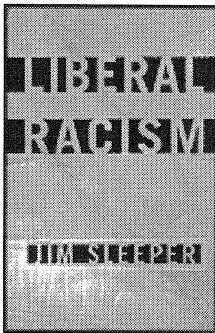


ARCHIVE INTERVIEW

~ Tuesday, August 5, 1997 7 PM ~

## Jim Sleeper: LIBERAL RACISM



**Moderator:** Welcome to the BarnesandNoble.com auditorium. We are excited to welcome, Jim Sleeper, who will be here at 7pm to talk about his new book LIBERAL RACISM. You can go ahead and enter questions into the queue by clicking the SUBMIT QUESTION button on the screen. We look forward to chatting with you this evening. Welcome!

**BarnesandNoble.Com:** BarnesandNoble.Com welcomes Jim Sleeper, author of LIBERAL RACISM. Welcome to all.

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**JS:** Publishing a book with a title like this has been an interesting experience. Reactions have been ranging across the spectrum and I can't wait to see what the BarnesandNoble.com audience's reaction is.

**Thomas from Jersey City, NJ:** What compelled you to write this book?

**JS:** The slow and painful realization that Liberal "solutions to racism," which I have always embraced, where only compounding the problem. In politics, schools and the legal system, I watched my liberal friends and allies leaping ahead of conservatives to draw new race lines in the American Civic landscape. After fighting so nobly to help Americans rise above color it seemed almost every liberal's "remedy" to racism involved making people define themselves first and foremost by skin color and name -- the very opposite of what we have said we were fighting for. To justify this we kept finding more and more racism under every rock and every bed. In the inner-city communities I knew best, this was so clearly counter-productive that even amid the reality of racism it began to seem wiser to pull back. Incidentally, in some of the lunier Liberal remedies like racial election districting, hard core conservatives where popping up as liberal allies. That was a tip-off that something was wrong.

**Craig N. from Chicago, IL:** What racial ideology do you think people must embrace in order to get a racially healthy environment?

**JS:** I think we have to get back to the trans-racial civic faith that Americans once professed to believe in. Liberals were always the framers of great public naratives that inspired people like the black labor leader A. Philip Randolph and writers like Albert Murray and Ralph Ellison to put forward an American vision beyond color. We should be renewing that. I don't mean that we should dispense with racial or ethnic sub-cultural loyalties. I do mean that like the black Baptists in the South during the Civil Rights Movement we should use the best values of the sub-communities to face outward and to embrace a larger American identity. For example, I 'd like to see a

Hollywood movie in which a black or Latino Jimmy Stewart serving on a jury refuses to act only as a delegate of his or her race and instead leaves the jury to a verdict that really rests on the true guilt or innocence of the person regardless of race. What an inspiring story that could be. Why aren't we telling it? We sure need it.

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**Amelia from North Carolina:** Hello Mr. Sleeper. What kind of response have you gotten from the liberal population you describe in your book? Also, if it's possible to generalize, what is the primary reaction from African Americans?

**JS:** Among Liberals it breaks down in two ways some are defensive and some reviewers will seize on certain lines in the book to complain about it's tone. I think what they are saying is "don't touch my belief structure, it hurts." These are folks who are pretty much hard-wired into the old solutions and in some cases, their careers are based on implementing those solutions. But, many other Liberals are saying to me, "Gee, Liberal Racism is a phrase that has crossed my mind several times a year because I know some things are wrong and I haven't had a a chance to think it through. The book is an attempt to do that and I think that is why people are reading it.

The African American reaction has been really interesting. Most blacks I have spoken with feel drawn to the title, they say "Oh, I want to read that." To some, Liberal Racism refers to people who aren't doing enough to expand the existing racial remedies. But, to others Liberal Racism seems to mean exactly what I say it does in the book: the condescension to non-whites, lowering standards so much that the intended beneficiaries don't get a feeling of real satisfaction, and most important, the drift into racial essentialism -- the "multi cultural assumption" that your skin color makes you the bearer of a particular culture and makes you almost as different as segregationist used to say. I have met more then a few Blacks that feel that is what Liberal Racism is doing, the best of intentions but with the worst of misconceptions.

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**Moderator:** For those of you just joining us, Jim Sleeper, author of LIBERAL RACISM, is here discussing the issue of race in America. Join in! To ask a question, simply click the red SUBMIT QUESTION button on the left of your screen. We're glad you could join us.

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**Daniel from OLD LYME, CT:** Hey Jim, I have been a fan and reading your stuff for years. . . I am curious to get your opinion of some of the other syndicated columnists out there. . . Are you a fan of George Will, Pat Buchanan etc.?

**>JS:** Hi Daniel, I think the conservative columnists you mention are often correct in how liberals get things wrong, but I don't often endorse their own solutions. Conservatives have a bad record on race and it isn't enough to point accusing fingers. I wish those columnists where taking a stronger stand against discrimination. Some black columnists are very reasonable, William Rasberry and Clarence Page. It is only a coincidence that they both praised LIBERAL RACISM.

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**Victor Perton from Melbourne, Australia:** I regret that your book has not yet arrived in Melbourne. How do you define liberal for the purposes of your text?

**JS:** To Englishmen and Australian, Liberal often means just individual rights and free markets--precisely what American Conservatives defend. But in America due to our unique racial history, Liberals have become the champions of Big Govt. interventions to redress economic and racial inequities. I think we do need some such intervention, but we can't get stuck with it so that we stop respecting people's ability to change of their own free will. On race, I honestly think Liberals have stopped giving Americans credit for trying to get beyond the black/white divide, and

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**Lawrence T. from Washington, DC:** Who are some politicians that you think have the proper view of race relations? Thanks for taking my question.

**JS:** I don't think it is an accident that many whites were drawn to Colin Powell as he thought of running for President. In the Army he oversaw an affirmative Action program that makes sense. It encourages people to strive harder and others to judge them more fairly. In electoral politics we have a new generation of black mayors -- Dennis Archer of Detroit, Mike White of Cleveland -- who have rejected the Marion Barry method of simply "playing the race card," trading on racial grievances and victimology. Similarly, some of the black members of Congress whose black-majority districts were abolished by the Supreme Court had to run in white majority districts last year. And to everyone's surprise they were re-elected by white voters. Most of these politicians are pragmatists who had the courage to reach across racial lines instead of circling the racial wagons like Rep. Maxine Waters of LA or indeed Marion Barry. Again, I write a lot about this in chapter three of LIBERAL RACISM.

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**Amy from Charlotte, NC:** In your book, you mention that liberals should advance economic opportunity? When talking about liberals, doesn't that generally involve programs based on affirmative action and minority grants that tend to accentuate rather diminish than racial differences?

**JS: YES, AND THAT IS THE PROBLEM.** For example, Liberals should have done much more to encourage Black business development and much less to expand welfare entitlements, under rules that undercut the family structure. Every racial and ethnic group has advanced by starting it's own small businesses and carving out it's own niche in the economy. And we see this especially in non-white groups including Indians, and others besides the Chinese and Koreans. Skin color clearly is not the problem in America as much as the legacy of slavery has been. If liberals are serious about addressing that, they should be serious about creating wealth promotion, yet for decades we went in almost the opposite direction through the welfare programs.

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**Moderator:** Mr. Sleeper will be answering one or two more questions before he leaves us this evening. We hope you have enjoyed the discussion.

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**kimothy from Wash. D.C.:** Mr. Sleeper, do really believe the melting pot theory works? You seem to point to that in your first response in this chat. I mean, people of different races ARE different in some ways at least. Why pretend otherwise? It seems counter productive to interracial understanding.

**JS:** Good question. In my view we have been leaning too much in the direction of differences while on the ground, the rates of inter-marriage and other mingling are moving ahead. Several million young Americans are already removed from every easy recoverable racial or ethnic identity. I believe it is this country's destiny to show the world how to keep faith with such people as Americans. It is not that I think that it is wonderful to transcend racial differences, I think it is our destiny and we should be preparing for it.

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**Paul from Morris PLains, NJ:** Hey Mr. Sleeper, I was watching one of these chats the other evening in which Kenneth Davis was the author online and he said he thought the United States (the South in particular) has never fully recovered from the Civil War. Do you agree with him?

because they don't give people enough credit, they are imposing some solutions that only tend to make it worse.

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**Carly from LA:** What is your opinion of Affirmative Action? I haven't had a chance to read your book yet but am interested in whether or not you think affirmative action is divisive?

**JS:** Yes, I think it is divisive. Two examples: In New Jersey, two teachers -- one white, one black -- in a highschool department had the same seniority and qualifications. But, the school board let the white teacher go when they needed to downsize because they felt they needed more black teachers -- in Piscataway, NJ, where there are plenty already. The black teacher who has been retained feels anguished and insecure about her position because the policy has deprived her of the ability to feel that she was kept on qualifications alone. They should have flipped a coin. Even more interesting, when the University of California saw two years ago that Prop. 209 -- the initiative against Affirmative action -- was going to pass, they instituted special evening prep sessions for inner-city highschool kids taught by UCal profs. Kids flocked to them. And I said "My gosh, why weren't they doing this all along instead of fudging the numbers in admission standards? In other words, instead of affirmative action, at least in colleges, we need to be doing more of the "heavy lifting" -- in preparation and remediation. To the extent that affirmative action involves fudging the answers we are setting kids up for disdain and disappointment. We do need outreach; and we do need demanding training based on a really frank acknowledgment because racism does exist, these kids have deficiencies, we will never get anywhere if we pretend that fudging the numbers in the name of "diversity" can make everything alright.

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**Tom O'Mara from Redding, CA:** We have a campaign here called "No Room for Racism," which has at no taxpayer cost produced 56 signs bearing that slogan, ten with the city seals of two cities here. Rock Hill and York County, South Carolina, have recently adopted this program, which started in Hayward, CA. The purpose is to publicly state what our laws and policies are, in the hope of reducing racial violence and increasing better relations. (Since I have not read your book), do you view this as a "liberal" solution?

**JS:** Buy the book! It sounds alright to me. I certainly have nothing against initiatives intended to improve the climate, but I would much rather see what actual work is being done, than see more signs because if there isn't much to back the publicity, you raise awareness that can quickly turn negative.

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**Moderator:** Jim Sleeper, author of *LIBERAL RACISM*, is joining us this evening to discuss racial issues in America. Feel free to ask him your questions. Just click the red **SUBMIT QUESTION** button on the left of your screen. Enjoy the discussion.

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**Sydney from New Jersey:** What do you think of the Al Sharptons of the world. . . just curious to get your opinion.

**JS:** I wrote the profile of Al Sharpton that ran in the *New Yorker* early in 1993 after his campaign for US Senate. I know him really well. Al Sharpton is a smart, funny, eloquent man, but sad to say, he is a con man. He has never built housing, never founded a school and never really curbed crime. We don't need more tree shakers, we need more jelly makers and I think his usefulness has passed. I will simply add that I do say some things about him in *LIBERAL RACISM* and I say a lot more in my last book *THE CLOSEST OF STRANGERS*. I like Al, but I feel sorry for him.

**JS:** On the one hand, it is true that we don't pay enough attention to our history and as Santana said "those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it." But, on the other hand, I think that when it comes to race, we need to find the courage to let go. The black journalist, Ellis Cose, has claimed that "few of us would wish to be race-less, to be without a tribe." I disagree. I think the 300 year long black/white embrace is slowly coming undone. As that happens, both white supremacists and black nationalists will have to learn that neither whiteness nor blackness can serve any more as vessels of hope. This really is our new frontier and I think more and more younger Americans are crossing into it. We should do to help them, not to hold them back. So, while I do agree that we haven't fully recovered from the Civil War, we should be playing to the strengths of people <sup>who</sup> have.

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**Marcus23@aol.com:** All in all how would you say race relations are here in the United States?

**JS:** I would characterize it as healthy, growing pains among ordinary people, that are being misinterpreted and resisted by the old Civil Rights establishment. By that I mean, that in daily life more and more people of all colors really want to get beyond this kind of labeling. And I think I do a good job of evoking that yearning in the opening chapter of LIBERAL RACISM. In the name of American destiny worth living, we have to do more to keep faith with people I sight in the book. And my next project will probably involve writing more deeply about what our shared destiny will entail. Look, my whole message to Liberals is this: Precisely because the country is becoming more racially and religiously diverse, we should all be working overtime to identify a few common values and bonds.

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