

The Bundy letter, 1979: Suggestions for the investigation of serial murder

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Barrie J. Ritter, Ph.D. © 2016



"Ted Bundy in custody, Florida, 1978 or 1979. Florida Memory Project, Florida Photographic Collection, #DND0671"
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In 1979, a letter was sent by this author to the Department of Justice, both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and what is now the National Institute of Justice (NIJ, formerly Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, or LEAA). (The letter was written for the Florida prosecutors in the two [Ted Bundy](#) death penalty trials, Larry Simpson for Tallahassee and Bob Dekle for Lake City, to ascertain whether the prosecutors were interested in further research bearing on Bundy and comparable cases. Mr. Simpson's co-counsel and Mr. Dekle were both gracious with their time and both were surprised by the large package of research materials that were left with them.)

The "Bundy Letter" presents a fair statement of what was occurring with respect to the emerging problem of serial murder at the time. New approaches were identified that could potentially help police and prosecutors with these difficult-to-solve homicide cases. One in particular, on the second page, focuses on the elements of the crime scene, suggesting that such elements are essentially *dynamic*. They must be (re)analyzed over time, as new information about the case, *and other cases*, arrives. This is emphasized over the traditional focus on static and discreet areas like victim characteristics, or outmoded presumptions about prior relationships and motives. *The Bundy letter follows:*

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1979

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OBJECTIVE: To assist in providing a systematic methodology, based on a contemporary sociological and psychological approach, for early detection and conviction of mass murderers.

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Theodore Bundy has been linked circumstantially to at least thirteen murders, the primary suspect in cases that cut across the entire United States, from Washington to Florida, from 1974 to 1979. Is he a scapegoat, as he claims, for frustrated police? Totally innocent? Or partly to blame as proven? Is he the murderer of forty or does the number go as high as "three figures," a remark attributed to him? He received a death sentence, finally, but if that sentence is fair for the Chi Omega sorority sisters' deaths, don't the remaining deaths deserve our concern? Are they to court for nothing merely because someone who was in the area at the time is to die for crimes in another area, at another time? Perhaps justice is served by his death -- obviously he can only die once -- but what justice is there for those who also died? No murderer has been convicted, no case has been solved. No murder victim, having been killed brutally, at random, can be forgotten or shelved. Neither local prosecutors nor frustrated police deserve to bare the brunt of this responsibility or have their efforts go to waste.

For the past seven years I have been involved in an independent study of mass murderers including intensive analysis of recent cases in the United States and in other countries and voluminous case histories written by psychologists, attorneys and other professionals attempting to offer an analysis of the type of individual who perpetrates these crimes.

As a result of my continuing investigation into this problem, it is becoming increasingly apparent that a new approach is necessary in order to protect the members of our society from the trauma and loss of life resulting from the sociological phenomena of random murders, assaults and mutilations.

Past approaches, in general, have been based on the assumption that random murders are rare and murders follow a predictable pattern based on the relationship between murderer and victim. The investigation proceeds on the assumption that the M.O., pattern and victim choice will reveal a motive such as greed or jealousy, thereby linking the victim to the murderer and offering the possibility of a solution based on this linkage. The possibility of a mass murderer is rarely considered until the murderer himself alerts the police by leaving a calling card which links victim to victim. At this point, the investigators shift their attention to searching for a sex killer.

For example, the classical profile of the mass murderer portrays the killer as a sexual deviant in the Freudian sense who is sexually impotent in "normal" relations, feels rejected by mother and women in general, and chooses victims who are symbolic representatives. The picture that emerges is one of a lonely, ineffectual, low-level functioning type of individual. In contrast, the outstanding feature that emerges from my cross-comparison of five recent cases of mass murder, including Theodore Bundy, is the general appearance of normalcy -- an intelligent, articulate, clean-cut individual with a high potency level sexually and socially, capable of charming and seducing women under normal conditions and for the purpose of murder.

My approach, which can be called the Methodology of Mayhem, is not based on any preconceptions as to the type of person who commits these crimes of the type of victim or situation in which the crime occurs, other than in relation to the particular pattern of progression, M.O., motive profile that emerges through a systematic analysis of all data available concerning the physical circumstances surrounding each murder in relation to other unsolved murders. The standard approach emphasizes who the victims are -- age, hair color, etc. My approach emphasizes the physical conditions surrounding the murder itself -- the position of the body, where it is placed and any other detail that may be considered an addendum to the killer's calling card. Only by examining these details for all cases of suspected mass murder, solved and unsolved, will we be able to put into operation an approach that will result in early detection and apprehension of mass murderers.

Everyone involved in the Bundy case is, in a sense, a victim. A victim of circumstance, lost in a sea of frustration, alone in the midst of a mayhem that spreads across the country. Without systematic coordination and an overall perspective, a system of centralized local data banks which store, analyze, alert and exchange information locally and by means of national coordination and colation, mass murder will continue to spread. Everyone is a victim and everyone is responsible.

Theodore Bundy is in the midst of a national ordeal. All efforts must continue, not only, though including, his appeals. Why should time, money, lives already spent be wasted? Why should fruitless efforts and money be spent on each local, extensive investigation throughout the country while simultaneously we are funding federal committees to study "violence"? The problems cannot be dealt with locally, statistically, or abstractly. Ted Bundy is a national problem. For through this one case we have the means to establish coordinated methods. And though each case may never be solved or necessarily tried, pulling all the data together and addressing all the factors involved will help answer these questions: Who and what is Theodore Bundy, and how many more are there out there like him...and Collins...and Bianchi...and Berkowitz...?