscripts.

Carrying court papers, the agent subpoenaed the society's membership records and questioned scholars for clues to the identity of the serial killer, often called the Unabomber, who in 17 years has killed three people and injured 23 others with homemade bombs.

That subpoena, and the disclosure that the F.B.I. believes that the bomber is immersed in the most radical interpretations of the history of science, has roiled the usually placid waters of the discipline. And across the country, professors have begun reconsidering old suspicions, acquaintances and tracts to help solve the crimes.

"They've thrown a bomb into the community," said Stanley Goldberg, a science historian in Washington. "My impression is that we're all scurrying around in our minds, thinking of people who might be suspects."

The bureau had detected the bomber's interest in the history of science, as well as other disciplines including behavioral psychology, by poring over letters he had sent to newspapers and to intended victims as long ago as a decade. The 35,000-word manifesto that he sent to The New York Times and two other publications in late June not only corroborated that interest but also gave the bureau insight into the issues that concerned the bomber, the depth of his reading and the authors he respected.

More than a few historians of science, who blanched at the possible link between their usually staid area of study and the object of the most intense manhunt in F.B.I. history, have taken pains to distance the discipline from a maniacal murderer who seems to be familiar with their debates and lines of thinking.

But Landon Winner, a political scientist and technology expert at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., said he was disappointed the F.B.I. had not consulted with him on the bomber. "I feel left out," Dr. Winner said. "It's like being left off the guest list for a really good party."

Scholars of the history of science investigate the origins of science from the Babylonians and Greeks onward. They study figures like Ptolemy, Copernicus, Newton, Galileo, Mendel and the Curies, and examine questions like how calculus was developed, and how telescopes, atom smashers and computers were invented and helped change the world.

In some history departments with no emphasis on the subject, professors sometimes believe that their pursuits are not considered as serious as political or philosophical history. "It was always regarded as a quixotic thing they let me play with," said Professor Harold Bauman, who has taught a variety of history courses for 30 years at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City.

Mr. Bauman has been interviewed three times by the F.B.I. since the bomber left a booby trap bomb on the Utah campus in October 1981; the device was defused before anyone was hurt. He said he was scheduled to be interviewed again by the F.B.I. yesterday and to be shown a copy of the manifesto to review.

Several other professors in the field have also been given copies of the tract, which condemns technological society and the scientific progress that scholars in this arcane field usually champion.

"They've got to be desperate," said David C. Lindberg, a physicist at the University of Wisconsin who specializes in medieval optics and religion and who is president of The History of Science Society. "These are extremely tenuous inferences they're making. But if it's the only thing they've got, then it seems to make sense."

Some academics, while endorsing the bureau's all-out search, take umbrage at the mention of their field and the bomber in the same breath.

"It's like saying an appreciation of Beethoven has something to do with the Nazis," said David A. Hollinger, a professor of history at the University of California at Berkeley.

Dr. Hollinger maintained that the ideas he read in newspaper excerpts of the bomber's manifesto were less out of the realm of the history of science than "generally from a more amorphous critical discourse that moves out of environmental groups and religious groups and some literary discourses."

"I would be looking more toward alternative education courses of the 70's," he said.

While conservative and scholarly for the most part, and sometimes downright stuffy, the field of history of science also has undercurrents and factions that have sometimes mounted intellectual attacks on the science establishment, blaming the military, industrial and academic worlds for social ills like unemployment and pollution.

That radical milieu seems to have been the breeding ground for the bomber, whose treatise says that science and the industrial revolution have undermined human values and calls for returning to a pre-industrial world better in tune with nature.

This week Director Louis J. Freeh of the F.B.I. announced that agents were talking to college professors around the country about the manifesto. The bureau, Mr. Freed said in a statement, "is taking this investigative step in an effort to determine whether that community might recognize the writer's work or be able to shed light on important or telltale aspects of the manuscript's general topic, the history of science."

In its hunt for the bomber's origins, the F.B.I. is focusing on Northwestern University and the Chicago campus of the University of Illinois, where the bureau believes that the killer might have lived in the late 1970's.

In the course of its inquiry, the agency has sown dissension among university officials quick to disclaim any kind of culpability.

"This is a working-class campus," Jan Rocek, dean of the graduate school of the University of Illinois at Chicago, said in an interview. "These characters tend to come out of more affluent families."

Charles Loebbaka, a spokesman for Northwestern, said, "University officials are cooperating with the F.B.I. and have been for sometime." But Mr. Loebbaka refused further comment, saying details would have to come from the F.B.I.

Over the decades, historians and writers like Lewis Mumford, Jacques Ellul, Theodore Roszak and Herbert Muller have worried that science systematically ignores human values. And even strongly pro-science historians admit that science tends to sow cultural discord because it is such a powerful agent of social change.

In the 1970's, the intellectual critique of the science establishment turned acid and sometimes violent as it joined with and was amplified by protests against the Vietnam War. Groups like Science for the People, a leftist organization, used confrontational tactics to disrupt meetings of scientists and to push for wider debate on the social devastation wrought by science and its ugly offspring, like napalm and nuclear weapons.

Science for the People was well-organized in the Chicago area, sponsoring meetings at the various universities and helping finance anti-war pamphlets. Its membership included all kinds of scientists, not just historians and philosophers.

After the August 1970 bombing of the Army Math Research Center at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, in which a researcher was killed, the Chicago collective of Science for the People helped finance a 119-page "indictment" of the math project, which was denounced as a "deadly power center" working against "the peoples of the world fighting for liberation."

The F.B.I., which often infiltrated such anti-war groups in the 1970's, has not indicated whether it is looking at the membership of the Chicago collective for clues. But some historians say that it should as a possible aid to tracking down the killer.

"This is a bright guy, but he doesn't know as much history of science as the F.B.I. thinks he does," said Dr. Goldberg, the science historian in Washington, who has read published excerpts of the bomber's manifesto. "He's on the fringes. It's more of a counterculture thing."

Keith R. Benson, the executive secretary of The History of Science Society, which is based in Seattle at the University of Washington, agreed. Mr. Benson said that, based on his talks with F.B.I. agents and his examination of the evidence, the killer was a knowledgeable outcast rather than a mainstream scholar.

"My suspicion is that this guy lurked around the halls of academia rather than being a graduate student," Mr. Benson said. "He's unbelievably sophisticated. He's covered his tracks."

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Photo: Keith R. Benson, of The History of Science Society, said he believed that the serial bomber was a knowledgeable outcast rather than a mainstream scholar. (Loren Callahan/Seattle Post-Intelligencer) (pg. 7)

Map/Diagram: "WHERE IT HAPPENED: Tracking the Serial Bomber" In its effort to track down the terrorist whose bombs have killed three and injured 23 others in the

past 17 years, the F.B.I. now believes that the bomber is a student of science history who may have taken classes or spent time at some university campuses from the late 1970's to the mid-1980's. Of the 16 bombing incidents, nine were at Universities or the homes of professors. (pg. 7)

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