

The Unabomber Was a CIA Guinea Pig

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

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- › Kaczynski was just 16 years old and already a student at Harvard University when he became part of the CIA's top-secret MK-Ultra project
- › Describing the CIA experiment, Kaczynski's brother explained, "Every week for three years, someone met with him to verbally abuse him and humiliate him"
- › Prior to his arrest, Kaczynski succeeded in getting The Washington Post and The New York Times to publish his 35,000-word manifesto, "Industrial Society and Its Future"
- › Kaczynski's manifesto, with its core premise of technology threatening to destroy the world and make humans its slaves, has struck a chord with a new generation of youth who have found themselves increasingly dependent on Big Tech and, now, AI

Ted Kaczynski, better known as the Unabomber, earned notoriety for committing 16 bombings between 1978 and 1995. But before he turned violent, Kaczynski was used as a pawn by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), which subjected him to cruel, mind-altering experiments.¹

Kaczynski, then, could be described as a construct of the CIA, a product of its teachings. Three people lost their lives as a result of Kaczynski's bombings, and 23 were injured, many seriously. He died in his North Carolina prison cell in June 2023, where he is said to have committed suicide.²

For some, his death puts to rest an era of terror that sowed fear into Americans. But many questions remain. Kaczynski's homemade bombs were mailed to those he believed to be destroying society with technological advances,³ and the damage done to Kaczynski's psyche by the CIA may never be fully known.

Unabomber Was Part of CIA's MK-Ultra Program

Kaczynski was just 16 years old and already a student at Harvard University when he became part of the CIA's top-secret MK-Ultra project. MK-Ultra involved mind control experiments, human torture and other medical studies, including how much LSD it would take to "shatter the mind and blast away consciousness."⁴ According to Kaczynski's brother, David Kaczynski:⁵

"The Harvard study my brother participated in was called "Multiform Assessments of Personality Development Among Gifted College Men." It was overseen by the noted psychologist Henry Murray, who during WWII worked for the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] (which later became the CIA), where he developed methodologies for interrogating prisoners of war.

In his professional life, Murray was known for his brilliance and his grandiosity. In his personal life, according to his biographer, he displayed sadistic tendencies. His research on college men bears a certain resemblance to his research on prisoners of war. He was quite a big wheel in his day, perhaps as well known and influential in military and government circles as he was in academia."

According to Jonathan Moreno, Ph.D., an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine and a professor of medical ethics and health policy at the University of Pennsylvania,⁶ "The experiment Ted Kaczynski participated in at Harvard involved psychological torment and humiliation."⁷

Moreno disclosed in a Psychology Today article that Murray, who conducted the three-year humiliation experiment, was a "close friend and colleague" of his father's, although

the Morenos weren't aware of the trial. According to Moreno:⁸

"The Harvard study aimed at psychic deconstruction by humiliating undergraduates and thereby causing them to experience severe stress. Kaczynski's anti-technological fixation and his critique itself had some roots in the Harvard curriculum, which emphasized the supposed objectivity of science compared with the subjectivity of ethics."

Weekly Verbal Abuse and Humiliation

Describing the CIA experiment, Kaczynski's brother explained, "Every week for three years, someone met with him to verbally abuse him and humiliate him. He never told us about the experiments, but we noticed how he changed. He became harder, more defensive in his interactions with people."⁹

After Harvard, Kaczynski received a Ph.D. in mathematics from the University of Michigan and went on to teach at the University of California, Berkeley, before largely disappearing from society.¹⁰ Prior to his arrest, he succeeded in getting The Washington Post and The New York Times to publish his 35,000-word manifesto, "Industrial Society and Its Future." Moreno explained in 2012:¹¹

"Kaczynski believes that the Industrial Revolution was the font of human enslavement. 'The system does not and cannot exist to satisfy human needs,' he wrote. 'Instead, it is human behavior that has to be modified to fit the needs of the system.' The only way out is to destroy the fruits of industrialization, to promote the return of 'WILD nature,' in spite of the potentially negative consequences of doing so, he wrote."

Was Kaczynski's terrorism the result of the CIA's psychological torture? The world may never know. But in his book, "Mind Wars: Brain Research and National Defense," Moreno states the psychological experiment could have left "deep scars."¹²

Other Criminals Also Subjected to CIA Torment

In a review of "Mind Wars," author and professional speaker Richard Thieme brings up another notable criminal who was subjected to CIA mind games – the late Donald DeFreeze, also known as Cinque, who led the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA):¹³

"DeFreeze and other members of the SLA kidnapped Patty Hearst and subjected her to brainwashing using classical mind control techniques. It is seldom asked how DeFreeze learned to brainwash so effectively.

Colin A. Ross, M.D. in "Bluebird," a study of the deliberate creation of multiple personalities, notes that DeFreeze, while an inmate at Vacaville State Prison, was "a subject in an experimental behavior modification program run by Colston Westbrook, a CIA psychological warfare expert and advisor to the Korean CIA." (Bluebird, p.212)."

In terms of Kaczynski, Thieme notes:¹⁴

"The accounts of both Kaczynski and DeFreeze suggest that their crimes might have been "blowback," unintended consequences of covert intelligence operations that rebound on perpetrators. If those accounts were not public, however, and we speculated in that vein about DeFreeze and Kaczynski, it would be easy to dismiss our speculation as "conspiracy theories" or sloppy thinking.

We know those two accounts are not the only experiments that might have backfired, but prudence suggests we not extrapolate from the known data, lest we be ridiculed. That's what respectability in a world of strangeness requires. But in light of those accounts, it is not unreasonable to ask, what other rough beasts have slouched out of covert research to be born?"

Was the Unabomber Mentally Ill?

After his arrest, Kaczynski was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia.¹⁵ His brother wrote:¹⁶

"My brother became the Unabomber as a result of a mental illness involving paranoia and delusions of reference. Clearly, he personalized his sense of the world's wrong in a way that most of us do not.

He wrote in his diary that he'd decided to take "revenge" on society – as if there were some actual entity answering to the name "Society," as if his victims somehow represented Society with a capital S, as if they had consciously harmed him, as if the concept of revenge made any sense in this context."

Kaczynski, however, insisted he was not mentally ill and reportedly tried to fire his lawyers when they suggested using an insanity defense. He instead pleaded guilty and told Time magazine in 1999, "I'm confident that I'm sane. I don't get delusions and so forth."¹⁷

In a 2001 interview with Blackfoot Valley Dispatch, Kaczynski also describes his desire to live in the wild, which afforded him "certain satisfactions" like "personal freedom, independence, a certain element of adventure, a low-stress way of life." It was a "crisis" that prompted him to leave society behind, he said:^{18,19}

"At about the beginning of my last year at the University of Michigan I went through a kind of crisis. You could say that the psychological chains with which society binds us sort of broke for me. After that I was sure that I had the courage to break away from the system, to take off and just go into some wild place and try to live there."

Kaczynski 'Might Not Be Wrong'

Kaczynski's manifesto, with its core premise of technology threatening to destroy the world and make humans its slaves, has struck a chord with a new generation of youth who have found themselves increasingly dependent on Big Tech and, now, AI.

Krystal Ball, host of "Breaking Points" with Krystal and Saagar, says in an episode titled, "Was Ted Kaczynski Right About Everything?":²⁰

"He also writes compellingly about the dangers of AI. He wrote, 'A society in the problems that face it become more and more complex and as machines become more and more intelligent people will let machines make more and more of their decisions for them simply because machine-made decisions will bring better results than man-made ones.

Eventually a stage may be reached at which the decisions necessary to keep the system running will be so complex that human beings will be incapable of making them intelligently. At that stage the machines will be in effective control."

Even Elon Musk tweeted about Kaczynski's musings on technology's dangers, "He might not be wrong."²¹ As for Kaczynski's fate, Ball says:²²

"Kaczynski himself, in a lot of ways, was the cultural product of modernity. The boy genius with the freakish mathematical aptitude, swept up at the tender age of 16, shipped off to Harvard where he would be fast-tracked into elite Society so his market desirable intellect could be put to use by the government, and where he would be experimented on as part of the CIA's MK-Ultra project.

When he became a terrorist, his exploits were packaged into digestible bites for mass news media audience that was just getting a taste for the 24-hour news cycle. Kaczynski argued that the unbearable weight of the current system would eventually come crashing down. Now, nothing quite so apocalyptic has happened, but post-pandemic we have certainly seen a dramatic reordering of human priorities."

Others, including historian and journalist Oliver Bateman, have shared that many people share the same ideologies as Kaczynski, especially in their youth. "The young long for autonomy, to seize control in a world that often seems controlled by faceless entities and systems," Bateman says.²³ He, too, tested out life in a remote location in western Montana, but says he eventually "came to his senses" and returned to society.²⁴

"We could possibly devote our lives to relearning the skills necessary for physical labor, striving for a self-sufficient existence, toiling away while the world around us succumbs to apocalyptic decay.

However, the reality for most people, as they navigate the complexities of adulthood, is a series of compromises and an acceptance of societal norms, conflicts, and even banalities. We work steady jobs, contribute to society in our own ways, and seek a balance between our ideals and the practical demands of our daily lives. After my time in Montana, I returned to academia, before settling into a career in the private sector and starting a family."

A 'Complicated Figure'

Bateman suggests Kaczynski "never grew up" and didn't learn to accept life's disappointments. But Ball suggests the cogs in the machine are moving toward more empowerment and autonomy every day. Particularly since the pandemic, she says:²⁵

"We've seen people move to find a quality of life, which more adequately nourishes their soul and their families. We have seen workers demanding accommodations for their new lifestyles rather than just sliding back into the old ways in which work life was everything.

We've seen historic support for worker-empowering labor movements and workers sparking grassroots movements to establish power and autonomy in their workplaces. These are all reformist attempts to reclaim the power that Ted argued the modern world had stripped from us all.

We should witness those attempts and we should be encouraged because for me personally I would like to find a way to promote human thriving and empowerment and protect the natural environment without having to give up antibiotics and air conditioning and maybe without indiscriminately murdering random people. So, Ted, complicated figure."

The Unabomber's story is, indeed, complex, and not confined to one person or event. Kaczynski's brother explained, "My brother was a victim before he victimized others – and in this he is hardly unique."²⁶ But is this just an excuse for inexcusable behavior? He says:²⁷

"It may seem that I am trying to provide my brother with a handy excuse – a deflection of blame – for having killed three people and devastated numerous lives. But that is not my point. I believe that we are both individually responsible for our actions, and collectively responsible for conditions of harm and injustice that exist in our world ...

Those who victimized him exercised cruelty with impunity, and quite possibly with the best of intentions. Status and power are hardly guarantees of good judgment or good character. Thus, the lessons we must learn are complex."

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