

Tuesday, June 11, 1996 • DAILY NEWS

Crime and apathy on the D train

By **JOSIAH H. BROWN**

THE WIDELY reported attack on a woman in Central Park — and the reluctance of anyone to help when she was first found — recalls my own recent experience.

I was mugged three weeks ago, on a Manhattan-bound D train at 11 p.m. Up to then, the evening had been routine. Returning home from a friend's apartment, I had boarded the subway in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, for a trip to the upper West Side. I was relaxed at the conclusion of a long week and absorbed in a copy of *The New York Times*.

His fists struck without warning, throwing me off the seat, onto the floor, around the car. "Give it up!" he demanded. I clutched my wallet and groped for my senses as seconds passed. My repeated shouts of, "Someone help me! Please!" were ignored by some 20 fellow passengers.

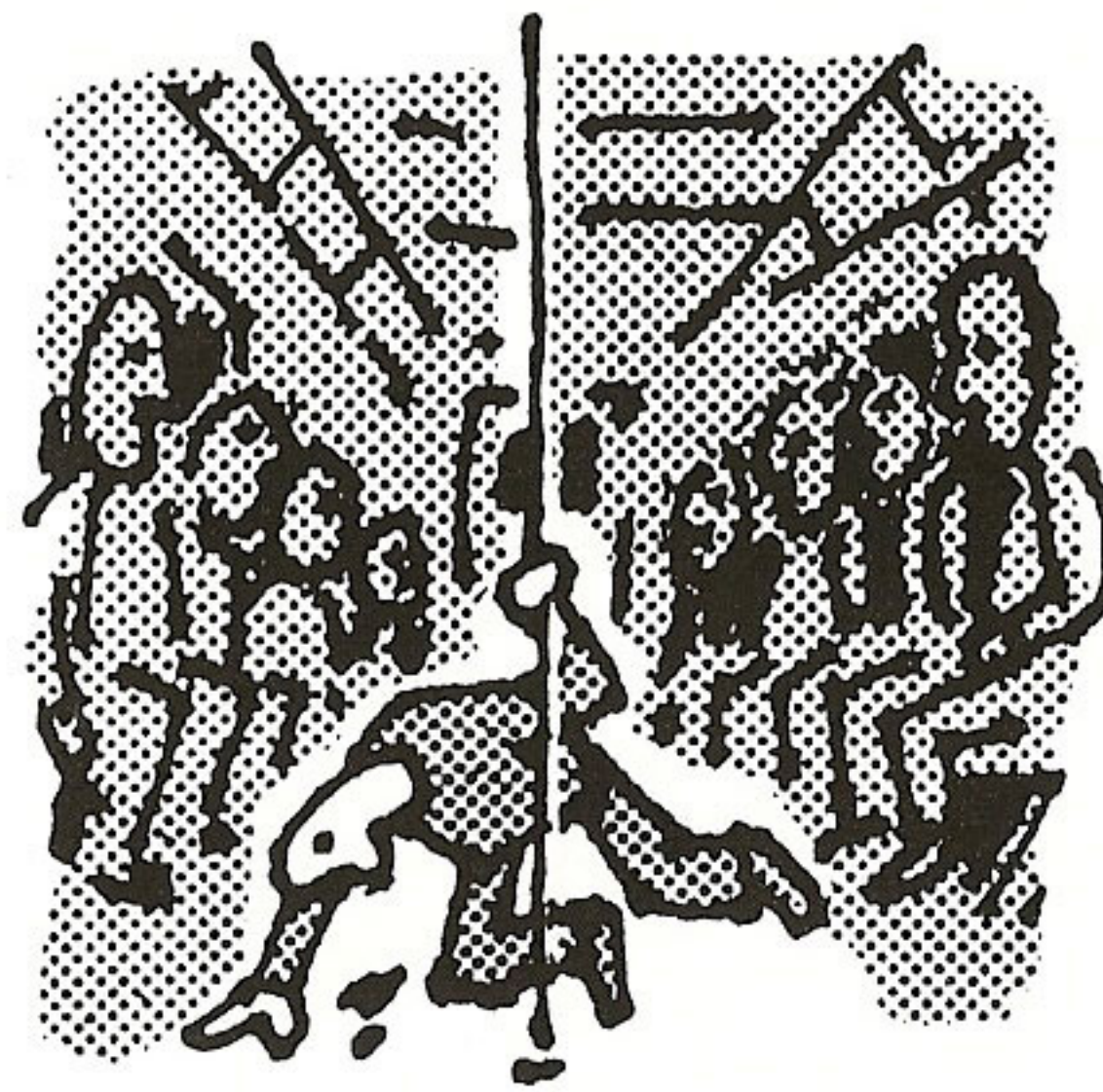
At first, I couldn't see them — couldn't see anything — but in awaking to the danger and scrambling quite pos-

sibly for my life, I glimpsed them sitting, inert, impassive. No one responded, no one moved, no one even offered a kind word when it was over.

Once I'd recovered my wits and balance, and as I continued to grip my wallet, the mugger settled for my canvas bag and dashed out the door. He disappeared into the next station, and I thanked God I was alive.

Then I got angry, walking the length of the car, forcing my witnesses to confront my battered face and urine-soaked pants. "Couldn't somebody have done something?" I asked. "How could you all just sit there?"

The silence was startling. A couple of teenagers dismissed my naivete with rolls of their eyes. Everyone else looked away, except for a little girl young



enough to stare. Realizing my isolation, and relieved that the attacker was gone, I retrieved my newspaper.

An hour later, I had talked with the police and called my roommate. Shrugging off the theft of my keys and camera, I accepted what seemed to be just bruises and bloody nose. At least

he wasn't armed, I thought.

But my comfort was laced with bitterness, shock and disbelief. No longer fearful, I was disgusted — stunned by the apathy of those who might have assisted me but didn't.

How could so many men and women be cowed by one punk? Does self-preservation overwhelm all benevolent instincts?

Brown is special assistant to the president at the New School for Social Research.