

# Rabbi gets Thomas scoop, backlash

BY BART JONES

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It was Rabbi David Nesenoff's first day as a self-declared journalist representing his own website, and the Stony Brook resident had landed a press pass to the White House.

Invited to cover a Jewish heritage event hosted by President Barack Obama, Nesenoff and his teenage son were wandering the grounds and asking people to comment about Israel, when they bumped into Helen Thomas, the dean of White House correspondents.

Thomas spoke, and the rest is history — within days of posting the videotaped interview on his website, Thomas resigned amid a furor over her statements that Jewish people should “get the hell



PHOTO BY ED BETZ

Rabbi David Nesenoff spoke to Helen Thomas at White House.

out of Palestine” and go back to Germany and Poland.

Nesenoff, 50, who has served as rabbi at several synagogues on Long Island, says he was as shocked as anyone by the 89-year-old Thomas' com-

ments.

“When I heard what she said, I was taken aback, confused. I was not expecting it,” he said. “I guess I was a little naive about her reporting over the years.”

Nesenoff actually sat on the explosive May 27 interview for a week before posting it on his website.

He said his computer-savvy son, Adam, 17, is his webmaster, but could not post the video because he had to study for his high school final exams.

“Every day went by and he said, ‘I have this test. I have that test. I have driver’s ed,’” Nesenoff said.

He also said he wasn’t in a rush because he wasn’t sure Thomas’ comments were big news. He called a reporter he knows at a Jewish publication

to ask his opinion and “he kind of shrugged it off,” Nesenoff said.

His son finally posted the video on June 3. By June 7, Thomas had resigned. Thomas covered 10 presidents during a half century — for years as a correspondent for United Press International and more recently as a columnist for Hearst Newspapers.

Nesenoff says his feelings now are less focused on Thomas’ downfall than on the Jewish people and the anti-Semitism he says the video interview has provoked.

He said he’s received thousands of pieces of hate mail, some of which he has posted on his website. He filed a police report, and the Suffolk County police department said its hate crimes unit is investigating.

But he also said he’s received support from people and some of the more recent e-mails are positive.

While Nesenoff said he was stunned by Thomas’ comments, he tried to keep calm at the time. “I kept my composure and was polite and was cordial and then thanked her,” he said.

As for his first stint as a reporter, he says it was memorable. “My reporting became famous,” he said, “and hers became infamous.”

## NOW ONLINE

Watch the rabbi's video of Helen Thomas; hear his thoughts on their encounter. [newsday.com/li](http://newsday.com/li)

## Mob boss' son: I was paid by feds

BY JOHN RILEY

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Mob informant John Franzese Jr. admitted under cross examination yesterday that he has received more than \$400,000 from the government for wearing a wire and betraying his father, reputed Colombo family underboss John “Sonny” Franzese.

In his third day on the witness stand, however, informant Franzese, 50, insisted that the money was only a minor factor in his decision to cooperate with the FBI against his 93-year-old father, a legendary enforcer and gangster who raised his family in the Long Island suburb of Roslyn.

“It was something inside of me . . . that I had to deal with,” Franzese said. “Years of living as a child of someone in this life produced a conflict in me.”

He admitted that his decision to inform could have put his father at risk of retaliation from the mob, but said he saw that as the result of his father’s decision to be a mobster — not as his responsibility.

“I care about my father,” he testified. “I did not make this choice of a life for my father.”

The money Franzese received included nearly \$200,000 in medical expenses

paid for Franzese, a former cocaine addict who testified that he had been diagnosed as HIV-positive.

The government also paid more than \$40,000 for housing, more than \$35,000 for relocation, more than \$40,000 for living expenses, and gave Franzese another \$50,000 for discretionary use.

Sonny Franzese and three co-defendants are charged in the case with a racketeering conspiracy that included robbery, loan-sharking, and extortion of businesses including topless bars and a Long Island pizzeria in Albertson. The trial began last week.

Cristina Franzese, the wife of Sonny and mother of John Jr., was banned from the courtroom after an outburst last week in the hallway outside where she allegedly bumped one of her husband’s daughters by another woman, rolled his wheelchair into a bathroom and urged him to plead guilty in the hearing of some jurors.

She was allowed to watch yesterday’s proceedings, however, on a closed-circuit feed in a room on a different floor.

U.S. District Judge Brian Cogan, after questioning jurors who witnessed the outburst, did not dismiss any of them.

## Same cigarette, new box

BY ROBERT LEVIN

Special to amNewYork

Colorful new cigarette packs that no longer display deceptive descriptors such as “light” are showing up in city stores, but health officials and even inveterate puffers are saying the change is just more Big Tobacco smoke and mirrors.

The last of the old packs will be sold on June 22, thanks to a new federal law designed to junk the misleading monikers.

After that, New York’s 1 million smokers will be able to buy packs the cigarette companies have chosen to color code to communicate differences.

But the changes are inconsistent from brand to brand: Marlboro Lights will become Marlboro Gold, and Pall Mall Lights are now Pall Mall Blue.

A city campaign is saying: Don’t be fooled. “All cigarettes contain the same poisons that make you sick and kill you,” said a new TV spot.

Philip Morris yesterday acknowledged that it hadn’t changed the design or marketing of its cigarettes, beyond removing the terms. The companies reject the idea they are being deceptive. “What you’re seeing here is a very limited adjustment to those packaging materials, to remove those terms that can no longer be utilized,” spokesman David Sutton said.

Still, New Yorkers yesterday said that the shift may be mis-



PHOTO BY RYAN THATCHER

New cigarette packaging has replaced terms such as “light” or “mild” with color coding to indicate differences.

leading. “I want to know what I’m getting, not see some color,” said Javonne Carl, 37, of Far Rockaway.

The law was designed to limit teen smoking, but some say the new packs will be more appealing to the young. “Changing the packaging like this is just another way to attract the kids,” said James Fox, 45, of Bedford-Stuyvesant.

John Tantillo, a marketing consultant, agreed, especially because of the use of appealing primary colors.

But it boils down to a simple truth, said Dr. Jonathan Whitson of NYU Langone Medical Center’s smoking cessation program. “There is no such thing as a safe cigarette, no matter whether it’s called light or not.”

With Tim Herrera