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American Accent

Pleasantly handsome, piercingly intelligent, he was a master manipulator, a silver-tongued charmer who lured women to their deaths, confounded police pursuers and clogged the court system for nearly a decade. Last week, when Ted Bundy was finally strapped into Florida's electric chair and jolted with 2,000 volts of electricity, he paid with his life for the 1978 kidnaping and murder of Kimberly Leach, a twelve-year-old Lake City girl. But if his last-minute confessions prove to be true, the former law student may have killed as many as 50 young women in Utah, Washington, Idaho, Colorado and Florida from 1973 to 1978, making Bundy one of the nation's most grotesquely prolific serial killers. Through legal maneuvers, Bundy, 42, had won three earlier stays of execution. But his luck ran out on Jan. 23, when the Supreme Court refused another delay. Cocky and contemptuous at his 1980 trial, Bundy turned remorseful in his final days, offering to confess to an array of unsolved murders. "Ted Bundy feels morally compelled as he faces death to do the right thing," said Diana Weiner, one of his attorneys. Although his disclosures may eventually help close up to 23 outstanding cases, few authorities credited Bundy with more than a last-ditch effort to delay his execution. Said Florida Governor Bob Martinez: "For him to be negotiating for his life over the bodies of victims is despicable." A onetime Boy Scout and A student, Bundy seemed headed for a sterling career in Republican politics in Washington State and even served as assistant director of the Seattle Crime Prevention Advisory Committee. Perversely, he was the author

of a pamphlet instructing women on rape prevention. That such an ostensibly upstanding citizen would rape and mutilate scores of women, then dump their bodies in remote places, was almost beyond comprehension. The morning of the execution, some 200 bloodthirsty revelers gathered outside the penitentiary in Starke, Fla., for a ghoulish celebration. They lit sparklers, cheered and waved signs reading BURN, BUNDY, BURN and ROAST IN PEACE. One of the few dissenters was college student Nanda Rogers, 22, of Orlando, who stood by herself a few yards away. "I believe in the sanctity of human life -- even Ted Bundy's life," she said somberly. The day before his execution, Bundy, choking back sobs, said, "I don't want to die, I kid you not, ((but)) I deserve, certainly, the most extreme punishment society has." He had seemed to deliberately seek that punishment. In December 1977, while jailed in Colorado awaiting trial for the murder of a nurse, Bundy asked policemen which state would be most likely to execute a killer. Florida, he was told. He soon escaped from jail and headed for the Sunshine State. There he crushed the skulls of two sorority sisters in their rooms at Florida State University. Three weeks later, he killed young Kimberly Leach.

In a final interview, conducted by California psychologist and radio evangelist James Dobson, Bundy tearfully cited the media as a source of his dementia. Perhaps playing to his inquisitor, a member of the 1986 federal pornography commission, Bundy said, "Those of us who are . . . so much influenced by violence in the media, in particular pornographic violence, are not some kind of inherent monsters. We are your sons, and we are your husbands, and we grew up in regular families." Some of Bundy's relatives might not have been so "regular." The illegitimate son of a Philadelphia department-store clerk, Bundy claimed he spent his early years with a deranged grandfather who assaulted people, tormented animals and had an insatiable appetite for pornography. Bundy talked of being appalled after his first murder. "It was like being possessed by something so awful, so alien," he said. "But then the impulse to do it again would come back even stronger." Yet a succession of appellate courts ruled that Bundy was not mentally incompetent to stand trial, as he repeatedly claimed. In 1987 a federal judge called Bundy "the most competent serial killer in the country . . . a diabolical genius." His decade of imprisonment and endless appeals eventually cost Florida taxpayers more than \$6 million. In a society increasingly fascinated with violent crime, the Ted Bundy story captured the public imagination. Five books and a television mini-series were produced about the boy-next-door killer. With network-TV broadcasts of the murderer's last interview and scenes of crowds gathered outside the penitentiary, even his execution became a media circus. Whether Bundy intended it or not, his final encounter with death renewed his nightmarish grip on the nation's attention.

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By Jacob V. Lamar and Charles Holmes

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