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*The Collective*

Acrylic and screenprinting

My research inspired my project in the form of the mystery of D.B. Cooper. I started to think about how the unknown plays a role in people's everyday lives and the psychology behind humans wanting to know more. My work was shaped by my personal experience because I wanted to make something that could be continued after my time at Oxbow. I also wanted to create something that I am passionate about, and for me, that was creating something that could be bigger than me and become a global movement. For the designs of both the skateboards and shirts, I choose to use minimal colors and primarily silhouette the character. I wanted to do this because it plays into the theme of mystery and the unknown. For the most part, my art didn't change throughout the creation process however my idea for installation changed many times. It went from just having everything hung up on the wall, to having a corner that I would try and make look like an apartment or a studio. The final idea which is the one that I ended up doing was using the hallway to create a storefront where the walls could be painted to match the streetwear aesthetic that I hoped to capture in my pieces.

# The Search for D.B. Cooper



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OS47

*Writer's Note: This paper addresses the case of D.B. Cooper and my thoughts on the situation. I have been interested in the Cooper case since I saw a video about him many years ago. Something that keeps me drawn in is the fact that we are still finding out more information and other people still care since this occurred in 1971. Even during the time of writing this new information, a new suspect has arisen. I also find it interesting how people love this guy that we know nothing about apart from this 8-hour moment in his life.*

## **I. THE STORY**

I am D.B. Cooper. An anomaly, unknown, a mystery just the way I intended. The day was November 24th, 1971, a Wednesday, I believe. I arrive at the Portland airport in the early afternoon, probably around 2:00, for the 2:50 flight I am taking. I'm traveling with only my black briefcase, which may have a surprise for later in it, but you don't need to know that yet. I purchased a one-way ticket to Seattle, which should only be a 30-minute flight. The next part of the plan is too easy because in 71, there is almost no airport security, so I can waltz through with my case. I board the plane and sit in 18E, the last seat right in front of where the flight attendants sit.

As the plane is taking off, I order a bourbon and 7-up, like the gentleman that I am. Once we are in flight, the attendant brings me my drink and I hand her a note. I don't know what she thinks because she doesn't open it right away. So, as she's walking away I say, "Miss?" And she starts to walk back to my seat, and when she gets closer to me I whisper "You'd better look at that note. I have a bomb." The note said that I had a bomb and I wanted her to sit next to me. She did as anyone would in a situation where there is a bomb, she asked to see the bomb when she sat, so I cracked open my case. She could see four red cylinders and the battery. It was time for business. I closed the case and told the flight attendant my demands; she took a note in order to not get

anything wrong. My demands were as follows: 200,000 dollars in a knapsack by 5:00 pm and two front and two back parachutes. I asked for four parachutes in case the police tampered with them. If you ask for one, you're done for, but it is much harder to tamper with four.

We were circling around Seattle in the air for a few hours while they collected the money and parachutes. As the plane was landing in Seattle, I made sure that all the window shades were closed because the police were there and I was unaware if they had snipers. I requested that only one person approach the plane with the money and parachutes. I sent the attendant that was sitting with me to retrieve the money. Once she returned I allowed the passengers to get off the plane and go home. I gave the crew my plan of what I wanted to do next. I wanted to fly to Mexico City at the lowest possible altitude and slowest speed without stalling the engine. As we were waiting for the plane to be refueled, the FAA requested a meeting with me. As anyone would do, I declined. Why would someone show their face to someone that wasn't part of the plan and risk jeopardizing the whole thing?

At 7:40 pm we were back in the air. We would not be able to make it to Mexico City on one tank of gas so a stop would be necessary. I told the crew that the stop would be in Reno, Nevada. Around 8:00 pm, I asked the attendant, who was still sitting with me at the time, to go to the cockpit and to close the curtain that separated first class from the regular seating. I also needed to move the money into one of the parachute bags since they gave me the money in the wrong type of bag. Once that was done I tied the bag around my waist and opened the rear staircase. This was the moment that everyone has been waiting for. In the middle of the night somewhere over the Washington and Oregon border in the pouring rain and heavy wind, I jumped. That was the last time that I have ever been seen by the public eye.

## **II. MANIFESTO**

There are many people that could be the true identity of D.B. Cooper. In my opinion there are two most likely suspects for the identity of Cooper. Until a few weeks ago, there was only one person that seemed to make sense. This simple fact alone is one of the reasons this case is still relevant today and why people stay interested in it.

The main suspect for many years has been Robert Rackstraw. Rackstraw was a troubled man– he had a criminal record and was involved in other plane hijackings. He was a helicopter pilot and trained jumper during the Vietnam War. During the war, he was a part of three different squads flying helicopters. It was later revealed that he was recruited to fly for a secret FBI mission in the Middle East after the war. This seemingly innocent piece of information will play a huge part later. He was then deported from the Middle East due to explosive possession. Rackstraw also somewhat matches the composite sketch of Cooper, however, he was much younger as Cooper was said to have been in his mid-forties. During the hunt for Cooper, Rackstraw was brought to trial for another crime that he had committed.

At the end of this trial, he was asked about Cooper and if he was in fact D.B. Cooper and he chose not to comment. This is interesting because I feel like he would have said he wasn't Cooper if he was innocent. This trend continued throughout his life when asked if he was Cooper or even any question regarding Cooper. The FBI crossed him off the list of suspects in 1979 because they said there was no evidence that connected him to the hijacking.

One of the reasons that I see Rackstraw as a suspect is due to the fact that he did a job for the FBI so they cannot convict him for the crime that he committed. It could be seen as somewhat like a witness protection program but for people who have done work for the FBI. This could also be the case because all the evidence which was found on the plane after the fact was “lost” while in FBI custody. He also has the qualities to be able to pull off something like this. He was trained

in parachuting and aircrafts, which explains his knowledge of the plane and which course to take when flying to Mexico City, and how he was able to jump in such harsh conditions. He also at one point in time was in possession of explosives which could explain the bomb that was on board with him.

A more theoretical approach is required to envision the landing and jump that Cooper made. Rackstraw had some connections to drug runners that went up and down the west coast. The theory goes that Cooper jumped out of this plane, landed, and was picked up by these two drug runners. Supposedly, Cooper gave a portion of the money to one of them that lived in the area and left back down the coast with the other. The guy that had the money was instructed to bury half the money in the river a few months following the hijacking. It was confirmed that the money was buried after the fact by a research group that compared the diatoms on the money to the ones that appear in the river in different months. Diatoms are pieces of algae that grow in rivers and other bodies of water. These diatoms change microscopic structure throughout the seasons so it is possible to figure out what season of diatom you have. It was determined that the money was submerged in the river during the May to June range instead of the November date, which would suggest that Cooper lost some of the money the night of the jump. This money that was submerged in the May to June range, washed up on shore sometime after that. When it washed up it was found by the family of the guy who put it in the river in the first place. Now you could call this dumb luck, or something else is going on there. This escape is somewhat of a stretch however, it is one of the only escape theories and it lines up with the timeline of events.

Throughout this whole paper I've been alluding to a new suspect that has been found in the last few weeks. His name is Vince Peterson. Now, Vince may be the leading suspect for Cooper due to the fact that there is evidence that points in the direction of him. This being the company

that he works for and the tie that he was wearing. Cooper's black clip on tie was found left behind on the plane. In 2017, a lab conducted a scan of the tie and they ended up finding a metal, which was a type of titanium alloy which was rare for that time period. Then on November 11th of this year, the scientists found the only company in America that was using those types of metals during that time period. A researcher was then able to find eight other researchers working for that company who were using those types of metals. And one of those researchers, Vince Peterson, was on that flight on the day of November 24th.

This is also a stretch because of the relation between this random company in Pennsylvania and this worker who happened to be on this flight. However, this is the only concrete evidence that anyone has that connects an object that was found on the plane to someone that could be D.B. Cooper. Unfortunately, Vince Peterson passed away in 2002 before he was identified as a suspect in the case. People were able to talk to his son but he did not believe his father to be Cooper.

Perception is something else that is important when trying to understand the precarious case of D.B. Cooper. Something else that is interesting to me is how people idolize this man when he is a felon and has committed a crime. I believe this to be because we do not possess much information about this man's life. We tend to think about the best in people. Many people see him as a Robin Hood-type figure, stealing from the government and vanishing into the night. To this day, there is a Cooper Con around the time of the hijacking every year. This event is a hub for all things D.B. Cooper, where people come from all over the country and get to meet with people that share the common interest.

I feel that part of what keeps bringing people in is the fact that we don't know who he is. People keep following the story and keep looking for answers because they want to know or be the person to find out who Cooper really is. It has to do with how the brain works because when

humans know less about something they are more likely to ask questions which leads to doing research and looking for answers on your own. Part of the brain is to limit the unknown, that is why humans always want to know more. Why is the guiding question that moves us through life, so when you think about what you have done in your life why is always the question that keeps you moving forward. This case on a psychological and analytical level is perplexing. From a mental standpoint it tickles our brains because we want to know more, but there is no more information to know. It is also very cool to see different people's perspectives and their own theories that they have made over the years. For example, there is a group of people that think that Cooper was in the Canadian Air Force and used the name Dan Cooper because of a comic book series. In this series Dan Cooper, the main character, is an Air Force pilot in Canada and becomes this hero similar to Captain America. People have just been trying to relate anything they can in order to try and find out who this person is. That is the beauty of this case.

If we knew more about why Cooper chose to do this, I think that many people would have a different perspective of him. Since we don't know why Cooper did what he did, people see him as an anti-hero. Anti-heroes are a niche group of people, the definition of an anti-hero is "a central character in a story, movie, or drama who lacks conventional heroic attributes" (Oxford Dictionary). People love anti-heroes because their flaws make them more like regular people. This also means that people are more likely to connect to them if they see themselves for people they know with that character. I would say that Cooper lacks traditional hero characteristics. That is another wonderful thing about Cooper, he could be anyone, he's not some rich entrepreneur or some all powerful being. He is just a regular guy who could be anyone. Although he may have courage which would probably be number one on most people's heroic characteristic list, that's about it since he has little to no morals.

Say, for example, we knew that Cooper was stealing the money just for the sake of stealing. I feel like people would think about him differently. We may see him as more of a traditional villain with no morals, taking for personal gain. People probably would not idolize him as much as they do now. He may be seen more as a regular criminal that committed a heist and got away with it. Once again, the element of mystery and the unknown play into our brains which make us more fascinated with this case. The same could be said if the reason for the hijacking went the other way. Meaning that he was stealing for a good reason or trying to give back. It is possible for us to hold Cooper on an even higher pedestal if he was stealing for a good reason, and he could be even more celebrated than he already is.

In conclusion, people stay interested in things that they are not sure about. The fact is that we may never know who D.B. Cooper is, and I am fine with that because it remains one of the best unknown mysteries in history. And if we knew the whole story of D.B. Cooper, it/he would not have the same interest level. Although with technology advancing, someday in the future we will probably end up knowing who he really is. It could also be that one of the many people that have confessed to being D.B. Cooper on their deathbeds is really him. They may have done such a good job that people and the FBI passed it off as a joke or someone wanting to say something memorable before their life comes to an end. It will become harder with time passing as many of the suspects are beginning to grow old and die. I will leave you with a quote from English writer Aldous Huxley. He said, "There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception."

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