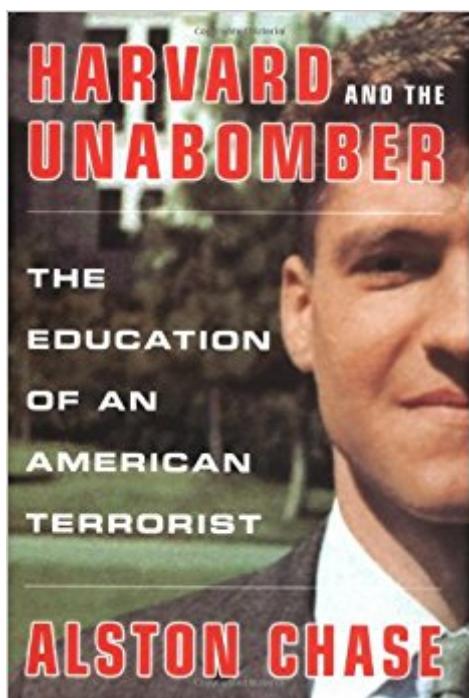


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Harvard And The Unabomber: The Education Of An American Terrorist



Synopsis

Alston Chase presents an interpretation of the infamous Unabomber. He projects Ted Kaczynski's life against the sinister background of the Cold War, when the prospect of nuclear conflict generated a fear of technology and a culture of despair on American college campuses. On these same campuses, federal agencies enlisted psychologists in a covert search for technologies of mind control and encouraged ethically questionable experiments on unwitting students. Chase's account follows Kaczynski from an unhappy adolescence in Illinois to Harvard University, to postgraduate study and to the edge of the wilderness in Montana, where he put his unthinkable plans into action. His reign of terror is rendered in detail and interweaved with this narrative is the chilling counterpoint of Kaczynski's coded journal entries on the efficacy of materials and techniques - the stark record of a killer's learning curve. A cautionary tale about modern evil, the conditions that provoked Kaczynski's alienation remain in place and may be getting worse as the War on Terrorism replaces the Cold War.

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Customer Reviews

Chase adds an important element to our understanding of the infamous Unabomber, Ted Kaczynski. Part of what made Kaczynski an iconic figure after his arrest in 1996 for 16 mail bombings (resulting in three deaths) between 1978 and 1995 was his unusual background as a highly gifted, Harvard-educated mathematician. While the media found comfort in writing him off as a mental case, more remarkable was how seemingly typical Kaczynski was. Bucking the conventional wisdom, Chase (In a Dark Wood) identifies Kaczynski as a victim more of the anxious

and contradictory Cold War 1950s than of the incendiary 1960s. With a background strikingly similar to Kaczynski's-including both a Harvard degree and self-imposed exile in Montana-Chase is in a unique position to probe the underlying tensions that led Kaczynski to commit dispassionate murder in the name of ideals. Chase persuasively isolates the turning point in his subject's years at Harvard, "where lasting human relations are more rare than championship football teams." In Cambridge he faced the typical Harvard pressures but, more importantly, was a subject of three years' worth of what many will agree were wildly irresponsible psychological experiments led by maverick psychology pioneer Henry A. Murray. While the conclusions Chase draws are unimpeachable, his description of the fateful experiments feels truncated, no doubt because some records remain sealed. Chase's disenchanted indictment of academia (represented here by Harvard) as lackey to the military-industrial complex is all the more compelling for the author's unruffled sense of perspective. With its unusual emphasis and sometimes surprisingly personal tone, this may become the definitive Kaczynski volume. 16 pages of photos not seen by PW.

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Chase, who, like Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski, graduated from Harvard and fled academe for the Montana wilderness, here offers a new slant on the triple murderer and doctor of philosophy. According to the author, the philosophical roots of Kaczynski's anti-industrialism began with Harvard's curriculum in the late 1950s. Chase writes that it cultivated the view, later to be called cultural or moral relativism, that democratic society and its institutions were sheer power relations and bereft of intrinsic value. Chase then sets forth the etymology, so to speak, of the killer's more particular thoughts, concluding that Kaczynski was a cherry picker among quite old and common execrations of technology. Tying in the killer's personal rages, Chase suggests that social awkwardness and participation in a traumatizing psychological experiment (led by the unorthodox psychologist Henry A. Murray) underlay Kaczynski's exaltation in planning and "justifying" his crimes. It takes an intellectual to think like that, and Chase astutely and provocatively delineates Kaczynski's metamorphosis into a Raskolnikov. Gilbert TaylorCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I have a slightly odd interest in Ted Kaczynski as a person because I've spent quite a bit of time in Lincoln, MT. I enjoyed reading about the part of his life that was spent in this interesting place, and reading about his interactions with some people that I have come to know well. I'm not sure that this book answers the question, "How did Kaczynski arrive at the point where extreme violence was the

answer?" but it does a very good job explaining many of the circumstances that may have played a part, including what he endured as a participant in Murray's psychological experiments at Harvard. I do wonder why he continued to participate in the experiment for three years. What a shame that a brilliant mathematical mind turned into an evil genius.

The first third of this book is a detailed recitation of the crimes of the Unabomber. It is all old material: reorganized, recategorized and rationalized, but essentially a recitation of things we already knew, or might have known had we been adequately interested to follow the story carefully. I found this part of the book uninteresting. The second part of the book, on the other hand, was fascinating. It details the experiences of Kapinsky at Harvard, where he was a brilliant student, and in particular a participant (victim?) in a series of quite outrageous and unethical experiments conducted by a highly distinguished Professor of psychology, himself, we learn, a pillar of the Harvard and American establishment-- and a sadist, a sexual weirdo and in other ways a nut-case almost as far out as Kapinsky. (Think of the various outrageous experiments in the 30's 40's and 50's conducted by "reputable" scientists on lepers, prisoners, Black people and other unsuspecting populations, often leading to death or permanent impairment.) The real story of this book --perhaps not told as clearly as it might be, but nevertheless told well, is that Kapinsky was not an isolated crazy but merely a more extreme Luddite, a back-to-nature environmentalist only one small step away from an entire movement of his times, namely the tree huggers, the Vermont-is-Paradise and other miscellaneous environmental extremists. In other words, the book very precisely places Kapinsky in the context of his culture. And in this context he comes across as someone unquestionably sane, quite brilliant and as the forceful (to say the least) articulator of a particular intellectual point of view: a point of view that is, when heard in other, non murderous contexts, eminently respectable. (But I would have liked to hear the author's opinion on how an environmental extremist goes from hugging trees to murdering people. Doesn't this qualify as some kind of insanity, contrary to Kapinsky's most urgently presented arguments?) I found the author's analysis fascinating, compelling and persuasive. My only quibble is that he handles Harvard, and indeed the entire American academic establishment, too delicately for my taste. After documenting the incredible extent to which American education was (and still is?) financially dependant on secret CIA grants, he doesn't really call for change. And worst of all, he is only discreetly critical of Harvard for allowing these experiments, for stonewalling him when he sought information and for closing ranks around the distinguished Professor Murray, who was definitively One Of Their Own--and apparently a world class sleazebag. But this is a quibble. The book is a fascinating exegesis of Kapinsky as a

lens through which we can view the larger society, and the reader comes away, not with any sympathy for Kapinsky (after all, there is a serious disinction between a tree hugger and a cold-blooded killer) but certainly with a much deeper understanding of the killer and his culture. I thought this was a very interesting and intelligent book. I recommend it highly.

Fascinating book. It's not just about the UB, it's about the history of western ideas . . . written by a man with a Phd in philosophy.

I thought it poorly written though thoroughly researched. Confusing the two concepts may lead one to an assessment that the book is very well written. I felt the author made too many assessments and arrived at too many conclusions that are the reader's to conclude. Even the primary conclusion that the subject's manifesto was 'spot on' by many, though the same premise had been found by others prior to the demanded publication of his thoughts was presented in a manner to diminish the writings of a jaded man lost. Technology, the two edged sword.

The interesting part related to illegal, unethical experiments at Harvard in collusion with Army and CIA by Dr. Murray. His papers are locked up and we will never likely know the whole truth.

Supposedly Ted Kaczinski was mistreated by a Murray interview and accounts in part for later behavior. The story is over weight in psychology by far and written by a psychologist who, it seems, insists the reader recognize that. His story id twice too many pages.

Very revealing read. I get the impression the author had a page requirement, though, because he repeats often and fills pages with unrelated, unnecessary information. Still, a worthwhile read.

Delighted with this. Rapid delivery. Excellent condition. Thank you.

very good

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