

FRIDAY
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Local cop cars show bad taste

SHANNON HALBROOK
COLUMNIST

There was a police car parked at the corner. It was early in the morning and I was driving the only car around, so I knew the cop's beady little doughnut-shaped eyes were studying my every move. I couldn't identify the police car, so it made me nervous. After stopping carefully, I continued on my way, carefully keeping the speedometer needle just a hair under 20.

It was only when I passed the car that I realized it was just a University Police Department car. But not like any University Police car I'd seen. Judging from the strange paint scheme, I thought it was a lost police car from some wealthy city. But here was a car, white with a snazzy red and blue logo and the words "Texas A&M University POLICE" on the door.

Since then, I've seen several of the new UPD cars, and I'm not sure I like them. I don't like the new paint jobs. They're like the new Texas license plates — red, white, blue and cheesy. Funny stars and stripes and rainbows and ribbons.

UPD must be proud of the new cars, but the old blue paint job is probably sufficient. By looking at the new UPD cars, one gets the impression that they belong to a real police department, rather than some university offshoot.

Both the Bryan and College Station Police Departments also have a problem with flamboyant cars. Bryan's cars feature gold and blue paint with stripes spanning the entire length of the car. College Station's have a huge logo and a gratuitous Texas. And state troopers' cars have that weird set of yellow lights that look suspiciously like the undulating red lights on KITT's front.

Remember the police cars in *The Dukes of Hazzard*? Hazzard County cop cars were neither precocious nor pretentious — they were just white cars with gold stars on the side. And they didn't even have radar for a while; I remember it being a big deal for Roscoe when he got his first (hand-held) radar gun.

It seems to be a trend right now to put as much junk on cop cars as they can possibly hold. Police cars from different towns appear in College Station occasionally, and they all look new and souped-up — kind of a cross between an F-16 and the Goodyear blimp. I guess the billboard-like paint schemes go along with the advanced radar and computers and supertechnological laser criminal detection equipment inside, but in some cases — including the UPD's new cars — it's a bit excessive.

I doubt it was necessary for the Texas A&M UPD to purchase these brand new cars. I've read "Police Beat" — it doesn't seem to me that they're strapped with a heavy, dangerous workload. As a matter of fact, once I saw three cars pull over one guy for running a stop sign. What are they going to use these new cars for?

Those police departments in the Saturn ads have the right idea. A Saturn retails for just under \$12,000, according to the ad, while Chevrolet Caprice Classics or Ford Crown Victorias can be several thousand dollars more. Police departments could just as easily use cheaper, less showy cars, like a Saturn, a Kia or even a 1977 Pinto with the headliner coming unglued. Personally, I would go 120 down University and risk jail time just to be pulled over by a cop in a Pinto.

A police car is no longer just a vehicle to transport police officers around in — it's a gaudy pretentiousness-mobile. The blue UPD cars weren't so bad. They were just ugly. The new cars are both ugly and gaudy. It's a bad combination, especially since police officers probably deserve some respect. They sure won't get it as long as they're driving cars that look like that.

Shannon Halbrook is a sophomore English major

Vigilante Goetz treated like a criminal in ruling

JASON BROWN
ASST. OPINION EDITOR

Just when you think it's safe to be a vigilante, something happens to disillusion you about the prospects of taking the law into your own hands.

On Tuesday, Bernhard Goetz, my hero from the '80s, was ordered to pay one of his "victims" \$43 million from a shooting incident in 1984.

For those with short memories, I'll relate the story of my friend Bernie. Bernie was in a New York subway station minding his own business on Dec. 22, 1984, when four black teenagers approached him and asked him for \$5. Bernie did what every red-blooded American would do; he pulled a gun and shot them.

On the surface, it may seem like he overreacted, but a closer look reveals that he possessed the valor most of us can only aspire to have. After all, a group of four black men posing as panhandlers in a subway station presents more than just the possibility of a crime. So what if they were just kids, and so what if the most dangerous weapon any of them was carrying was a screwdriver? Bernie could have been killed.

Still, it wasn't just Bernie's quick thinking that endeared him to me; it was also the flair with which he did it. When the teen-agers asked him for the money, Bernie reportedly responded, "Yes, I have \$5 for each of you." That's when he shot each of them — two in the back.

But he wasn't finished. The money-grubbing Darrell Cabey, who just won the civil suit, was lying on the ground, shot, when Bernie said, "You don't look too bad. Here's another," and shot him again.

Whoop!



With such style, is it any wonder why he was acquitted of attempted murder in 1987 and won the hearts of millions of Americans like only Mary Lou Retton could?

Ever since then, it's been a field day for ordinary Americans who realize that law enforcement officers won't protect us when we need it most. While the FBI targets child molesters stockpiling illegal weapons in Waco and other so-called threats, the rest of us are crying for protection from suspicious people we meet every day in places like subways,

streets and churches.

Fortunately, militias have sprung up all over the country to protect our rights and safety from those who would rape us of them. Plus, they have the support of the NRA, so no one's gonna mess with them.

Even better, law enforcement officers have recently learned the lesson that the best defense is a good offense. In the past couple of months, two high-profile incidents have assured the country this is the case. First was the beating of the woman in South Carolina by a cop who caught her — of all the

revolting things — speeding. Then came the Riverside, Calif., circumstance in which police said, "Bienvenidos," to some shameful people who not only had the gall to be immigrants, but illegal immigrants at that.

Thanks to brave soldiers like Bernie and cops and militia members who stop crimes before they even start, I had never felt safer in my life.

But alas, the honeymoon would end. A New York civil court ordered Bernie to cough up a fortune to Cabey, who supposedly suffers paralysis and brain dam-

age from the gunshots. How much do you want to bet that Cabey will be catching some rays in Tahiti after the first check comes in?

Still, the spirit of Bernie's mission will not die. I have decided to take up his cause — to protect the innocent from the suspicious and to do it with style. I will do it my way, but with the inspiration of one of my other favorite vigilantes.

I just have one question: Does Super Wal-Mart sell Batarangs?

Jason Brown is a senior economics major

Ring Dance: a trip down memory (or bowling) lane

Visa — it's everywhere I want to be.

This week, it looks like I want to be at the tux shop, the florist and some restaurant that plays fast and loose with reservations.

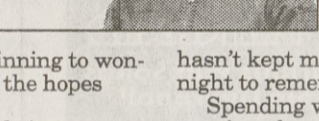
Ring Dance is tomorrow and as I shell out some of my unearned plastic, I'm beginning to wonder if the event can live up to the hopes and dreams of most Aggies.

We Aggies take a lot of pride in our bands of gold. So much pride, in fact, that we have over-romanticized the traditions surrounding them. Our ring rituals are so demanding that few of us can actually perform (or easily afford) them.

This weekend, \$55 will buy you and a date what an MSC box office attendant described as "hot and cold finger foods, non-alcoholic drinks and musical entertainment."

Very rarely am I a pessimist, but I admit that I am getting ready for a night of Mrs. Paul's, Hi-C and a Deep Blue Something/Robert Earl Keen medley.

JEREMY VALDEZ
COLUMNIST



One problem with the Ring Dance mystique is that very few Ring Dancers actually know what to expect. A quick survey of my friends showed that about the only thing we think we can count on is a long wait in line to have our picture taken in a giant ring. But our naive

hasn't kept many of us from preparing for a night to remember.

Spending well over \$100 on a single evening also puts many Aggies in something of a moral dilemma. I'm feeling a little decadent for spending money so I can shake my money-maker when there are people starving out there.

\$100 could sponsor several of Sally Struther's kids in some Third World country. Hell, \$100 could sponsor several of Sally's trips to some third-class rib joint.

I worry that for me, Ring Dance will be all too similar to an evening at the bowling alley. I'll be hot, sweaty and less than graceful on the floor. I'll be dressed in funny clothes, and when it's all over I'll have

to return the rented shoes. Ring Dance isn't the only ring-related event that gets blown out of proportion. Ask any good Ag how to dunk a ring and he or she will tell you that all you need is a pitcher, some space in the Chicken, and the burning desire to drink the hell outta beer in class seconds.

The only problem is many of us never get to live up to this partying paradigm.

On November 17, 1995, it was a dark and stormy night. A hard-charging member of the Class of '96 (we'll call him Jeremiah Vasquez) had just received his Aggie ring. Determined to christen it in the proper venue, young Jeremiah headed to Northgate. Alas, the hurling masses at the door proved what Jeremiah and his friends had feared — there was no room at the Chicken.

The party made a similar discovery at Dudley's. Even at the Northgate Cafe, Jeremiah found that there was no room at the inn ... er, bar.

Finally, Jeremiah had to break with tradition and settle for a table on the back porch of the now defunct Road-

house. In the rain.

His dunking long exceeded the goal of class seconds, and he betrayed his cool exterior by producing two geysers of malted froth.

But Jeremiah's story and this week have shown me what some people already know, and what all should remember. The best way to enjoy our overblown traditions is to remember what they hopefully celebrate, friendship and accomplishment.

Otherwise we run the risk of being disappointed by the dance that might not be worth the price, or the stopwatch that hits the century mark.

The bottom line is that ring traditions are only what each of us makes of them, and no one can take away what the rings symbolize — years of hard work, dedication and new experiences.

So I'll see y'all at Ring Dance. Look for me to be wearing a tux with tails that almost, but not quite, reach my bowling shoes.

Jeremy Valdez is a senior chemical engineering major



MAIL CALL

Discrimination hurts the unattractive, too

All this talk from minorities and women whining about losing their preferential scholarships and special treatment make me sick. Their level of discrimination in today's world is meaningless compared to an even bigger discriminator that exists today. What do you think is this discriminator? Race? No. Sex? No. What about sexual orientation? Nope. I dare say that the biggest discriminator in today's society is unattractiveness.

Let me ask you, how many times a day is a person discriminated against by his or her race, gender or sexual preference? I would guess about a dozen times. Now, how many times a day is a person discriminated against by a low level of attractiveness? 30? 40? 50? — in actuality this per-

son is discriminated against in almost every encounter that this person makes during the day with other people.

People of low attractiveness have always been discriminated on every level, from the workplace to interviews to the social scene. Heck, even the media pokes fun at unattractive people. Who is almost always the butt of sitcom's jokes? That's right, unattractive, socially awkward people. Who gets the promotion in the office most often, the attractive person or the unattractive person? Once again the clear choice is the attractive person, even though the unattractive person may be more experienced and has often worked harder to attain his or her position. Even fast food businesses hire and promote with one's level of attractiveness being a main criterion.

By far the most crippling lev-

el of discrimination for unattractive people is the social scene. When an unattractive person walks into a club/bar/class, people of the opposite sex avoid him or her like the plague.

Situations of discrimination against minorities and women are meaningless when compared to the hardships of unattractiveness. No matter what time period examined, from biblical times to modern times, unattractive people have always been discriminated against. Affirmative action recipients, when you are ready for a handout of free money and other extra perks based on your race or sex, remember that your plight is insignificant compared to the plight caused by the biggest discriminator of all history: unattractiveness.

Jonathan Endicott
Class of '97

Israeli brutality seen in wave of attacks

A five year old Lebanese boy, who was burnt to the point of disfigurement in the current Israeli shelling of Lebanon, swore "to kill all the Israelis" when he left hospital. This is how Hezbollah guerrillas, who seek

the destruction of the Jewish state, are made. The fact that Israel is occupying part of their country, Southern Lebanon, has been forgotten by the rest of the world. Hezbollah is not a group of some religious fanatics, but a guerrilla movement that is resisting this occupation.

Will a show of military might over one's enemies bring peace? It only creates further tension and bloodshed. Even while talking peace with the PLO, Israel is seeking to highlight its military supremacy in West Asia. The current onslaught on Lebanon by air, sea and land is the proof of this. The most tragic moment in this new bloody onslaught occurred last Thursday when Israeli artillery shells devastated a UN peacekeeping base in Southern Lebanon, killing 101 Lebanese refugees. More than 150 people have died in this sudden round of state terrorism. How many of them are Hezbollah's? The figure stands less than 10. It is true that Hezbollah has been striking within Israel for some time now, causing considerable bloodshed. Such groups were the "enemies" of peace so far. But is the Israeli military response in proportion to these crimes? How will the slaughter of innocents in Lebanon ad-

vance the cause of peace and reconciliation in the Middle East? As the chilling words of the five-year-old traumatized, Lebanese boy proves, the predictable Israeli savagery in response to "hard-liner" inspired hostile acts will only breed more and more hatred. The majority in the Arab world might begin to see some sense in the hard-liners' approach to problem solving.

The sudden and disproportionate Israeli reaction to the problems posed by Lebanon-based Anti-Israeli Hezbollah gives substance to the view that the gruesome episode is closely related with Israeli and U.S. politics. This is the election year and President Clinton knows how valuable American Jews' vote is for him to be reelected. The Shimon Peres regime is besieged by Israeli right-wing groups, which are making internal security an election issue. Hence, the current bloodletting. Unless the West, and the United States in particular, make Israel see the futility of choosing the military option and halt the bloodshed, the Middle East peace process could suffer a crippling blow.

Anil Rupasingha
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