

Letter From New York City

by Murray N. Rothbard

It Was a Long Hot Summer



I returned to New York at the end of May for my summer stint to find that both bellwethers of New York life, the far-out left *Village Voice* and the chic liberal *New York*, were headlining (respectively) "Race Rage," and "The Race Mess." Yes, the fabled and much-dreaded Long Hot Summer was already well under way.

In fact, the "summer" had been raging ever since February, when a still-continuing boycott was launched against two Korean fruit stores by militants in a black neighborhood in Brooklyn. Details of the February incident are murky, especially since, as one of the baffled Brooklyn district attorneys put it, "the Korean and the black witnesses say the opposite things, and there is no way of deciding between them." All sides agree, however, that at the root of this and many other incidents is a "clash of cultures" between blacks and Koreans. The blacks claim that the Koreans "never smile," that they "dis" (show disrespect for) feisty black women, and that the Koreans don't understand the West Indian (the black woman in the February incident is a Haitian) proclivity for higgling and haggling over prices.

The first point to note is that the "never smile" charge can only be calculated to impress non-New Yorkers. Since when do *any* retail clerks in New York smile? In fact, the New York customer, in any retail dealings from "Bloomie's" on down to the supermarket, considers himself lucky if the clerk doesn't chew gum in his face. I remember the first time that I, a born and bred New Yorker, lived in California. It was a real shock when bank tellers said to me, "Hello, sir, how are you?" and "Have a nice day." My immediate reaction was, "What's she

up to?" and "What scam is she pulling?" It took months outside of New York to decompress.

Furthermore, how come that Koreans are not systematically rude to *white* customers, be they male or female? And how come that blacks, even Haitians, don't expect to higggle over prices at any *other* stores? No, the real culture clash is very different from what has been portrayed in the left-liberal media. Over 200,000 Koreans have migrated to New York City in the last decade, and they have opened up 4,000 greengrocer stores throughout the city. Not only that: the stores invariably have far better vegetables and fruit (though of course at higher prices) than the quasi-garbage offered at the supermarkets, they are open 24 hours a day, and Korean families pitch in and work 18 or more hours a day. In short, the Koreans have not only revived the old, much-lamented Mom-and-Pop stores outcompeted by the supermarkets, but they have proved that hard work and thrift is the path to success and upward mobility. Typically, the Koreans spend next to nothing out of their modest revenues and, in a few years, save enough money to open up other stores. In the classic immigrant tradition, the Koreans have overcome the great barriers of language and lack of capital (even though they were middle-class and well-educated in their native land, the South Korean government, until recently, only allowed them to take a maximum of \$5,000 per person out of the country).

Leftists see this phenomenon as another race "exploiting" the "black community." But why do blacks flock to buy the Korean wares? And why don't consumers in white neighborhoods feel they are being "exploited"? And why can't blacks open up stores and work hard? Liberals counter that white racist banks refuse to lend money to stores in neighborhoods with high crime rates and declining property values. How then do Koreans get the capital? From a network of Korean families and self-help organizations, which pool their savings to lend money

for precisely such purposes. There is no reason why blacks couldn't form similar organizations.

Black activists also complain that Korean stores in black neighborhoods "don't give any money back to the community," which in plain English means hiring blacks and paying money to black churches and other "community organizations." The Koreans answer, and quite rightly, that their family labor force is extremely dedicated and low-cost, and that unlike large corporations, they can't afford such thinly veiled blackmail in the name of altruism. Besides, they resent such demands.

Which brings us to another "culture clash." The February incident in Brooklyn occurred when a Haitian woman, exasperated at standing in line, decided to walk out of the Korean fruit store. Suspicious that the woman had purloined some of their fruit, the Korean owner and his workers demanded to see her bag. She refused (even though every large store in New York displays a sign proclaiming the store owner's right to search a customer's bags). A scuffle then ensued, during which she claims that she was knocked to the floor (and suffered a slight cut finger) and the Koreans claim that they discovered in her bag three dollars worth of fruit.

In short, part of Korean "culture" is to resent theft of their property very deeply. Trained also to be suspicious of any police, the Korean storekeepers prefer defending their property themselves. These storekeepers, either out of bitter experience in New York or because they have imbibed white racist stereotypes (take your pick), are particularly suspicious of black customers, and are therefore possibly more ready to "dis" them than whites. And there we have it.

This black boycott has become an integral part of rising black militancy in Brooklyn. Mayor David Dinkins—the first black mayor in New York history—and his administration are caught between two opposing sets of expectations. His white liberal supporters

elected him because he is soft, slow, and nonthreatening, and they believed that he could calm the black militants and bring New York racial peace. His black supporters, however, particularly in militant Brooklyn, voted for Dinkins in order to get a lot of goodies from the New York government. These goodies have not been forthcoming. Another problem is that Dinkins and his black advisers, coming from the relatively genteel old politics of Harlem, have never understood the militant and fiercely antiwhite mood of black Brooklyn. As a result, Dinkins has awakened to find that two sets of militants who give him fits are now in charge in Brooklyn. Sonny Carson, convicted kidnapper and proud hater of all whites, is the Grand Old Man of the Korean boycott, while The Terrible Trio, lawyers C. Vernon Mason and Alton Maddox, and the self-ordained "Reverend" Al Sharpton, responsible for the Tawana Brawley "rape" hoax in upstate New York, keep threatening racial conflict if, for example, any alleged white murderers of blacks are not duly convicted in court. Indeed, Stephen Murphy, the tough white defense lawyer for the eventually acquitted youth Keith Mondello, alleged Bensonhurst murderer, received many death threats from angry blacks. When Mayor Dinkins duly followed the white line by calling for peace and harmony and denouncing racial boycotts, the beefy Mason charged Dinkins with racial treachery and with "wearing too many yarmulkes" and appointing "too many Jews" in his administration.

Meanwhile, Brooklyn blacks have begun random assaults against Vietnamese (well, after all, don't they all look alike?), thereby bringing other Asian groups (most of whom hate each others' guts) into the fray in sheer self-defense.

Incensed at black racism, a black teacher at Brooklyn's Erasmus Hall High School, Fred McCray, led 30 black youths into the Korean Family Red Apple store—site of the February incident—to cross the angry, snarling picket line and patronize the store. McCray proclaimed that "unity means love." For his pains, McCray and his family received death threats, leading him to request a transfer from the school.

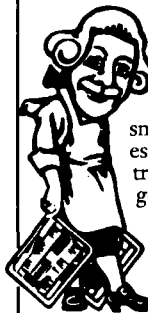
Revolutions tend to leave their pioneers behind, and so an interesting phenomenon of this accelerating race conflict is what has happened to a couple of venerable, streetwise, Irish Catholic left-populist writers prominent in the New York press: Jimmy Breslin and Pete Hamill. Even after decades of championing liberal causes and bleeding for the poor and the oppressed, Breslin and Hamill have never quite absorbed the idea that white males are per se guilty for all the evils of mankind. Pete Hamill never had quite his old enthusiasm for the black masses after the famous black gang-rape and assault of a white lady investment banker in Central Park last year. And Breslin, in early May of this year, reacted vehemently and in typically colorful language to an impertinent message sent on inter-office electronic mail by a fellow *Newsday* reporter, Korean-American Ji-Yeon Mary Yuh. Breslin had written a humorous column protesting that his wife, who is prominent in liberal Democratic circles and now high up in the Dinkins administration, was neglecting her wifely chores in pursuit of her political career. It was in the classic spirit of Henny Youngman's "Take my wife—please!" but Miss Yuh, who like all professional anti-sexists and anti-racists lacks appreciation for high wit, denounced Jimmy's column as viciously "sexist." Breslin, enraged, rushed into the press room at *Newsday* and denounced Miss Yuh as a "slant-eyed . . . yellow cur," further making what the *New York Times* cautiously referred to as "an obscene anatomical reference."

Oh the fuss and feathers! The venerable Breslin had not realized that the country had glided quickly into the tyranny of Left-Puritanism, and petitions by *Newsday* reporters and writers angrily demanded Breslin's head. The thought police were hard at work cracking down on "hate crime." Didn't they know about the rough-and-tumble of the pressroom, and about the great tradition of *The Front Page*, and didn't they realize that streetwise Jimmy could not be expected to react in the now-approved style of a "sensitive" young househusband? Breslin made the required apology to Miss Yuh, but there were some Inquisitors who felt that Jimmy's repentance

lacked the requisite degree of abasement, and sure enough Jimmy had the gall to go on the notorious Howard Stern radio talk-show and to laugh off the entire incident. (Stern is the king of Obnoxious Radio in New York, in which the host functions as the lightning rod for suppressed racist-sexists in his listening area.) Well, that tore it, and *Newsday* promptly suspended Breslin without his munificent pay for two weeks. The Hate Police had gotten at least a pound of flesh, and so they pronounced themselves satisfied, albeit grumbling about the fact that a couple of years ago a *Newsday* editor not enjoying the prominence of a Breslin was overheard making racist remarks at a cocktail party and was promptly fired. Clearly that's what the Hate Squad really wanted, and the editor of the Portland *Oregonian* spoke for them all by canceling the offender's column permanently. Apparently, in our free and democratic America, a hundred flowers may bloom and a thousand arguments contend, but anyone who

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commits a Hate Thought is in danger of getting the ax and being permanently barred from the “free marketplace of ideas” that our Establishment likes to crow about.

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Letter From the Lower Right

by John Shelton Reed

An Academic Remnant

As a rule I don't use this letter for academic shoptalk. Most of you aren't college professors, and few things are more tedious than another profession's gossip. Besides, there's no regional angle to this stuff, except that the trendy foolishness currently plaguing American campuses may afflict Southern schools (Duke University aside) marginally less than those elsewhere. Still, if you don't know about an organization called the National Association of Scholars, you should. Back in June I went to a meeting of that group in New York, and I'd like to tell you about it.

The NAS aspires to be an umbrella group for faculty members concerned or at least annoyed by what's going on around them. This gives it, to say the least, a broad agenda. At one time or another the organization and its quarterly, *Academic Questions*, have deplored entropy in the curriculum; the metastasis of race, ethnic, and gender studies; the denigration of excellence and Western civilization in the name of “diversity” and “multiculturalism”; the deformation of humanistic learning by tendentious or self-indulgent “theoretical” work; the proliferation of race- and sex-based hiring and admissions policies; and no doubt other enormities that I don't recall at the moment.

Of course, not every NAS member is exercised about all of these issues. Some of us are soft on multiculturalism, for instance. Others doubt the efficacy of imposing a core curriculum on unwilling students, or fear what

a core curriculum designed by today's professors might look like. A few try to look on the bright side of literary theory and victim studies. Some (mostly tenured) aren't wild about the alternatives to affirmative action. Others just question whether it is politic for the NAS to bundle all of these issues: after all, the broader the agenda the narrower the constituency.

Still, the issues do tend to come as a package, and from pretty much the same promoters. And most of the NAS program ought to appeal not just to us reactionaries but to liberals of the old-fashioned sort who have had enough and aren't going to take it any more. That's certainly true when the organization steps forward to defend the traditional academic freedoms of speech and inquiry.

It's hard to talk about the threats to these freedoms without sounding hysterical, but they are threatened. That's not new, of course; they usually are. What's new is that the threat these days comes from what we might as well call the left, and that the usual defenders of academic freedom (notably the American Association of University Professors) are strangely supine in the face of what they would ordinarily call McCarthyism.

In my own discipline, for instance, the American Sociological Association was called upon a few years ago to censure James Coleman of the University of Chicago for producing a study of busing with conclusions that were not politically correct. At Harvard, when historian Stephan Thernstrom was denounced for “insensitivity” in the classroom, his accusers at first declined to specify the charges further; eventually they produced a list of offenses that included Thernstrom's observing that 19th-century Chinese immigrants practiced an “Oriental” religion, and remarking that family instability contributes to present-day black poverty.

Now, Coleman and Thernstrom are big boys, bull elephants of the academic jungle, and they weathered these episodes without permanent damage — although they've both become active members of the NAS. But what about students and junior faculty? When the Sensitivity Police come for men and women without named chairs and international reputations to protect

them, a new double standard is applied without shame. Last year a student editor published some stupid slurs on Duke's black cafeteria workers; he was drummed out of office without one solitary bleat from the usual First Amendment fundamentalists. When an art student's offensive painting of Chicago's former mayor in ladies' underwear was torn down — well, actually I think it should have been torn down, but then I feel the same about Mr. Serrano's *Piss Christ*. (Even if Jesus Christ's reputation is on firmer ground than Harold Washington's, how about some concern for the feelings of Christians?) But where were the defenders of the supposed rights of that student “artist”? Hell, he wasn't even receiving NEA funds.

It's probably the 98-pound weaklings of academia who need the NAS most, and one of the great pleasures of the New York meeting was hearing from some of the Charles Atlases of our profession. One session dealt with the question “Can the Professoriate Reform Itself?” The consensus seems to be that, no, it can't, but everyone seemed pretty cheerful nevertheless. When you hear sense being spoken by people like Coleman and Thernstrom, by Gertrude Himmelfarb and Dean Donald Kagan of Yale — well, it's encouraging. You realize that you're not just right, you're in good company.

It's like the famous Asch experiments, which Intro. Psych. students of a generation ago may recall. Asch asked groups of people to say which of several lines was the longest. The actual subject of the experiment was the last to be asked, after several pseudo-subjects had confidently and consistently made the wrong choice, and often the poor schnook simply caved in and went along with the group. Some just felt it wasn't worth arguing about, but others were actually led to doubt the evidence of their own eyes. A few, unusually suggestible, even saw one of the shorter lines as longest, when the others said it was. Even subjects who made the right choice usually did it hesitantly and apologetically.

Apparently it takes a real hero, or a real jerk — anyway, someone unusually stubborn or arrogant or courageous — to insist that everyone else is simply wrong, even when they obviously are. That's the bad news. The good news,