

# Opinion

## Bernhard Goetz and the irrational aggression

There is a utility to stereotyping. The American ethic, not to mention the law, insists that we all be judged as individuals, but the city dweller knows better. Having been asked for \$5 by four black youths, seeing them as a



Richard Cohen

shod for crime in high-top sneakers, Bernhard Goetz saw the stereotype and assumed he was about to be robbed. Many New Yorkers have applauded his rationality.

Consider further: Although Goetz could not have known it at the time, all four of the youths who approached him for money had criminal records. At the moment, two are in jail and one is in a drug-rehabilitation center. The fourth youth, Darrell Cabey, lives at home, paralyzed from the waist down by the bullet Goetz fired into him.

And one further thing: The request for money is a preface to robbery. It is really a demand, a strange street ritual in which everyone understands that there is no question mark at the end of the sentence. This is the code of New York, if not other places, and everyone in Goetz's subway car knew it.

But in Goetz's case, rational deductions were made by an irrational man. In the first place, he was illegally carrying a gun. Second, he machoed his way into the midst of the four youths while others in the subway car wisely kept their distance. His behavior was the urban equivalent of "smile when you say that stranger" — the prologue to so

many fights in so many movie Westerns: almost a challenge in itself.

When it was accepted, Goetz responded not by simply showing his gun (the four youths were unarmed), but by opening fire. He blazed away and, later, in a taped confession he repeatedly mentioned that he had once been a mugging victim. His actions and his words were of a man who thought he had finally settled a score.

The dilemma of the Goetz case lies in the difficulty of distinguishing between a rational fear based on a stereotype and the irrational behavior that can result. Life is too complicated, the city too menacing, to judge every person as an individual. A person of whatever race — black or white — is entitled to extrapolate on the basis of either experience or knowledge (crime statistics) to make certain judgments. Only a fool would treat Goetz's four boisterous black youths apparently looking for trouble as if they were four Iowa farm kids out to see the Big City.

Prudent, self-defensive behavior is

not the same as aggressive, retributive action. What Goetz did was the moral equivalent of a white mob running through a black neighborhood, beating and, maybe, lynching the first person it encounters because a wholly different black had injured or killed a white. The fury of Goetz's attack was fueled not only by the demand for money, but by his previous mugging. Race, but not necessarily conventional prejudice, undoubtedly played a role. The fear here is specific, not general — not an entire race, but the young, male members of it who dress and act in a certain menacing way.

That always-moving, always-thin, line between rational fear and irrational action is one of civilization's essential threads. Pull it, and society begins to unravel. The fear of the urban American is real — as is the threat to him or, more likely, her. Crime and the threat of it has atomized our already weakened communities.

People live in virtual vaults behind

door locks and window bars. They do not walk their own streets at night, in some places, during the day. They are tremulous, often victimized by the young. Cabs will not stop for certain people and, for many, dogs are no longer pets, but weapons of self-defense.

But the law rightly insists that our actions be reasonable. It does not require you to be unafraid, not to or sneak out of harm's way or not to suspect the stranger. But it does require the worthy standard that you have the right to translate your fear into aggressive, dangerous action that is of proportion to any threat.

Bernhard Goetz did that. He was right to suspect those four youths as even right to fear them. But when one by one — he shot them, he committed a crime and so, in acquiescing to him, did his jury. It moved the line between rational fear and irrational action a little to the jungle.

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## Mail Call

### Commie bashing?

EDITOR: Once again, your liberal rag has shown its true colors, in Friday's article by David Spence on Guatemala. Why are you constantly printing the "full" picture? All you are really doing is suggesting that the CIA can't handle things on its own, or that our country's interests should not come before anyone else's. But all of us True Americans and True Ags know what a wonderful job the CIA and the military are doing, and that is why so many of us join them every year despite your "evidence." And only a Commie or a traitor would dare to imply that our country should come second to any other. If we have to wipe out uncooperative governments, well that's just what they deserve for getting in our way. Besides, we are really doing them a favor by sparing them from a Commie takeover. Everyone knows they are much better off with one of our dictators than with the Communists. In fact, those students in South Korea should clam up too. I don't see any of them moving north. So quit trying to confuse the problem, and let's just worry about stopping the Commies. Joseph Kachmar

### An evening on the rocks

EDITOR: Last Friday, I went to a local club to have a few drinks with my friends. It was a great evening until it was time to leave and I discovered my purse had been stolen. It was a silver purse and it contained a lot of things I would really like to get back and many things that would only be useful to me. If you were the person who took my purse or if you have any knowledge of its whereabouts, please contact me at 693-1435 or send an anonymous note to tell me where I might pick it up. Think about how you would feel if this happened to you. Be a good Ag. Return my purse. Susan Richardson '87

### Homosexuality is not a disease

EDITOR: I'm writing in response to the letter by Kathy Nicholson in which she stated "Being a psychology major, Rex should know homosexuality is a sexually abnormal behavior." In making this statement, Ms. Nicholson committed a major faux pas. She should have consulted the DSM-III, the "Bible" of all mental health professionals, before blatantly displaying her ignorance as she did. Homosexuality has been accepted as a normal human condition, just like heterosexuality. Psychologists don't try to teach homosexuals how to become "straight." They try to teach them to come to terms with their homosexuality and to accept themselves as they are.

I commend Doug Driskell for a sensitive and informative report. If only more students at A&M could be as informed and sensitive. Mary Teel '90

### Thanks for the memories

EDITOR: Thank you very much for providing coverage of a design and construction project performed as a community service in your April 24 edition. We sincerely appreciate the recognition afforded the Student Chapter Association General Contractors, inasmuch as the student members worked diligently and professionally in bringing the project to reality.

Construction science students prepared the detailed construction schedule, final cost estimates, and planning and implementation documentation, and subsequently commenced work on the project. Also worthy of note is the fact that a number of design students participated in construction of the project.

Thank you again for informing your readers of this project which integrated the efforts of many students and faculty, and professional disciplines, and numerous members of the local community.

Robert Segner Jr.  
Associate Professor

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the classification, address and telephone number of the writer.

## The Battalion

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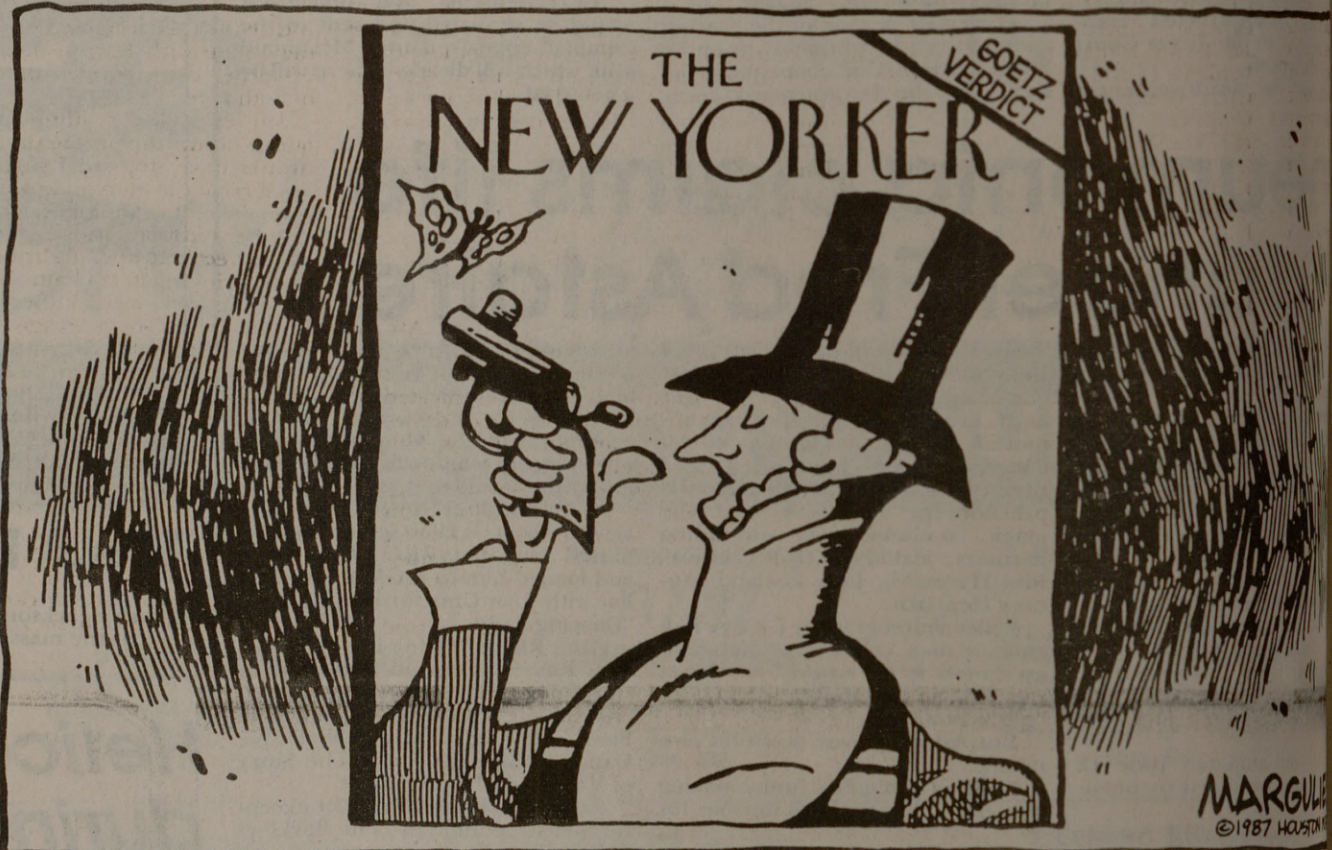
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## Listen, Fawn — and learn

My secretary, the lovely and multitasking Ms. Wanda Fribish, couldn't believe it when she read Fawn Hall's testimony recently before the Iran-Contra investigation panel.



Lewis Grizzard

Fawn Hall, secretary to Marine Colonel Oliver North, the designated heavy in the affair, testified she never questioned what her boss was doing and that she helped him load evidence against him into a paper shredder because she always did what he told her to do. "The little twerp," said Miss Fribish. "You don't think," I dared interrupt her, "a secretary should be loyal to her boss?" "Back in your cage, four-eyes," she said to me. "If I want your opinion I'll ask for it." I suppose Ms. Fribish and I do have a

unique relationship. She is convinced I work for her.

She comes in around 10, asks for her messages and then I pour her a cup of coffee.

After that, she reads over *Feminist Soldier of Fortune*, *Wrestling World* and *Cycle Magazine* and then I get my first assignment, which usually is something like: "Hold down the fort, horse head, the manifold is busted on my Harley and I gotta go get it fixed."

After the Fawn Hall testimony, I was intrigued to know how Miss Fribish would have handled the situation had she been Ollie North's secretary.

"First," she said, "I would have let that wimp know where he stood with me."

"Wimp?" I replied. "Col. North is a Marine."

"I don't care if he's in the Moose Club," she went on, "all I would have said is, 'One word out of you, jarhead, and I'll rattle what's left of your brain.'"

"And you wouldn't have followed his

orders blindly as Fawn did?"

"Who do you think you're dealing with here — Tammy Faye Bakker?"

"I would have made him empty his pockets and his desk drawers and I'd have taken all the money he made from the sales to Iran and given it to somebody who really deserved it."

"Who's that?" I asked.

"My sisters in the National Organization of Militant Feminists, of course."

"Let the Contras take care of their own problems. We have a battle to win right in this country completing our overthrow of the wobbling dominant male."

There was talk, of course, of Playboy inviting Fawn Hall to pose nude. That's where she and Miss Fribish at least have something in common.

Miss Fribish can be seen modeling the latest camouflage outfits in the November issue of *Guns and Ammo*.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some papers to shred for the boss. Copyright 1987, Cowles Syndicate

## EVOLUTION of the WASHINGTON SECRETARY



ELIZABETH RAY  
- Can't type



FAWN HALL  
- Knows steno  
- Takes dictation  
- Wordprocessor skills  
- Shreds 60,000 words a minute

MARGULIES  
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