

Did Kaczynski Pattern His Life After Thoreau?

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Ted Kaczynski's reclusive life in Lincoln, Mont., is a disturbing and distorted echo of the life of Henry David Thoreau, the 19th century writer credited with launching the environmental movement.

Outwardly at least, Kaczynski's cabin is a close approximation to the famous one Thoreau built at Walden Pond in the 1840s. Its general appearance is the same: nestled among trees, it is a simple, one-room board structure with a loft and a cellar. The dimensions are similar. Kaczynski's cabin is 10 feet by 12 feet. Thoreau's cabin, according to his description in the masterpiece he wrote there, *Walden*, was "ten feet wide by fifteen long." This description was confirmed by excavations made by R.W. Robbins in 1945.

Kaczynski built his own shelter and tried to live on the produce of his garden. Those also were among Thoreau's goals during the two years and two months he spent at Walden Pond.

As Thoreau wrote in *Walden*, "There is some of the fitness in a man's building his own house that there is in a bird's building its own nest. Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed, as birds universally sing when they are so engaged?"

Links go deeper than surface similarity, extending to ideas about protecting nature, living isolated in the woods, and self-sufficiency. They both frequently use a method of comparison in which what seems good is turned ironically on its head. And strikingly, both express a deep distrust of modern industrial improvements.

Thoreau sought to instruct society to turn away from an impersonal industrial system, reaching out in his gentle masterpiece, *Walden*. He spoke out in lectures at the public lyceums and in essays published by intellectual journals. And toward the end of his life, he stridently defended the violence of John Brown in the cause of freeing the slaves.

The Unabomber also sought to instruct society to rebel against the same industrial society.

If Kaczynski really did write the Unabomber Manifesto — and the possibility that he is the Unabomber is the only reason the Montana recluse is in the national news — then the connections become even more pronounced. Spooky links multiply when Thoreau's lyrical masterpiece, *Walden*, and some of his other works are compared with the rambling, angry manifesto.

From the Unabomber Manifesto: "Everyone has goals; if nothing else, to obtain the physical necessities of life: food, water and whatever clothing and shelter are made necessary by the climate. But the leisured aristocrat obtains these things without effort."

From *Walden*: "The grand necessity, then, for our bodies, is to keep warm, to keep the vital heat in us. What pains we accordingly take, not only with our Food, and Clothing, and Shelter, but with our beds, which are our night-clothes, robbing the nests and breasts of birds ... The poor man is wont to complain that this is a cold

world ... The luxuriously rich are not simply kept comfortably warm, but unnaturally hot ... ”

From the Unabomber Manifesto: “Most workers are someone else’s employee ... must spend their days doing what they are told in the way they are told to do it. Even most people who are in business for themselves have only limited autonomy.”

From Walden: “Most men ... are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them... Actually, the laboring man has not the leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relation to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be any thing but a machine ...

“The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.”

From the Unabomber Manifesto: “Legally there is nothing to prevent us from going to live in the wild like primitive people or from going into business for ourselves. But in practice there is very little wild country left, and there is room in the economy for only a limited number of small business owners.”

From Walden: “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”

From the Unabomber Manifesto: “If you think that big government interferes in your life too much NOW, just wait till the government starts regulating the genetic constitution of your children.”

From Thoreau’s essay “Civil Disobedience:” “I heartily accept the motto, — ‘That government is best which governs least;’ and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe, — ‘That government is best which governs not at all’ ... ”

From the Unabomber Manifesto: “When motorized vehicles were introduced they appeared to increase man’s freedom ... But the introduction of motorized transport soon changed society in such a way as to restrict greatly man’s freedom of locomotion.”

From Walden: “We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us ...

“Why should we live with hurry and waste of life?”

From the Unabomber Manifesto: “The positive ideal that we propose is Nature. That is, WILD nature; those aspects of the functioning of the Earth and its living things that are independent of human management and free of human interference and control. And with wild nature we include human nature ...”

From Thoreau’s essay “Walking:” “I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil — to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society.”

And again, from Walking: “in Wildness is the preservation of the world.”

The Ted K Archive

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