

A better way exists

Ballistic fingerprinting could prevent mass murder tragedies from recurring

The recent sniper shootings created an unprecedented level of panic in the Washington, D.C. area. Armed with a Bushmaster XM15 semiautomatic rifle, snipers killed 10 people and injured three. The snipers eluded capture because of the scant evidence they left behind.



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The sniper shootings show the need for a ballistic "fingerprint" database. If such a system had been in place before the crimes had been committed, arrests could have been made sooner and innocent lives would have been saved.

The barrels of rifles "contain a series of spiral grooves" that leave "signature scratches on the bullet's surface" when the gun is fired, according to *Time Magazine*. Although these grooves are specified by the model of the gun, each rifle has unique imperfections that allow investigators to match bullets to a specific weapon.

Only two states have implemented a ballistic fingerprint database — Maryland and New York, according to *The Baltimore Sun*.

Maryland's database does not include rifles, such as the kind the sniper used to inflict terror. It is clear that a gun fingerprint database is needed at the federal level that includes all types of weapons. Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., wishes to introduce a bill that would make such a system a reality, according to *The Baltimore Sun*.

Such a database would require that a firearm be test-fired before it is sold so that its distinct fingerprint could be kept in a database that investigators could use later, according to *Newsday*.

Not surprisingly, gun-rights advocates are firmly opposed to the idea. They claim that such a database will lead to a national gun registry, according to *The Baltimore Sun*. They have also expressed doubts about the accuracy of gun fingerprinting. Some gun advocates say that the markings made by the firearm on a bullet change as the gun is fired many times. They also argue that criminals can deliberately alter the barrel of the gun, thus changing the imprint left behind.

But the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) strongly disagrees with these points. An ATF study showed that "bullets have been shown to be consistent through hundreds or thousands of firings," according to *Newsday*.

It is very unlikely that a criminal will shoot a firearm thousands of times.

The same study found that attempts to change the imprint of firearms by criminals were "exceptionally rare." One ATF firearms examiner, throughout his 15-year career, only saw two cases where a criminal tried to alter the imprint of a firearm, according to *Newsday*. Both cases were unsuccessful, and the ATF was still able to match the evidence to the precise firearm. Thus, there should be no fears about inaccuracy in a gun fingerprint database.

President Bush has also expressed his opposition to such a database. The administration claims that it takes this position due to privacy concerns,

according to *Newsday*. Ari Fleischer, White House spokesman, gave this argument in opposition to a national gun fingerprint database: "Is that to say that every citizen in the United States should be fingerprinted in order to catch robbers and thieves? ... The president does believe in the right of law-abiding citizens to own weapons." The position taken by the president is an ironic shame. He wants to do everything in his power to disarm Saddam Hussein of dangerous weapons, yet won't take the necessary measures to stop stateside terrorists who use firearms as their weapons of mass destruction.

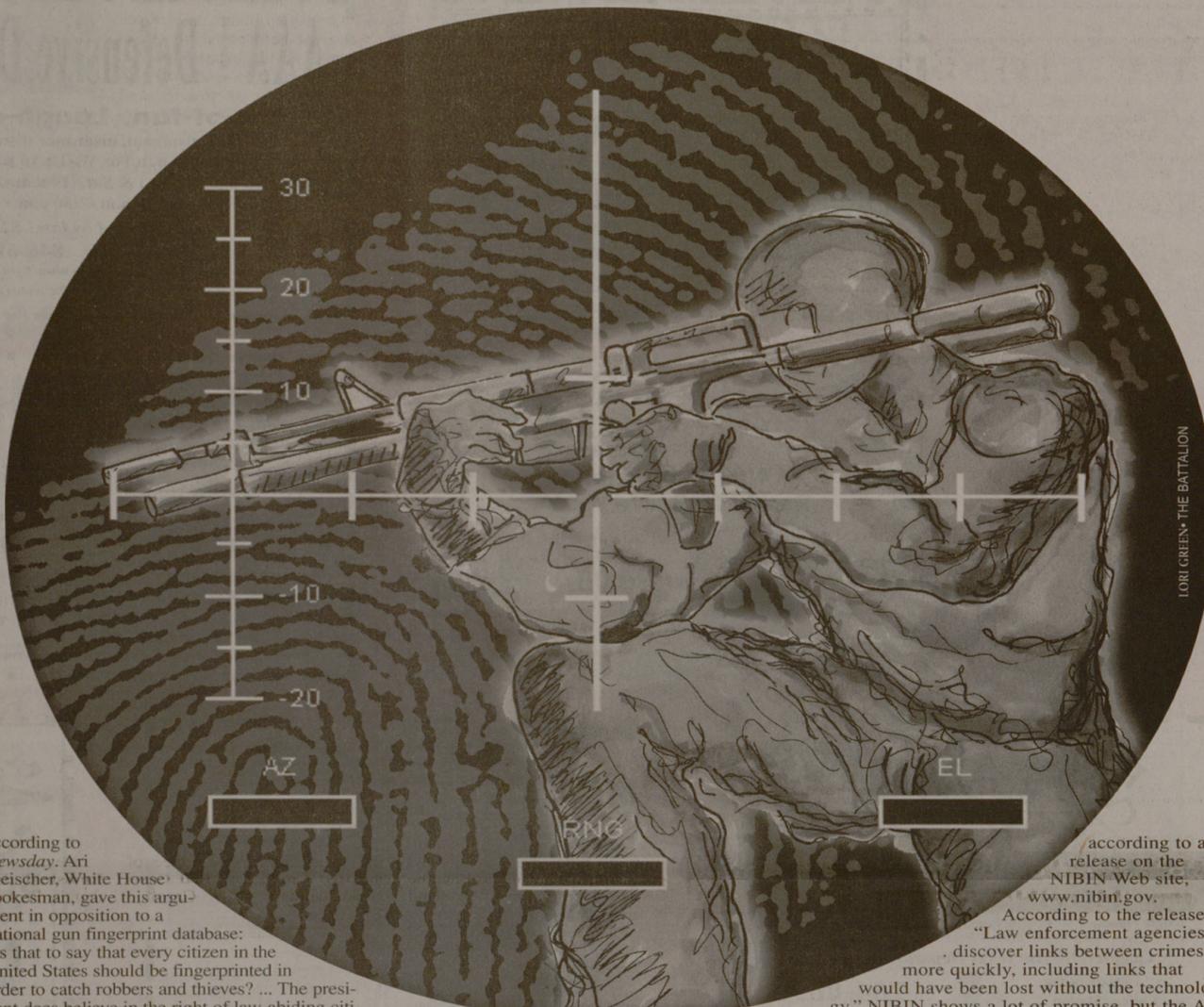
If the proposed ballistics database does lead to gun registration or something similar, legitimate, law-abiding gun-owners have nothing to fear. After all, if citizens want to vote, they must register.

Drivers also have the obligation to register their vehicles. There is no reason why guns shouldn't be registered. And the charge that such a system will lead to the confiscation of guns is laughable. The

Constitution, the supreme law of the land, explicitly states in its second amendment that citizens have a right to bear arms. But the public also has a right to safety. And law-enforcement officials have the right to information that could help catch killers.

This information could come from programs such as the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) which is deployed by the ATF.

NIBIN equipment compares the markings made by firearms on a bullet, thus minimizing the amount of evidence firearms examiners must inspect when dealing with a crime,



LORI GREEN - THE BATTALION

according to a release on the NIBIN Web site, www.nibin.gov.

According to the release, "Law enforcement agencies... discover links between crimes more quickly, including links that would have been lost without the technology."

NIBIN shows a lot of promise, but the ATF can only deploy the equipment to state and local law enforcement agencies. Legislation such as that proposed by Schumer can implement this type of system nation-wide. But without support from the president, there's very little chance it will become law, Schumer told *Newsday*.

Very little good has come out of the sniper shootings. But if it convinces America to implement an urgently needed gun fingerprint database, then the innocent people slaughtered will not have died in vain.

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Putting all public records on Internet violates privacy

Many problems can occur when new and updated technology is introduced. The court systems of the United States have seen such problems with the Internet and open access to public records.



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In the past, open access meant going to a courthouse to gather information. Now, with many courts streamlining workloads, court cases are on the Internet. Anyone with access to the Internet can get this information. Many issues of privacy, retaliatory actions and identity theft have come to the forefront because of the unlimited access to public records.

These cases contain large amounts of information that are sensitive, including Social Security numbers, names and addresses of witnesses and jurors and allegations of domestic violence. The federal court system has decided to put civil and bankruptcy cases online without personal information such as Social Security numbers, birth dates and names of minors, according to *The New York Times*. States need to follow suit by limiting personal information in state, county and city court cases.

Many critics argue that once the government is allowed to limit access to information, it will limit access to records off-line for alternative motives. "I'm deeply suspicious of anyone tinkering with open access records laws because they're usually doing it for a specific self-serving reason," said Timothy Smith, director of the Ohio Center for Privacy and the First Amendment at Kent State University in a *New York Times* article.

While it is a valid point to be leery of the government limiting open access because of

ideas such as freedom of the press, which would include the ability to access information, the issue of privacy and personal safety is a more pressing issue to solve.

It is not impossible to believe that some government officials may use this issue as an excuse for limiting the press' access to other public information, such as information covered in Texas' Public Information Act. The act allows information such as past criminal histories to be posted about government employees. The public has entrusted a certain amount of faith in its legislators to not abuse their power. To protect against such abuses, the public needs to be knowledgeable and informed about the measures its legislators are taking.

One of the greatest concerns about online open access to public records is identity theft and all the problems that are caused by it. "Some courts delete obviously sensitive data such as Social Security numbers, but one could also find bank account numbers and a person's name and address, information that could help an identity thief," according to *The Associated Press*. There have been many horror stories about a person's information being taken from records of minor court proceedings, including something as common as divorce cases. Another horror story is when an online thief opens credit cards in a person's name, leaving them with the debt and hassle of working to clean up the mess of all that results from an identity theft. An example of this is when "someone used the (Hamilton County court's Web) site to get, the general manager of Cincinnati's hockey arena, Jim Moehring's Social Security number and other personal details from a 1996 traffic ticket, opening seven credit cards in his name and charging \$11,000," according to *The New York Times*. By limiting the information placed in open records, states

could decrease instances like this. Another concern of open access is the vulnerability of victims, witnesses and jurors to retaliation from criminals or potentially becoming another victim for another predator. It is not a far stretch of the imagination to see the predictable dangers to these people if the information is readily available to anyone with access to the Internet.

A continuation of this concern is the idea of information from divorce proceedings, including lists of assets, names of children and even layouts of homes put divorced women at risk for stalkers.

"People don't have good intentions, and the county is laying a road map for them," said Randal Bloch, a Cincinnati divorce lawyer, in *The New York Times*. "It goes beyond stolen identity. It speaks of personal safety."

In the *New Jersey Law Journal*, Grayson Barber offers an idea of what information should be deleted from open access records. These include "income and business tax returns; names, addresses or telephone numbers of sexual assault and domestic violence victims as well as witnesses, informants and potential or sworn jurors in criminal cases; medical and mental health records; and trade secrets and other intellectual property." This type of information puts people at risk for serious dangers and consequences if they fall in the hands of people with evil intentions.

States, as well as other court systems, need to create clear and concise rules and procedures for limiting dangerous information from online public records. It is an issue of privacy and personal safety.

Brianne Porter is a senior political science major.

MAIL CALL

Corps member should not have attacked Nebraska football fans

I was extremely disappointed and saddened by the way the officer of the day performed at the game on Saturday evening. I don't believe that his actions were a reflection of the entire Corps of Cadets, but I do believe his actions will be reviewed as a reflection of our University.

I watched him run up to not one but two fans from the opposing team and punch one in the back of the head knocking him down and the other in the face. If the security guards were doing their job, no one would be on the field besides players, coaches, and other people with the team(s). I just hope that something is done to prevent people from running wild on Kyle Field and to prevent certain members of the Corps from making our University not only look like bad sports, but also make people question our traditions and integrity.

*Jennifer Ashley
Class of 2002*

Nebraska fans should not have been on Kyle field after game

I would like to know, where the police and security guards were on Saturday night to stop the Nebraska fans from rushing Kyle Field.

Furthermore, I was extremely disappointed to once again see the 12th Man leaving the stands after the Ags got outscored. Now, I know what those of you who left are going to say. You're going to bellow that you are completely within your rights to leave whenever you want.

However, the fact that it is your right to do something doesn't mean that something is the right thing to do.

Of course, everyone is entitled to their own opinion and their own actions. This is America. In my opinion, though, a good portion of the 12th Man needs a swift kick in the pants.

*Ryan T. Reynolds
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