

## REALITY CHECK

JACOB SULLUM

We can thank Saddam Hussein for one thing, at least: The prospect of a real war in the Persian Gulf has diverted attention from the drug war at home. One year after the release of William Bennett's *National Drug Control Strategy*, the *New York Times* reserved a space at the bottom of page 14 for its story about President Bush's progress report on the antidrug campaign.

It's been a success, by the way. "I think a prudent and cautious judgment on our present circumstances would be that the drug problem—in general, nationwide—is no longer getting worse," Bennett said at Bush's news conference. "In some very significant respects [it] is now getting better—not victory, but success." Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Joseph Biden noted that casual drug use "appears to be plummeting" and praised the administration's efforts to promote that trend.

Yet the most-recent data on nationwide drug use come from a survey carried out in 1988, so it's a mystery how anyone can judge the impact of an antidrug campaign launched in 1989. Furthermore, drug use has been dropping since well before George Bush was elected; the household survey conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse has found a decline in overall use of marijuana since 1979 and of cocaine since 1982. In any case, unless the administration is prepared to accept blame for increases in drug use, it should not expect to receive credit for the continuation of trends that began a decade ago.

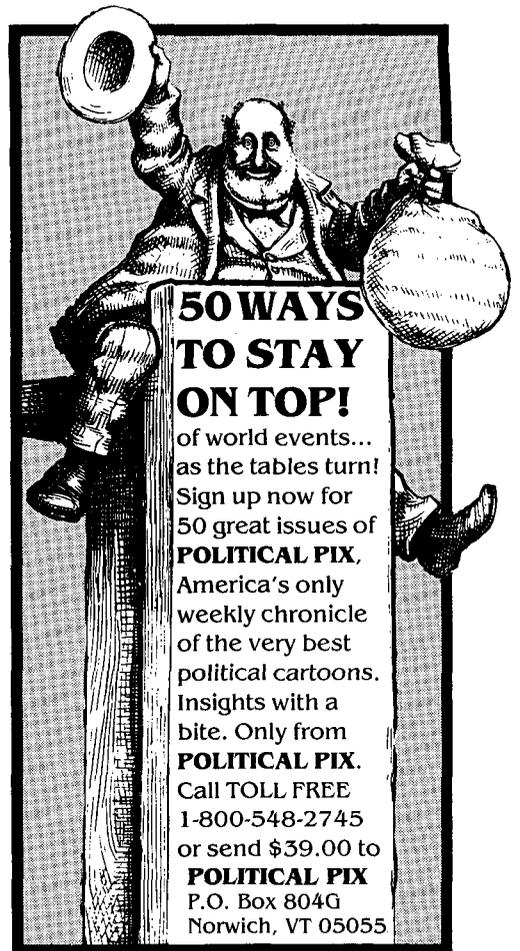
Bennett pointed to more-recent developments as well. Data from NIDA's Drug Abuse Warning Network indicate that the number of emergency-room patients who mentioned using cocaine (not necessarily those who suffered from cocaine-related problems) declined by 27 percent between the third quarter of

1989 and the first quarter of 1990. It's not clear what these figures mean. Furthermore, the DAWN sample is not random, so it's not even representative of U.S. emergency-room patients, let alone the general population.

Should Bennett come up with more convincing evidence of success, he may have difficulty finding an audience to impress with it. According to the *New York Times*/CBS News poll, the percentage of Americans who consider drugs the nation's number-one problem declined from 64 percent in September 1989 to 10 percent a year later. Analysts have reached a startling conclusion: If you bombard people with antidrug propaganda for a few months, they will tell you that drugs are a big problem. After a while, however, they will move on to other concerns.

Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates is a little behind the curve. Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the first anniversary of Bush's baggie-of-crack speech, he called casual drug users traitors who "ought to be taken out and shot" for aiding the enemy in time of war. Although Bennett talks about beheading drug offenders only in theory (and even then, only dealers), Gates's statement—which he later repeated—is the logical conclusion to be drawn from the rhetoric of the drug warriors.

The police chief must have seemed especially out of touch to anyone who recalled a story that received wide publicity just a few days before his testimony. A 22-year-old tourist from Utah had been fatally stabbed on a New York City subway platform while trying to defend his mother against a gang of robbers. This is real crime, and citizens have a right to demand that law-enforcement officials devote their time and effort to fighting it, instead of waging phony wars against manufactured enemies. □



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## LETTERS

### Courting Controversy

My compliments to Stephanie Gutmann for her excellent article on date rape ("It Sounds Like I Raped You!," Jul.). As a teacher of rape-prevention classes, I was most impressed with how well Ms. Gutmann's article addressed the confusion about this issue.

In my classes I emphasize assuming personal responsibility for avoiding or defeating violent assaults, and for acquiring the necessary awareness and skills to do so. But the current ideas about "date rape" greatly confuse the issue of personal responsibility. Many of these ideas invite women to cast themselves as passive victims—exactly the opposite attitude they need to have before they can effectively take care of themselves in genuinely threatening situations.

It is legally very dangerous to confuse coercion through the use or threat of violence or physical force with simple social or psychological pressure, no matter how intense. While it is appropriate to defend yourself with potentially deadly force against an assailant who is trying to physically force his way into your body, it is rather less appropriate to shoot someone who is whining at you to go to bed with him. (And rather foolish to try to reason with someone who is physically attacking you.) When we muddy the definition of rape, we make it much more difficult for the potential rape victim to recognize her own situation and respond appropriately.

*Anthony M. Gregory  
Indianapolis, IN*

I WANT TO EXPRESS MY admiration for the courage and clarity with which Stephanie Gutmann considered the topic of date rape and its adverse implications for female independence.

Ms. Gutmann hints at, but does not specifically address, a terribly serious ramification: By using the concept of "date rape" to excuse personal passivity, women may become even more vulnerable to hard-core *assault* rape. Rapists deliberately choose their victims to subjugate them, and any woman who is taught to think that sexual ambivalence and lack of assertiveness is excusable may be a victim of preference for such predators. Being armed with a handgun can be a powerful deterrent to assault rape, as well as an effective instrument of defense and deliverance—but for a woman to go armed requires a degree of deliberation, clear thinking, self-knowledge, and assertive determination that the "date rape" habit of thought would make impossible to muster.

It would be too easy to misconstrue the issue; there is no question that any act of coercion is inexcusable, rape no less than any other violation. However, neither is there any excuse for the victim to find refuge in passivity.

*Michael J. Dunn  
Auburn, WA*

STEPHANIE GUTMANN makes some good points about the blurring of distinctions between rape (a crime of violence) and caddish seduction. Yes, people concerned with rape prevention should stop devaluing the horror of real rape—and many acquaintance rapes are just that—and yes, women should stop playing "go away a little closer" games or accepting more alcohol than they can handle.

While most of what I read accords with what I saw when I was on the board of a rape crisis center, much more emphasis should have been placed on the *man's* role in situations where the woman is not clearly a willing participant. It goes without saying that only a foolish woman would go into a biker bar in a strange city on a Saturday