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Know them by their silence

IT WAS SOMETHING a lot of New Yorkers, particularly minority New Yorkers, never expected to hear: "The blue wall of silence," a law enforcement source told the Daily News, "is not a wall anymore."

In the aftermath of the sadistic assault on Abner Louima, several police officers have come forward to tell what they know. Some, like the one who failed a lie-detector test, might only be trying to save their own sorry skins.

But at least two others are genuine, true believers in the oath they took when they joined the NYPD. And at the head of the list is Officer Eric Turetzky, who first blew the whistle on the 70th Precinct's neanderthals-in-uniform.

He and the unnamed officer who turned in a pair of bloody gloves allegedly used in the assault are emerging as the heroes of the piece. The others should be considered villains — unless they tell all. Until then, their silence speaks volumes.

There were as many as 20 officers in and out of the precinct during the time Louima was in the stationhouse. Surely more than two know something.

To its credit, even the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association is promoting the search for the truth. While emphasizing the union's "contractual and moral obligation to represent police officers in trouble," President Lou Matarazzo urged every officer "with any knowledge that might help investigators learn... what happened that night to come forward with complete candor and tell what they know."

It's a message that can't be repeated often enough.

Turetzky is under police protection, which says two things quite clearly. 1) When it comes to certain cops, a man with a conscience can be in danger; and, 2) Obviously, there are enough decent sorts in the NYPD to afford Turetzky the protection he deserves. And needs.

Yesterday, Mayor Giuliani announced the formation of a task force (one of its members is Daily News columnist Stanley Crouch) to try to bridge the gap between New Yorkers and the NYPD. And Zachary Carter, federal prosecutor in Brooklyn, has pledged that his investigation will be pursued "wherever it goes." In his announcement, Carter noted that something led the sadists to think they could get away with such a blatant abuse of human rights. What was it?

The answer might appear self-evident, but the more evidence that's gathered, the stronger the chance for real justice and, perhaps, for a long-needed purge of NYPD miscreants. And of the cop-culture miasma that permitted them to exist.

The only way to make that change happen is for good cops to come forward, to stand for honor instead of silence. When enough do, they will be creating a new tradition: The Blue Wall of Truth. Eric Turetzky is showing them the way.

Taking a toll

In getting rid of the toll on the Cross Bay Bridge in Queens for local residents, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority is getting it half right. The toll should be eliminated altogether.

Gov. Pataki told the MTA to end the toll for residents of Broad Channel and the Rockaways who must face highway robbery to get to their post office, schools and supermarket. The bridge connects "mainland" Queens to the Rockaway peninsula.

The MTA tried to justify the levy by saying it lowered the \$1.75 toll to \$1 for residents who bought tokens, and to 67 cents for those using E-ZPass. But even the MTA realizes that charging a toll to travel within the same zip code is unfair — and probably illegal.

Pataki was right to demand a change, but the toll barriers on this tiny bridge should simply come down. When more than 40% of the people using the bridge no longer pay for it, what's the point of keeping the toll collectors and E-ZPass system intact?

The MTA will still have similar costs with far less revenue. And it wouldn't exactly be fair to tell New Yorkers that while Rockaway residents should be allowed to get to the beach for free — all other New Yorkers who want fun in the sun must spend \$3.50 each time they go out there.

Just as it made no sense to collect 50 cents from passengers on the Staten Island ferry, it makes no sense for the MTA to spend millions each year on toll collectors and administrative costs when the people who use the bridge most often aren't paying.

When the MTA board meets Sept. 30 to discuss removing the toll, it shouldn't be satisfied with half-measures. It should go all the way and level the toll booths.

She devil

From the wires: SYDNEY, Australia — Men should be able to dress as women and walk the streets of the Australian island state of Tasmania without fear of arrest, according to a review of the island's 60-year-old police laws released Monday.

Oh, no, Rudy has taken his Inner Circle act on the road.



VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Double standard?

Brooklyn: I was in total disbelief when I read about the torture of Abner Louima. But I had no choice but to wonder about prejudice. Two weeks ago, two cops were suspended without pay for taking a joyride across state lines. The cops accused of sodomizing Louima initially were put on desk duty. Where is the justice in that? Is the life of a foreigner not worth much? **Janella R. Meeks**

APB for EKG

Manhattan: Each of the police officers who assaulted Abner Louima should examine his own heart to see if he is human.

Leonard Jackson

Crazy solution

Woodhaven: Since police brass have "demanded the removal of plungers and other potentially dangerous objects" from stationhouses, how can they stop at bleach and kitchen utensils? Perhaps all rulers, pencils, matches pens, chairs, telephone cords and glass objects also should be removed. The removal of bleach was the most ridiculous remedy for prevention of abuse and torture. If cops cannot have bleach, how can they have guns?

Christine Schleyer

Crazy cops

Bronx: I question the psychiatric checks that are done before people become cops. If these checks are so thorough, how is it that one policeman killed a man whose football hit his car? How can a policeman rape a prisoner while others know it is happening? Everyone who knew about the attack and did nothing should have his head examined. Whether an officer used a plunger handle or his own organ, he committed an act of rape. As long as psychiatric checks are perfunctory, this will happen again.

Karen Silver

Police slogan

Staten Island: Re the article "Dismissed recruits sue academy alleging bias" (Aug. 15): If you can't pass the class, you can't wear the brass. End of story.

K. Sabbagh

Make the grade!

Elmont, L.I.: To the police recruits who could not pass the NYPD exam and now are suing the department for raising the score to 75%: The score should be

raised to 80%. If you can't pass, then you obviously do not have what it takes — brains and common sense — to be a police officer in the city. The old score, which was 70% (C-), was ridiculous.

Joy Parris

No response

Manhattan: The other night, I was kept awake by a blaring radio on Amsterdam Ave. Finally, at 4 a.m., I called the 33d Precinct. I was told that a patrol car would be sent over to handle the situation. The cops never arrived. This is not an isolated incident. If I lived on Riverside Drive, they would have arrived within 15 to 30 minutes. Yet, because I live in a low-income, minority area, I am not given equal priority. There are a few of us in Washington Heights who are law-abiding, hardworking citizens who deserve a response to our complaints.

Suzana Rodriguez

Look in mirror

Manhattan: To all complaining MetroCard users: I have been using the card since the inception of MetroCard Gold. The only time I ever have a problem is when I do not properly swipe the card. I see so many people getting angry

at the turnstiles/bus machines when they are improperly using the card. Don't blame the machines if you don't know what you're doing. **Matthew Roberts**

Clearing the air

Toms River, N.J.: To Voicer Edwin Glassman: You seemed to have missed my point. How much do you think it would cost to "renovate" JFK and LaGuardia? A conservative estimate would probably be somewhere around \$2 billion for both. LaGuardia and JFK were designed and refurbished in the '40s and '50s, respectively. Newark Airport was opened in the '70s. People coming to New York use Newark because it is faster and much more convenient. That will never change. **Mark DeGeronimo**

Not so easy

Staten Island: To Voicer Michael Goldsmith: Just like detachable stereos, bare E-ZPass Velcro strips do not guarantee a thief that the tag is inside your car (nor should it be), hence, most thieves would move on. Mike, I don't believe we are really talking about E-ZPass anymore. I think you're upset that I classified you with the other "vanity stricken idiots." Well, I concede you're not vanity stricken. **Joseph Vidal**

Food tax

Brooklyn: So New York is going to lift the sales tax on clothing under \$100 for one week next month. Big deal. The meanest tax is that on food. We don't buy clothes every day, but we surely eat every day and pay that 8.25% tax. Let's cut that tax or eliminate it — for good. **John G. Wolber**

Patience is a virtue

Staten Island: I certainly wouldn't want anyone in my family to have been assaulted in the same manner as Mr. Louima was, but what's with the protest in Brooklyn? What else do you want done? Four officers were arrested, more people were transferred, and the investigation continues. Only one week had passed by the time the march happened. Witnesses have to be interviewed, facts and evidence evaluated.

This is not Haiti, so we don't kill the accused upon hearing an allegation. In America, we have what's called "innocent until proven guilty." I am not judging whether the officer is innocent or guilty, but give the wheels of justice time to turn. Remember, they turned for O.J. Simpson, right?

P.S. Don't try to make this a racial issue, it's a human issue. The KKK never would have allowed an Italian into their ranks — especially one with a black fiancée. **Cheryl Augustyne**