

Subway vigilante reacted naturally to 'uncivilized' situation

What does it mean to live in modern American society, to be a civilized man? Webster asserts that a man who is civilized has been brought out of a condition of savagery or barbarism to a higher level of social organization, especially in the arts and sciences. Not coincidentally, the next entry in the dictionary is "civil law," the body of law having to do with private rights.

Sometimes, the paths of a civilized man and civil law conflict, such as when civil law fails to protect his private rights. It should follow that if he disobeys the law, even to achieve a goal both desire, the civilized man is ignoring society's rules and reverting to barbarism.

speaking out

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Almost unanimously, newspaper editorials and government officials have urged us not to take matters into our own hands like Bernhard Goetz, the New York subway gunman. This is understandable. No one expects to read editorials that condone violence. What is surprising is that the general public almost unanimously disagrees with them.

Goetz is considered by many to be a hero. He accomplished what many people only dream of doing: when four youths allegedly accosted him and demanded money, Mr. Goetz pulled out a gun and shot them, paralyzing one of them from the waist down. Though hidden from sight during the attack sharpened

screwdrivers were discovered on the four, who were also found to have a string of convictions.

Yes, I wish he had simply waved his gun and scared them off. I wish one of the four boys wasn't paralyzed from the waist down. I also wish there weren't any muggings or violent crimes. But, as the system does its duty, which is to punish Mr. Goetz, I have sympathy for him. I feel nothing for the four youths.

However, *Time* magazine states that, "Psychologically, he may have been punishing the four youths for his earlier mugging. He had made some racist comments in the past and clearly used more force than the situation called for."

Well, the actions of Goetz were not the result of a psychological imbalance. Simply put, he was learning from his mistakes. Goetz learned, through an earlier mugging, that he must arm himself if he expects to be safe from criminals.

While critics point out that he did not actually see any weapons, sharpened screwdrivers were the least Goetz could expect. Muggers do not charm money from people with smiles and open arms. They use violence and the threat of violence to get what they want. Goetz was protecting himself.

Of course, the unfortunate tailend to such thinking is exemplified by Roy Innis, the black chairman of the Congress of Racial Equality, who called for a "volunteer police officer" force of armed civilians to roam the streets. *Time* quotes him as saying, "After enough criminals get blasted, they will conclude that crime does not pay." This is as wrong as the too-harsh criticism of Goetz, for it entails attacking as opposed to defending.

In sum, I support Goetz's attempt to defend himself. I show no remorse over the shooting of the attackers, though it is certainly an act that must be punished. If Goetz had simply scared the attackers off, he would be a shining example of how a citizen should defend himself. However, if he had, Goetz would not have received nearly as much, if any, publicity.

So, some good has come out of this unfortunate event. Society has been alerted to a serious problem and given a general solution: self-defense. I should add that if the four attackers had drawn their sharpened screwdrivers, as they very well might have done, that Goetz would be right to shoot them. It is a fine line, but I would rather see an innocent victim cross it than see a wanton criminal crush it.

A civilized man should realize that mugging is an uncivilized act. More importantly, he should know it demands an uncivilized response. Giving an attacker your money is just as uncivilized as defending yourself with a gun.

We must all ride the subways of modern society, whether we live in New York, Kansas City or Gainesville. As we hurtle along, the cars tend to rattle and roll, jumbling violence, vigilantism and villain into an incomprehensible mess. Fortunately, when it seems as if the train is jumping the tracks, we are merely changing lanes and nearing the light at the end of the tunnel, the light of civilized man.

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