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## Blacks and Jews

**I** believe it is time to get beyond Dr. Leonard Jeffries or our reaction to him and to find out if his assertions are true or false," says New York State Assemblyman Albert Vann, chair of the Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Caucus, about the City College professor's charges at an arts festival in July that Jews have conspired against blacks in Hollywood, in setting educational policy and in promoting the slave trade.

It's unclear who called this court into session, and who is judging whom, and by what warrant. But whether this is a trial of the Jews precipitated by the ovations some blacks have given Jeffries, or whether it is a trial of Jeffries and his supporters prompted by Jews' outcries, it is a setback for the legitimate claims of multicultural education, which his celebrants, not the media, insist on linking to his fate. Worse, it is yet another wrong turn for a black protest politics that, since the Tawana Brawley case, has kept mistaking communal psychodramas that belong in cultural theaters for the interracial organizing desperately needed in public places.

The emergence of C. Vernon Mason, of Brawley hoax fame, as Jeffries's attorney is a tip-off as to how this will end. Just as Mason and some of the same activists needlessly alienated a thin but vital stratum of white ethnics who wanted justice done in Howard Beach; just as he and others embittered feminists in the Central Park jogger case; just as their tactics in the boycott of two Korean groceries in Brooklyn dislodged the Asian tile from Mayor David Dinkins's "gorgeous mosaic," so now they are burning blacks' last bridges to liberal Jewry.

The reason few black leaders warn of the danger can be found in the admonition of Michael Meyers, a black attorney who heads the New York Civil Rights Coalition: "Too many of us are intimidated by charges that we are controlled by the establishment, are tokens of the whites," he told *The New York Times*. So the air is thick with rationalizations: Jeffries is merely speaking the scholarly truth; Jeffries has been misrepresented—proof of yet another conspiracy.

The full text of Jeffries's conference remarks reveals a rambling polemicist, not a scholar. He said that Jews and the Mafia had engineered "a financial system of destruction of black people. . . . It was calculated." He said that resistance to multiculturalism is led by U.S. Education Department official Diane Ravitch, "a Texas Jew" and a "debonair racist." "Many people, such as the Ravitches, who happen to be Jewish, have blinded us on the attack coming from the Jewish community—systematic, unrelenting. . . . Not anti-Semitic to raise the issue—but if you do not deal with it, you're fooling yourself."

The question is not whether such charges are true, or taken out of context. The question has to be why, with a dozen black film directors moving mainstream audiences, Jeffries waves

a list of dead Jewish movie moguls; why, when George Bush has given us education secretaries such as William Bennett, Jeffries singles out Ravitch; why, after the Korean boycott highlighted black economic desperation, he talks about Jews in the slave trade.

There are historical reasons, of course. Jeffries has made Jews surrogates for the white establishment and exaggerated their marginal role in slavery because Jews have been classic intermediaries between urban elites and the black poor. If you were a black New Yorker in the 1950s, Jews often decided whether you got an apartment, job, passing grade, welfare check or probation. "In most cases," notes Brooklyn newspaper publisher Andrew Cooper, "the encounters were not unfriendly. But there's bound to be a reaction when you feel people are manipulating your life and have power over what you can achieve."

Enter Jeffries, a bit late, ushering his listeners into a psychic landscape flickering with old, familiar demons. Yet that side of his black-Jewish story doesn't fully explain his allusions, for no other white group has given more, individually and collectively, in dollars, votes or moral witness, to black struggles for justice. In a curious way, this side of the story, too, helps explain his obsession.

Simply put, Jeffries understands that Jews are white folks whose skin you can get under. Baiting them gets a rise out of at least part of the white establishment, no small thing for aggrieved blacks to whom no one listens. Out of their peculiar mix of insecurity and idealism, Jews do listen. They are the first among whites to take alarm at black rage. Others show far less concern, and some of them don't care much for Jews, either. That takes a lot of the risk out of Jeffries's posture of defiance.

But because Jews listen, baiting them has long-run costs. For instance, Jews have always supported black candidates at rates double those of other white groups—even in David Dinkins's 1989 victories over Edward Koch and Rudolph Giuliani. Jeffries is investing needlessly in the demise of that support. That, combined with the consequences of the paroxysms that have alienated other groups, means that Dinkins is New York's last black Mayor for the foreseeable future.

Given Dinkins's fiscal-crisis politics, that's not the worst of the consequences. Once again, decent progressive blacks' hopes for social change are being derailed by charlatans; once again, thousands of innocent blacks are going to suffer yet more undeserved isolation and contempt. There has to be a better way forward, for blacks and for all of us.

JIM SLEEPER

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**The origins of Colin Ferguson's hate.**

# PSYCHO-KILLER?

*By Jim Sleeper*

In the weeks since the December 7 Long Island Railroad massacre, scores of commentators have cited the diversity of gunman Colin Ferguson's grievances against Caucasians, Chinese, "Uncle Tom Negroes" and "so-called civil rights leaders" to argue that he is a deranged loner. And he is. But none of the reports took into account the most compelling explanation for his malevolent worldview: the dangerous political subculture in which he was steeped. No one, it seems, is willing to entertain even the possibility that Ferguson's delusions were fed by the politics of Crown Heights, Tawana Brawley, the Central Park jogger, the Korean boycott and other cases—a politics of paranoia and rage about white and Asian racist conspiracies that has dominated New York City's black media.

Notes found on Ferguson after the slayings repeat, with an eerie fidelity, the catechism of diverse hatreds taught in recent years by many civil rights leaders, among them Colin Moore, a black Brooklyn lawyer who was a militant defense attorney in the Central Park, Korean boycott and Crown Heights cases. Two days after the Long Island Railroad massacre, Moore revealed in an essay in *Newsday* that Ferguson had in fact approached him in 1991, seeking help in a discrimination case against Adelphi University. Ferguson had professed admiration for Moore's handling of the Central Park case (in which he had charged that the jogger's injuries were trumped-up and that her sex life was to blame). Ferguson "felt we had a lot in common," Moore reported.

Yet for the next seven days, the flood of commentary about the massacre rolled on without a single reference to Moore's astonishing report—a remarkable act of collective denial by the media. If Ferguson had been white

and had, say, sought help from an attorney for David Duke, we would have heard about it endlessly. Pundits certainly had much to say about the culpability of the militant pro-life movement when an anti-abortion activist killed a doctor at a Florida clinic last year. And when New York's other railroad gunman, Bernhard Goetz, shot four black teenagers in 1984, there was plenty of talk about the "climate of racism" and "white backlash" around Goetz, even though, provoked by four black teens, he hadn't fired indiscriminately at the non-white passengers in his subway car. Black activists also cited Goetz's demagogic attorney, Barry Slotnik, as proof that even tormented loners like Goetz aren't really alone in their rage—isolated from the rest of us in some respects, perhaps, but also bound more intimately to our subconscious hatreds and fears than we care to admit.

So why not give similar attention to Ferguson's apparent susceptibility to the delusions of omnipresent white conspiracy that have made their way into black protest politics? Why not consider the influence of rhetoric that freely vilifies members of other groups, elevates rage into a virtue and speaks of fighting the power "by any means necessary"?

New York's most militant black leaders have traded freely in that sort of currency. As the black boycotters of Korean stores called the shopkeepers "yellow monkeys" and their customers "Uncle Toms," attorney Moore prolonged the ugliness by thwarting Mayor David Dinkins's attempts at negotiation. For years, Moore has been spitting hatred at whites, Asians and certain blacks—twice in Ferguson's own Flatbush neighborhood.

"No matter what Colin says, he never looks at an issue as anything but a racial war," says Melissa Pressley, an East Flatbush activist who worked on Moore's first losing City Council campaign in 1991, but eventually became disillusioned with his tactics. While the targets of Moore's wrath are racially varied, no one dismisses him as an "equal-opportunity hater," as pundits did Ferguson. Somehow, everyone understands that a seething resentment of whites is the core around which his subsidiary hatreds revolve.

The same goes for the militant black protest politics that transcends Moore's participation and is often as delusional as anything Ferguson conceived. Were the Central Park jogger's wounds really trumped-up, as Moore claimed? Did New York Attorney General Robert Abrams really masturbate over photos of Tawana Brawley, as her advisers claimed? Did Irish Republican Army rituals really guide Brawley's supposed abduction?

And was it reasonable for black talk radio host Clayton Riley, referring to several white journalists by name during the mayoral campaign, to admonish his listeners to remember Colin Powell's maxim: "Find the enemy, isolate it and kill it"? In a *Village Voice* column two months ago, Nat Hentoff wrote an open letter to WJLB owner Percy Sutton, asking whether he had considered what might happen if a deranged listener took Riley's

comments literally. Sutton never replied, and Dinkins appeared for ten minutes every Monday morning on Riley's show throughout the controversy.

By accepting such behavior as normal, by continuing to accord Sutton respect and to call the Brawley advisers and Moore "civil rights leaders," reporters and columnists confer a kind of legitimacy on the fantasies of loners like Ferguson and Goetz. That's why there is something phony, even desperate, about the chorus insisting that Ferguson is utterly isolated in his derangement.

Finally, though, the game is up. Moore has offered to represent Ferguson—at Ferguson's request and, Moore claims, at the behest of unnamed members of the black community. "Whether they agree or disagree with what Mr. Ferguson did," Moore said, "they would like to see that he has proper representation." *Whether they agree or disagree?* And still, no one dares call Moore delusional, for to do that would be to implicate black activism in Ferguson's rage.

There is extraordinary denial at work here. When Louis Farrakhan mentioned Ferguson at a New York rally on December 18, his audience erupted in an ovation that seemed to startle Farrakhan himself. That recalled the Central Park jogger and the Reginald Denny cases, which seemed open and shut until fantasists transformed the perpetrators into martyrs.

Incredibly, that same impulse to shift the racial blame is evident in the Ferguson case, and not only among Farrakhan's enthusiasts or in Moore's remarks. Instead of admitting forthrightly, as Michael Meyers of the New York Civil Rights Coalition does, that "Ferguson's crime was a race crime," mainstream columnists move seamlessly from saying we must not associate Ferguson with black activist histrionics to saying we must associate a few white politicians' post-massacre calls for the death penalty with a general white racist backlash—and they see no contradiction.

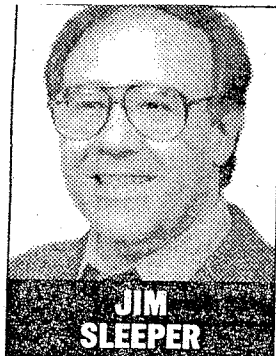
Instead of suggesting that some black activists might benefit from a little soul-searching, columnists seem almost eager to expunge race from the discussion. In New York, many local commentators look for signs of a white backlash that hasn't occurred. The entire discussion is skewed by a virtual taboo against talking about what Moore's involvement in this case really means.

What it means is what the black poet Julius Lester wrote in *THE NEW REPUBLIC* in October 1985, when Farrakhan addressed a rally in New York: "The time has come to stop making apologies for black America, to stop patronizing black America with that paternalistic brand of understanding which excuses and finds reasons for the obscenities of black hatred. . . . Farrakhan is subtly but surely creating an atmosphere in America where hatreds of all kinds will be easier to express openly, and one day, in some as yet unknown form, these hatreds will ride commuter trains into the suburbs. By then it will be too late for us all."

JIM SLEEPER is a columnist for the *New York Daily News*.

# Racial roots of the LIRR massacre

DEC. 28 '93



JIM SLEEPER

Ever since the Long Island Rail Road massacre, a chorus of commentators has cited the sheer diversity of gunman Colin Ferguson's grievances against Caucasians, Chinese, "Uncle Tom Negroes" and "so-called civil rights leaders" to argue that he's just a deranged loner — not a deranged loner steeped in a particular delusional subculture.

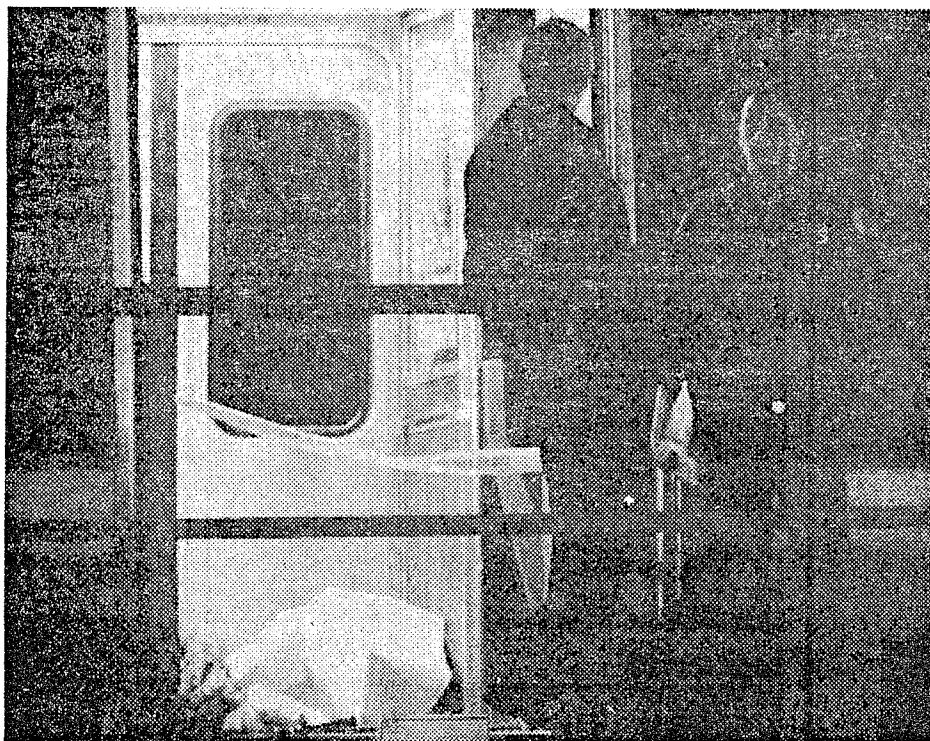
Ferguson is surely deranged. But no one, it seems, wants to entertain even the possibility that Ferguson's delusions about omnipresent racism and anti-black conspiracies were fed by the politics of the Tawana Brawley, Central Park jogger, Korean boycott, Crown Heights and other cases — politics of rage and paranoia that dominate some of the city's black media and tolerate even the repeated broadcasting of death threats at white journalists.

Notes found on Ferguson after the slayings repeat, with eerie fidelity, the catechism of hatred for whites, Asians and Uncle Toms taught recently by many black activists, including attorney Colin Moore, who has abetted attacks on all these groups and now wants to be Ferguson's lawyer.

That Moore wasn't actually on Ferguson's list of "so-called civil rights leaders" intrigued me, for he'd been active in Ferguson's Flatbush neighborhood. Just after the massacre, on a hunch, I wrote that "the only people who can reach victims of racism such as Ferguson are those, like Moore, who may have reached them already."

That very day, Moore revealed that in 1991 Ferguson had in fact asked him for help in a discrimination case against Adelphi University. Ferguson had professed to admire Moore's handling of the Central Park case (in which Moore charged that the jogger's injuries were trumped up and that her sex life had caused them). Ferguson "felt we had a lot in common," Moore wrote.

Yet, for the next seven days, the flood of commentary about the massacre rolled on without one reference to Moore's revelation. If Ferguson had been white and had sought out, say, an attorney for David Duke, we'd have heard about it endlessly. Pundits had lots to say, too, about the culpability of the militant pro-life movement when an



anti-abortion activist killed a doctor at a clinic last year. And newspapers gave plenty of space to talk about the "climate of racism" and "white backlash" surrounding New York's other railroad gunman, Bernhard Goetz — even though, provoked by four youths, Goetz hadn't fired indiscriminately at the nonwhites in his subway car.

In those cases, it was legitimate to argue that tormented loners swim in a sick social sea — isolated from the rest of us in some ways but more attuned to our subconscious hatreds and fears than we care to admit.

So why not give similar attention to Ferguson's apparent susceptibility to the delusions of white conspiracy that have come to characterize some strains of black protest politics? Why not consider the influence of rhetoric that vilifies members of other groups, elevates rage to a virtue and speaks simplistically of "fighting the power" "by any means necessary"?

For years, the most militant black leaders have traded in that sort of currency. As the black boycotters of Korean stores called the shopkeepers "yellow monkeys" and their customers "Uncle Toms," Moore prolonged

the ugliness and embarrassed Mayor Dinkins by thwarting negotiations on behalf of his client, a Haitian shopper who claimed she'd been beaten.

When Red Hook Principal Patrick Daly's killers were sentenced last year, Moore said they'd been "lynched by a bloodthirsty mob who wanted someone to pay for the death of this white Samaritan."

When Moore's legal colleagues, Alton Maddox Jr. and C. Vernon Mason, claimed that New York Attorney General Robert Abrams had masturbated over photos of Brawley and that Irish Republican Army rituals guided Brawley's supposed abductors, they had the support or acquiescence of many black leaders,

When WLIB talk-show host Clayton Riley referred to several white journalists by name during the mayoral campaign and reminded listeners of Gen. Colin Powell's maxim, "Find the enemy, isolate it and kill it," he did so without criticism by black leaders. Two months ago, Village Voice columnist Nat Hentoff wrote an open letter to WLIB owner Percy Sutton, asking what would happen if a deranged listener took

Riley's comments to heart. Sutton never replied, and Dinkins appeared for 10 minutes every Monday on Riley's show.

And now, Moore has offered to represent Ferguson — at Ferguson's request and, Moore says, at the behest of some in the black community. "Whether they agree or disagree with what Mr. Ferguson did," Moore said, "they would like to see that he has proper representation." *Whether they agree or disagree?* Yet no one dares call Moore delusional. To do so might implicate black misleadership in Ferguson's rage.

It's time we stopped denying the fact that no man is an island. When Louis Farrakhan referred to Ferguson at the Javits Center last Saturday, his audience erupted in an ovation that seemed to startle Farrakhan himself. That recalled the Central Park jogger and Reginald Denny cases, which seemed open and shut until fantasists transformed the perpetrators into martyrs.

## Skewed by a taboo

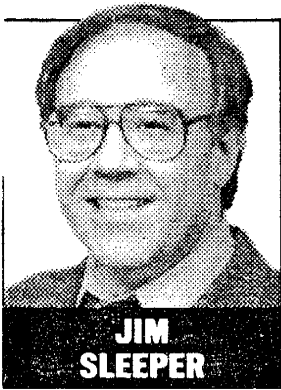
Incredibly, a similar impulse to shift the racial blame seems to be emerging now. Instead of wondering what explains the applause of Farrakhan's enthusiasts — and instead of acknowledging, as did Michael Meyers of the New York Civil Rights Coalition, that "Ferguson's crime was a race crime" and suggesting that some black activists might benefit from a little soul-searching — mainstream pundits have moved seamlessly from denying any link between Ferguson and black-activist histrionics to linking some white poils' calls for the death penalty to a general white backlash that hasn't even occurred.

I don't think most commentators mean to do this. I think our discussions have been skewed by a virtual taboo against exploring what Moore's involvement with Ferguson really means. What it means is what the black poet Julius Lester wrote in 1985 when Farrakhan last visited New York:

"The time has come to stop making apologies for black America, to stop patronizing black America with that paternalistic brand of understanding which excuses and finds reasons for the obscenities of black hatred ... Farrakhan is subtly but surely creating an atmosphere in America where hatreds of all kinds will be easier to express openly, and one day, in some as yet unknown form, these hatreds will ride commuter trains into the suburbs. By then it will be too late for us all."

3/1/94

# Massacre in Israel forces a hard look inward



JIM SLEEPER

In December, I wrote that LIRR gunman Colin Ferguson can't be understood outside the sea of racial bile and paranoia he swam

in. I added that, while black radicals weren't culpable for his crimes, they could use some soul-searching. Now Baruch Goldstein makes us apply the same standard to part of the Jewish community, and you may be interested to know that that means applying it, harshly, to me. Goldstein's is a road that beckoned me in my youth.

At 13, I left my Yankee hometown to spend the first of many summers at a Hebrew-speaking camp with kids from, among other places, Goldstein's yeshiva in Flatbush. I learned to chant the Book of Esther, which Goldstein read to his children before embarking on his mission of death. I went on a group tour of a still-fledgling Israel, whose energy and sweetness intoxicated me as deeply as Holocaust movies had shaken me. When the Six-Day War began on my 20th birthday, I tried to become a noncombatant volunteer, but my parents refused the required legal permission.

None of which distinguishes me from thousands of other young Americans who became vigorously Jewish in the '60s. The sense of embattlement that was mixed with our pride seemed to satisfy deep cravings for belonging, direction, even defiance. It seemed to free us from countless insecurities, including a baseless yet gnawing fear of rejection by an America that was someone else's country.

Israel's physical distance deepened the romance of our self-imposed peril. It was a giant screen where we could project our fantasies with a clarity the real world rarely supports. Africa serves Leonard Jeffries' followers similarly, as Cuba and China did young leftists. While Jews' and blacks' experiences here differ vastly, what strikes me about nationalistic young blacks is the all-too-familiar misplaced enthusiasm, the too-easy answers to per-

as time passed. Even in a racist society, similar regrets may haunt blacks who segregate themselves, with empty defiance, on liberal campuses.

Eventually I chose American Jewishness, in all its ambiguity, over Jewish nationalism, in all its deceptive clarity. Out of love for my friends, many far removed from any recoverable ethnic past, I shed my own ancient feuds and fears to seek an American identity that's thick enough to live in. Because Goldstein chose otherwise, I say he was right to leave the country. The line I draw is not the one separating him from saner Jewish expatriates, but the one separating all of them, living out their nationalism in the blinding clarity of the desert, from the rest of us, who risk ourselves differently, across lines of religion and race, to create a new kind of national community.

Unlike some leftist moralizers, I don't doubt the fateful grandeur of the Jewish nationalists' choice. I do doubt the right of their bellowing supporters here, and counterparts in other ethnic groups, to turn the American experiment, which has its own grandeur, into a West Bank, Belfast, Bosnia or Boer War. America is about *not* having to live that way. I won't trade Louis Brandeis or Saul Bellow for Meier Kahane; blacks needn't trade Ralph Ellison and Martin Luther King Jr. for Louis Farrakhan.

In other words, not only don't we need Colin Ferguson or Baruch Goldstein, we don't need the smooth-talking fanatics who handed them their bloody scripts. We shouldn't aid them by shrinking — leftists from misplaced shame, rightists from misplaced pride — from defending America's flawed but precious legacy. I am nothing if not consistent on this. This time, some Jews have soul-searching to do.

*Choosing America's ambiguity instead of deceptive clarity*

sonal doubts and American dilemmas.

In the 1970s, a few things made me do a double take on my own posture of defiance, as if I'd stumbled suddenly upon my reflection in a full-length mirror. First, my Jewish education had a liberal bent that kept Arabs human. Israelis face a grim reality, and I honor their legendary toughness and pragmatism. Still, their situation attracts fanatical American wanna-bes who annoyed me so much in 1969 that I returned to Israel on an Arab-Jewish relations project, meeting Palestinians in Acre and Haifa — a lasting antidote to nationalistic excess.

Second, growing up in New England made it hard to give up on America, as Goldstein did. Unlike him, I had the democratic faith of my Yankee mentors. Unlike blacks who feel shunned by non-blacks, I had non-Jewish friends who were more ready to accept me than I was to trust them — an insight that shamed me