

Ted Kaczynski: Evil or Insane?

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Abstract

Explores the life of the infamous Unabomber, and demonstrates why his manifesto on society and his extraordinary intelligence makes him the most unique and brilliant serial killer in United States history.

Keywords

Unabomber, Serial Killers, Manifesto, Bombs

Disciplines

Criminology | Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance | Sociology

Comments

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Ted Kaczynski: Evil or Insane?

An individual may choose to take another human being's life for a multitude of reasons. Domestic problems, financial issues, a desire for revenge and pent up anger are among the motivations behind homicide. One may take someone's life during a period of severe distress and irrational thinking. A serial killer is unique in the fact that the murderer will commit multiple killings over a course of a longer period of time. A serial killer has the ability to pause and contemplate their decisions, yet still goes through with their actions. The majority of serial killers are labeled as insane and mentally ill by society due to the fear that these killers inflict on people. Ted Kaczynski, famously known as the Unabomber, was one of the most infamous serial killers the United States has ever seen. Ted Kaczynski's unusually high IQ, his manifesto on technology, and his isolation from society demonstrates that there is a correlation between his education and acts of violence, yet, in reality, it is unknown why he killed innocent people.

Ted Kaczynski was born on May 22nd, 1942 in Evergreen Park, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. At just nine months old, Kaczynski suffered from extreme hives and spent months in a hospital alone. Upon his return, he was described as never being the same content and happy child again. His parents nurtured his academic success from a young age as his IQ was measured at an astonishing 167. Years later in his manifesto, Kaczynski indirectly talked about his childhood and explained how he detested his mother and father for his strict juvenile years. With an Intelligence Quotient higher than Albert Einstein, he was clearly a gifted young man and was sent to Harvard University on a scholarship at the age of 16 (Biography.com). It is at Harvard where Kaczynski was able to study independently and form his own understanding of society.

Ted Kaczynski enrolled at Harvard University a fairly shy, yet stable man who had a strong desire to learn. Kaczynski lived in a single dorm and enjoyed his social

isolation from the rest of his classmates. Upon his arrival, a Harvard nurse gave Ted his freshman year checkup and was quoted saying, “Good impression created. Attractive, mature for age, relaxed...Talks easily, fluently and pleasantly. likes people and gets on well with them. May have many acquaintances but makes his friends carefully. Prefers to be by himself part of the time at least. May be slightly shy. Essentially stable, well integrated and feels secure within himself. Usually very adaptable. May have many achievements and satisfactions” (Chase). This description is one that many parents would be proud to read about their child as they start their college years. How exactly did a seemingly innocent and pleasant 16-year-old boy become a mass murderer and the most wanted man in America decades later? The answer is largely unknown, yet his ignorance and his hypocrisy bear most of the blame. If one man could be credited with the development of the Unabomber, it would be Henry Murray, a psychology professor at the school. Under Murray’s guidance, Kaczynski went through experiments to see “how people reacted to stress” (Chase). In one experiment Kaczynski was told to write down his morals and those beliefs would later be debated against a law student. This interrogation system proved to trouble Kaczynski and is thought to be the beginning of his deep hatred towards college professors. In addition to this cruel test, Kaczynski was told to read incredibly dark books such as *God is Dead*, *Mortality is The Herd Instinct of the Individual*, and *The Thought of Suicide is a Great Source of Comfort*. The Unabomber, a man with vehement disgust towards technology and the alienation from man to nature, was born due to the confluence of two sources that turned Ted Kaczynski into a serial killer. One source was his personal anger directed towards his family and the people he grew up with. The second source is derived from his philosophical critique of the world humans live in and his thought that people should rebel against society. The combination of these two sources as well as the Murray experiment fueled the growth of an anxious and troubled man into adolescence. Kaczynski had forever held these two beliefs, and it was at Harvard where these two belief systems intertwined. Kaczynski enrolled at Harvard with a strong bitterness towards his family, yet by no means does this make Kaczynski an insane individual. Many teenagers leave for college with strong resentment toward their families, and many people admit to having difficult childhoods, similar to the discontent that Kaczynski felt. Kaczynski’s Harvard experience legitimized his prior beliefs and further catalyzed his development as a serial killer. A magazine article titled *Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber* said, “By the time he graduated, all the elements that would ultimately transform him into the Unabomber were in place—the ideas out of which he would construct a philosophy, the unhappiness, the feelings of complete isolation. Soon after, so, too, would be his commitment to killing. Embracing the value-neutral message of Harvard’s positivism—morality was non-rational—made him feel free to murder. Within four years of graduating from Harvard he would be firmly fixed in his life’s plan” (Chase). There are many exceptionally bright people who have endured humiliating experiences at Harvard and have not gone down the path that Kaczynski did, yet Kaczynski’s immaturity and mental instability were further

advanced at Harvard. During Kaczynski's trial many years later, psychology expert Karen Bronk Froming performed multiple tests on the Unabomber in an attempt to understand his insanity. Froming cited Kaczynski's "unawareness of his disease" as an indication of illness. A different psychologist, Dr. Amador, said that Kaczynski suffered "from severe deficits in awareness of illness" (Chase). A man with an exceptionally high IQ and multiple years of higher education knows more about himself than a psychiatrist can prove. The Unabomber was perfectly aware of his actions later on in life and committed these heinous crimes in order to bring awareness to the problems in society, mainly the dominance of technology. Kaczynski's beliefs did not originate at Harvard, and the university should not be blamed for contributing to Kaczynski's skewed view of the world. Kaczynski's main aspirations were not to kill people, but rather he wanted members of society to read his manifesto on why technology was ruining the human way of life. The psychiatrists Froming and Amador were incorrect with their statements as Kaczynski was perfectly conscious of his actions and merely killed people in order to bring attention to his manifesto.

After his graduation from Harvard, Kaczynski began a graduate program at the University of Michigan. Immediately after Kaczynski became an assistant professor of Mathematics at the University of California Berkeley in 1967. Four years later he moved to a remote town in Montana where he spent the next twenty-four years of his life in a 10 by 12-foot cabin with no heat, electricity, or running water. On May 25th, 1978 Kaczynski successfully started his reign of terror as a bomb, which was mailed to a professor at Northwestern University, exploded in the hands of a security guard (Winton). For the next eighteen years Kaczynski would slowly become the most wanted and feared man in America. Unlike other serial killers, Kaczynski never communicated with authorities and it was not until the fifth bombing that the F.B.I had any information to act on. On all of the bombs discovered the letters "F.C." was written on them, which stood for Freedom Club. Kaczynski would refer to himself by these initials, and once the F.B.I noticed this trend the authorities knew that the bombings were coming from one man (Winton). Until his arrest in 1996, Kaczynski lived entirely alone and had very little human interaction. This isolation allowed Kaczynski to do whatever he pleased.

Similar to that of a student working in the library at 3 a.m., Kaczynski was filled with irrational thoughts. No one was there to stop the wandering mind of Kaczynski as he was completely emerged in his own world. Kaczynski was able to ponder everything that he learned throughout his life, and his isolation allowed him to cement his ideas into his mind. Ted Kaczynski is famously mentioned in the movie *Good Will Hunting*, which tells the story about an intellectually gifted young man who has to choose between using his intelligence to his advantage or wasting it by conforming to lower class standards. In the movie, Professor Gerald Lambeau strives to capitalize on Will's intelligence by giving him a job where he can work on math equations and contribute something to the world. Will's therapist, Sean Maguire, is hesitant to force Will to pursue a career in mathematics and wants Will to be able to make his own

decisions. While having a drink, Gerald Lambeau states that he cannot let the boy's intelligence go to waste. He imagines what would have been lost if people let Albert Einstein sit around all day and get drunk with his buddies. Sean Maguire uses the counter example of Ted Kaczynski to prove that Gerald is wrong. Sean says in this scene, "Direction is one thing, manipulation is another" (Van Sant). Even though there is no single reason, event, or flaw that is responsible for creating the Unabomber, his experiences at Harvard certainly made Kaczynski more unstable. Harvard is not to be blamed for the creation of the Unabomber, and it is believed that Kaczynski would have committed these crimes regardless of the school he attended. Harvard challenged Kaczynski intellectually, just like many other schools would have, and by doing so Kaczynski became more insecure and unreasonable. An individual can use extraordinary intelligence for the good or bad of society. Many incredibly gifted people have contributed amazing ideas to this world that have helped progress society into what it is today. Unfortunately, Kaczynski abused his gift and hurt not only those close to him, but many other innocent Americans as well. In a world of good vs. evil, Kaczynski certainly fit the description of an evil man.

When authorities searched Ted Kaczynski's cabin they found a wealth of bomb components, 40,000 handwritten journal pages that included bomb-making experiments and descriptions of Unabomber crimes, and one live bomb, ready for mailing (FBI.gov, Unabomber). Included within the abundance of journal entries was Kaczynski's 35,000-word manifesto titled *Industrial Society and Its Future*. This incredibly deep critique of society was sent to both the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* in early 1995. Kaczynski demanded that his manifesto be published, and if it were not, then he would continue his reign of terror. The Federal Bureau of Investigation agreed to let these newspapers print his manifesto for the world to read, and Americans were amazed at what Kaczynski had to say. What he wrote in his manifesto opened the eyes of Americans to the path that society was headed towards as a result of the dominance of technology. People hated what Kaczynski wrote about because of the violence of his actions as most Americans did not take him seriously. Americans knew that he was correct, but did not want to admit that and because of this many declared him insane. Alston Chase, a writer for *The Atlantic* and a fellow graduate from Harvard, wrote about Kaczynski's manifesto that, "it is true that many believed Kaczynski was insane because they needed to believe it. But the truly disturbing aspect of Kaczynski and his ideas are not that they are so foreign but that they are so familiar. The manifesto is the work of neither a genius nor a maniac. Except for its call to violence, the ideas it expresses are perfectly ordinary and unoriginal, shared by many Americans. Its pessimism over the direction of civilization and its rejection of the modern world are shared especially with the countries most highly educated (Chase). People who read Kaczynski's manifesto knew he was right, but did not want to admit that society was doomed for disaster. Ted Kaczynski did not believe that he was mentally ill and neither did other people, yet society needed to deem Kaczynski as insane in order to prove his manifesto incorrect. Kaczynski's manifesto is articulate, rhetorical, and most impor-

tantly, terrifying. He writes about a term he coined called “surrogate activities,” which is an activity that is directed toward an artificial goal that people set up for themselves merely in order to have some goal to work toward or merely for the purpose of the “fulfillment” that individuals get from pursuing the goal. Kaczynski believed that people worked towards the goal of achieving surrogate activities in order to hide feelings of boredom, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, frustration, sleeping disorder, and much more. To Kaczynski, all of these characteristics are common for the modern-day man, yet has rarely been seen in the primitive man. His main reasoning behind people feeling this way is because of the negative influence of technology. Kaczynski was a believer in the fact that single advances benefit society, but many advances at once change society in a negative way. Kaczynski states that a technological society has to weaken family ties and local communities if it is to function efficiently. This statement is contradictory because Kaczynski lived without any modern technological advances completely isolated from the outside world, but believed that by using technology people were weakening family ties. Essentially, Kaczynski was weakening his family ties by not using technology. In modern society, an individual’s loyalty must be first to the system and only secondarily to a small-scale community (Kaczynski 6). What Kaczynski wrote about in 1995 directly applies to modern day society. Recently an article was published by the *Chicago Tribune* titled *The iPhone X proves that the Unabomber was right*. This article, written over twenty years after Kaczynski’s manifesto, praises the Unabomber for his understanding of technology. The article quotes Kaczynski as he said, “Once a technical innovation has been introduced, people usually become dependent on it, so that they can never again do without it, unless it is replaced by some still more advanced innovation. Not only do people become dependent as individuals on a new item of technology, but, even more, the system as a whole becomes dependent on it” (Chapman). An example of this today is the iPhone and the basis for why this article was written. When the first iPhone was released in 2007 people across the globe became addicted to the device. People of all ages today cannot live without their cell phones and the moment a new iPhone is released society immediately needs to buy it. The iPhone 7 is a device that has all the purposes a human could ever ask for, yet once the iPhone X was announced people jumped to get the newest form of technology. Kaczynski is a man with such intelligence that he was able to predict the future of society. Professors who have been teaching for a long time can recall a period when students used to talk to one another before class. The professor would have to quiet down the classroom in order to have begun teaching. In present day, students are glued to their phones while blocking out what is around them. An entire classroom of students, many of whom are friends, can sit next to one another and not communicate with anyone for an unbelievable amount of time. Professors nowadays have to initiate conversation in a classroom rather than vice versa. Kaczynski was deemed insane largely because of his social isolation. If we are all glued to our phones, distracting ourselves from what is around us, then are we not all isolating ourselves to a similar degree to that of the Unabomber? Yes, there is a large difference between living alone in the woods and

going on your phone, yet in both circumstances the individual is isolating themselves from what is around them. Whether or not one believes that Kaczynski was sane or insane, all people must be able to acknowledge that his manifesto is accurate to some degree. Kaczynski uses a powerful metaphor in his manifesto to describe humanity's attachment to technology. Kaczynski says, "Imagine an alcoholic sitting with a barrel of wine in front of him. Suppose he starts saying to himself, 'Wine isn't bad for you if used in moderation. Why, they say small amounts of wine are even good for you! It won't do me any harm if I take just one little drink...' Well you know what is going to happen. Never forget that the human race with technology is just like an alcoholic with a barrel of wine" (Kaczynski 26). In the metaphor, the wine is symbolic for technology. It is impossible for humanity to have a little bit of technology, similar to how it is difficult for an alcoholic to have just a little bit of wine. An alcoholic is going to drink all of the wine, and society is going to embrace every bit of technology that it can get its hand on. He believed that one day the system was going to collapse on its own, and once this happens, that the weight of human suffering it will create will be unbearable. Kaczynski stated that the longer technology persisted, the more devastating will be the ultimate collapse (Chase). Kaczynski believed that he was doing society a favor by potentially starting a revolution against technology. The world that we currently live in has yet to collapse, but an increase reliance on technology has been seen. While I was writing this research paper my computer began to malfunction, and I immediately become overwhelmed with stress and anxiety. As I sat in the library, panicking over whether or not I would be able to finish my paper, I realized that I was a product of the overuse of technology. The primitive man never suffered from technological problems and as a result suffered from less stress and frustration and was better satisfied with his way of life than modern man is. Before captured by authorities, Kaczynski had successfully taken the lives of three people and injured 24 more. Kaczynski was an evil man with deep hatred towards university professors, largely because of his inability to communicate effectively with others. Once someone takes a deeper look into his life, specifically Kaczynski's manifesto, one can understand the Unabomber's extraordinary intelligence. Essentially, Kaczynski predicted the future of mankind, and only time will tell whether or not a revolution takes place that will wipe out society. Do not judge a book by its cover for from the outside Kaczynski is insane, but on the inside, he is simply brilliant beyond what his own mind could control. No one, not even Kaczynski himself, understands why he killed those people, yet we can all understand and relate to what is preached in his manifesto.

Ted Kaczynski was eventually arrested and taken away from his cabin on April 3rd, 1996. His reign of terror was over, and Kaczynski was sent to Sacramento, California, for trial. His brother, David, wanted to portray Kaczynski not as a manipulator, but rather as a mentally ill man. An article written about the Unabomber case wrote, "Theodore Kaczynski had been fighting an increasingly futile battle to, in effect, insist on his sanity. But, particularly after a court-appointed psychiatrist diagnosed him as a paranoid schizophrenic last weekend, Mr. Kaczynski's struggle seemed more and more

to highlight the legal system's difficulties in dealing with the mentally ill" (Glaberson). Ted Kaczynski did not believe he was ill. The thought of debating his sanity drove him crazy. Kaczynski sought control over his own trial, but once this request was denied, he accepted a plea that meant he would not be sentenced to death.

Kaczynski is believed to be the most intellectual serial killer the U.S. has ever produced. A man with unbelievable intelligence will spend the rest of his life in an isolated cell in a "Supermax" prison in Colorado. The verdict offers little satisfaction, as it is not entirely known the extent of Kaczynski's proclaimed mental illness. Regardless of whether one views Kaczynski as insane or sane, it can be well understood that his ignorance, his social isolation, and deep hatred towards certain individuals contributed to his evil nature. Additionally, Kaczynski's manifesto warns society of the dominance that technology plays in our lives. Even though society may hate to admit it, Kaczynski was indeed correct and mankind is heading down a dangerous path with regard to the increased reliability shown to technology. Ted Kaczynski lives in solitary confinement while modern technology marches on. Only time will tell if the infamous Unabomber was able to predict mankind's outcome. Society should pray that Ted Kaczynski was wrong.

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