

Idaho Murder Motive May Never Be Known, Families Left in Pain

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Bryan Kohberger was sentenced to four consecutive life terms for the brutal 2022 murders of four University of Idaho students, yet the motive behind the killings remains unanswered, a silence that has left families and the public unsettled.

The recent sentencing of Bryan Kohberger, who admitted to the calculated killing of four

University of Idaho students, has delivered a measure of justice, but not closure. Despite confessing to the crimes under a plea deal that removed the death penalty from the table, Kohberger never offered any explanation for his actions. The legal arrangement required him to acknowledge the elements of his offenses, but it did not obligate him to disclose his reasons for committing the murders.

Kohberger received four consecutive life sentences for the November 13, 2022, stabbings of Kaylee Goncalves, Madison Mogen, Xana Kernodle, and Ethan Chapin in an off-campus home. He had no known relationship to the victims. While families sought answers, including pleas for a motive and details of the final moments, Kohberger remained silent during his sentencing.

Latah County Prosecutor Bill Thompson noted that full, accurate confessions are rare in such cases. “We would all like to know the details of what happened,” he said, “but Mr. Kohberger is not going to be the source of getting the truth.” The judge presiding over the case, Steven Hippler, also acknowledged the desire for clarity but warned against giving Kohberger further attention. “By continuing to focus on why, we give Mr. Kohberger relevance and power,” he stated in court.

While motive is often a source of emotional resolution for victims’ families, it is not a legal requirement to secure a conviction. As former federal prosecutor and University of Washington Law School professor Mary D. Fan explained, “Motive is something that we want to know as humans, but it’s not legally a part of the crime.”

Some legal experts and psychologists argue that understanding a killer’s intent can aid in healing. Dr. Patricia Harney of Harvard Medical School, who has personal experience with violent loss, said the need to make sense of tragedy is deeply human. “What underlies that is a desire to have some way to make sense of something so senseless,” she explained.

Yet under American criminal law, such insight is not guaranteed. The plea arrangement mirrors past cases like that of Gary Ridgway, the so-called Green River Killer, who had to provide extensive cooperation to avoid the death penalty. Kohberger, however, was not required to do the same.

The Goncalves family voiced strong objections to the deal, calling for a trial or at least a full confession, including the location of the murder weapon. “Truth spill it, BK,” they wrote in a social media post. But as the legal process has concluded, the families are left with a

painful reality: the man who committed these heinous acts may never explain why. And for many, that lingering void is a haunting final chapter.