

OPINION**Transportation horrors**

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by Abe Mittleman |

The New York City taxi and for-hire transportation service has been invaded and taken over by illegal vehicles, most Taxi & Limousine Commission-licensed but many not licensed at all.

The crimes the drivers of these vehicles commit not only happen on the city streets and at both major airports. Hotel employees and the drivers of these vehicles conspire with each other regularly each day at most if not all of New York City's major hotels. The hotel doormen who are being paid by the drivers of the illegal vehicles lead unsuspecting travelers away from legal yellow medallion taxis, claiming they have cheaper rates than the taxis. Not only is this an illegal practice, the unsuspecting passengers are charged criminally gouging rates for the service.

The wrongdoing that is taking place on a daily basis and at many of the major hotels is not news. Drivers of medallion taxis, the only taxis that can legally pick up passengers in New York City on demand, have been aware for many years of this activity. What is news is the way the overabundance of for-hire vehicles has grown to such an extent that in order for the drivers of these vehicles to earn a living they must seek to steal the fares of legal medallion taxi drivers. They are doing so at the airports, on the streets of New York City and at the hotels of the city by conspiring with the doormen and paying them for leading passengers to their vehicles.

It is no secret that the previous administration in City Hall was not very friendly to the medallion taxi industry. It is well-documented in news articles that former Mayor Bloomberg in May of 2013 was quoted in a public place telling a large fleet owner of medallion taxis that he was going to "destroy [his] industry" when he was done with his term as mayor. Left out from this statement was the vulgarity Mr. Bloomberg used.

When Bloomberg's former taxi Commissioner David Yassky had the rates removed from the front doors of all the taxis several months before this incident, we didn't understand why this was being done. These rates had been on taxis in New York City as far back as anyone today can remember.

Considering what is happening now, it seems apparent that this was a well-planned attack, and removing the rates medallion taxis charge was one way to start the battle. When transportation seekers at the Midtown hotels approach the doormen asking for taxi service, they are told that the taxi rates are much higher than the illegal vehicles they are being led to. If you are a New Yorker, you know that the rate of fare to JFK airport is \$52. The rates that are negotiated in the hotel lobbies are much higher. They are high enough so the drivers of the illegal vehicles can do very well. The doormen are doing well also with the fee they get from the drivers for this service. The losers are the customers who aren't aware of fair fares the medallion taxis charge, and the taxi drivers who have to work harder to try to make up for these losses by putting in more hours of tiring driving.

Although the authorities, police and TLC enforcement have been aware of this for a long time, they have not taken measures to put an end to the crimes that are being committed. This needs to be brought to light and enforcement of the city laws governing for-hire vehicles must be carried out. Any excuse that authorities use for not doing so is totally unacceptable.

The visitors to New York City deserve better than they are getting. They should be returning to their homes with positive stories of New York, not the horror stories of how they had been taken advantage of by illegal drivers for hire and hotel doormen.

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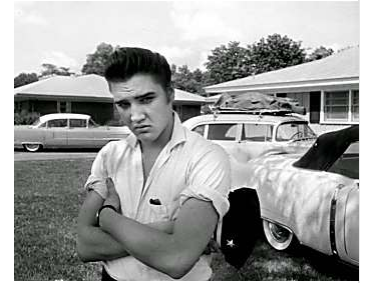
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