

# Minister Conrad Mohammed Seven Verses

(April 1992, morning. A café/restaurant. Roosevelt Island, New York. We are sitting in the back, in an area that is surrounded by glass floor-to-ceiling windows. Mr. Mohammed is impeccably dressed in a suit of an elegant fabric. He wears a blue shirt and a bow tie. He has on fine shoes, designer socks, and a large fancy watch and wedding ring. His hair is closely cropped. He drinks black coffee, and uses a few packs of sugar. He is traveling with another man, also a Muslim, in the clothing of a Muslim, impeccable, who sits at another table and watches us.)

The condition of the Black man in America today is part  
and parcel,  
through the devlishment  
that permitted Caucasian people  
to rob us of our humanity,  
and put us in the throes of slavery . . .  
The fact that our— our Black  
parents  
were actually taken  
as cattle  
and as, as  
animals  
and packed into  
slave ships  
like sardines  
amid feces  
and urine—



and the suffering of our people,  
for months,  
in the middle passage—  
Our women,  
raped  
before our own eyes,  
so that today  
some look like you,  
some look like me,  
some look like brother . . .  
*(Indicating his companion)*  
This is a crime of tremendous proportion.  
In fact,  
no crime in the history of humanity  
has before or since  
equaled that crime.  
The Holocaust did not equal it  
Oh, absolutely not.  
First of all,  
that was a horrible crime  
and that is something that is a disgrace in the eyes of civilized  
people.  
That, uh, crime also stinks  
in the nostrils of God.  
But it in no way compares with the slavery of our people  
because we lost over a hundred  
and some say two hundred and fifty,  
million  
in the middle passage  
coming from Africa

to America.  
We were so thoroughly robbed.  
We didn't just lose six million.  
We didn't just  
endure this  
for, for  
five or six years  
or from '38 to '45 or '39 to —  
We endured this for over three hundred years—  
the total subjugation of the Black man.  
You can go into Bangladesh today,  
Calcutta,  
*(He strikes the table with a sugar packet three or four  
times)*  
New Delhi,  
Nigeria,  
some really  
so-called underdeveloped nation,  
and I don't care how low that person's humanity is  
*(He opens the sugar packet)*  
whether they never  
had running water,  
if they'd never seen a television or anything.  
They are in better condition than the Black man and woman  
in America today  
right now.  
Even at Harvard.  
They have a contextual understanding of what identity is.  
*(He strikes the table with another sugar packet three or  
four times and opens it)*

But the Black man has no knowledge of that;  
he's an amnesia victim  
*(Starts stirring his coffee)*  
He has lost knowledge of himself  
*(Stirring his coffee)*  
and he's living a beast life.  
*(Stirring his coffee)*  
So this proves that it was the greatest  
crime.  
Because we were cut off from our past.  
Not only were we killed and murdered,  
not only were our women raped  
in front of their own children.  
Not only did the slave master stick  
*(The spoon drops onto saucer)*  
at times,  
daggers into a pregnant woman's stomach,  
slice the stomach open  
push the baby out on the ground and crush the head of the  
baby  
to instill fear in the Massas of the plantation.  
*(Stirring again)*  
Not only were these things done,  
not only were our thumbs  
*(Spoon drops)*  
put in, in devices  
that would just  
slowly torture the slave  
and tear the thumb off from the root.  
Not only were we sold on the auction block

like cattle,  
not permitted to marry.  
See these are the crimes  
of slavery that nobody wants to talk about.  
But the most significant crime—  
because we could have recovered from all of that—  
but the fact that they cut off all knowledge from us,  
told us that we were animals,  
told us that we were subhuman,  
took from us our names,  
gave us names like  
Smith  
and Jones  
and today we wear those names  
with dignity  
and pride,  
yet these were the names given to us in one of the greatest  
crimes  
ever committed on the face of the earth.  
So this kind of thing,  
Sister,  
is what qualifies slavery  
as the greatest  
crime  
ever committed.  
They have stolen  
our garment.  
Stolen our identity.  
The Honorable Louis Farrakhan  
teaches us

that *we* are the chosen of God.  
We are those people  
that almighty God Allah  
has selected as his chosen,  
and they are masquerading in our garment—  
the Jews.  
We don't have an identity today.  
Because we are the people . . .  
There are seven verses  
in the Bible,  
seven verses,  
I believe it is in Deuteronomy,  
that the Jews base  
their chosen people, uh, uh,  
claim the theology,  
the whole theological exegesis  
with respect  
of being the chosen  
is based upon seven verses  
in the Scripture that talk  
about a covenant  
with Abraham.

## Letty Cottin Pogrebin Isaac

(Morning. Spring. On the phone. She is in her office in her home on West 67th Street and Central Park West in Manhattan. Her office has an old-fashioned wooden rolltop desk and bookcases filled with books. She says she was wearing leggings and a loose shirt.)

Well,  
it's hard for me to do that  
because  
I think there's a tendency to make hay  
with the Holocaust,  
to push  
all the buttons.  
And I mean this story about my uncle Isaac—makes *me* cry  
and it's going to make your audience cry  
and I'm beginning to worry  
that  
we're trotting out our Holocaust stories  
too regularly and that we're going to inure each other to  
the truth of  
them.  
But  
I think  
maybe if you let me read it,  
I would prefer to read it:  
(*Reading from Deborah, Golda, and Me*)  
"I remember my mother's cousin



Isaac who came to New York  
immediately after the war and lived with us for several  
months.

Isaac is my connection to dozens of other family members who  
were murdered in the concentration camps.

Because he was blond and blue-eyed he had been  
chosen as the designated survivor of his town.

That is the Jewish councils had instructed him to do  
anything

to stay alive and tell the story.

For Isaac

anything turned out to mean this.

The Germans suspected his forged Aryan papers and  
decided that he

would have to prove by his actions that he was not a Jew.

They put him on a transport train with the Jews of his town  
and then gave him the task of herding into the gas chambers  
everyone in his train load.

After he had fulfilled that assignment  
with patriotic

German efficiency,

the Nazis accepted the authenticity of his identity papers  
and let him go.

Among those whom Isaac packed into the gas chambers  
that day

dispassionately as if shoving a few more items into an  
overstuffed

closet

were his wife

and

two children.

The designated survivor  
arrived in America  
at about age forty

*(Breathes in)*

with prematurely white hair and a dead gaze within the  
sky blue

eyes that'd helped save his life.

As promised he told his story to dozens of Jewish agencies  
and community leaders and to groups of families and  
friends which

is how I heard the account  
translated from his Yiddish  
by my mother.

For months he talked,  
speaking the unspeakable.

Describing a horror  
that American Jews had suspected but could not conceive.

A monstrous tale  
that dwarfed the demonology of legend  
and gave me the nightmare I still dream to this day.

And as he talked  
Isaac seemed to grow older and older  
until one night  
a few months later  
when he finished telling everything he knew  
he died."

## Robert Sherman Lousy Language

(11:00 A.M. Wednesday, November 13, 1991. A very sunny and large, elegant living room in a large apartment near the Brooklyn Museum. Mr. Sherman is sitting in an armchair near an enormous bouquet of flowers for the birth of his first child. He wears sweats, and a bright orange long-sleeved tee shirt. Smiles frequently, upbeat, impassioned. Fingers his wedding ring. Each phrase builds on the next, pauses are all sustained intensity, never lets up. Full. Lots of volume, clear enunciation, teeth, and tongue very involved in his speech. Good-humored, seems to like the act of speech.)

Do you have demographic information on Crown Heights?  
The important thing to remember is that—  
and I will check these numbers when I get back to the  
office—

I think the  
Hasidim  
comprise only ten percent  
of the population  
of the neighborhood.

The Crown Heights conflict has been brewing on and off  
for twenty years  
since the Hasidic community  
developed some serious numbers  
and some strength in Crown Heights and as African  
Americans and  
Caribbean Americans came to make up the dominant  
culture in  
Crown Heights.