

6/5/93

OPINIONS

Will the real Giuliani please stand?



JIM SLEEPER

position now indistinguishable from Bill Clinton's. "The enforcement emphasis should be on the captain and organizers," he said. "They're tantamount to slave traders, putting people into indentured servitude. If passengers are dealt with case by case, maybe some can prove political persecution and stay. But you can't establish that precedent where the claim is purely economic; otherwise half the world would have the right to be here."

That reasonable answer jibes with what Giuliani said about *legal* immigrants last month at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Inwood. The area's transition from Irish to Dominican has been rocky, and Giuliani got a few racially loaded questions. "People come here from all over the world because they want the same things you do," he said. "We have to make this work."

"I admit, I was surprised," says Jane LaTour, a labor historian at NYU's Wagner Archives who's not on Giuliani's side. "In all his answers, he didn't stoop, he raised

people up. I saw a real mind at work. He was clever and funny. I mentioned this to a friend, and he said, 'Don't tell anyone.'"

LaTour's friend also warned that since Giuliani, like David Dinkins, takes money from Wall Street and real estate interests, his priorities are no better. A fair challenge, and with neither side facing a serious primary, we'll take it up soon. Meanwhile, why not "tell everyone" that the same Giuliani who uses words like "pogrom" and "b-----t" to please people who are already going to vote for him has been telling them other things more important, if less reported?

On Sunday at the Roosevelt Hotel, as local Republicans formally put Herman Badillo on the "fusion" ticket, Giuliani delivered, for the umpteenth time, a speech that even The New York Times will someday have to report is giving honest New Yorkers goose bumps. He lauded the GOP for making this "the first time there has been a Puerto Rican on a ballot for citywide office. But you did it in precisely the way it should be done: You nominated the person far and away most qualified for the job." His listeners, most of them white, applauded so vigorously you might have thought Badillo was their life raft in a rising sea of color. But Giuliani was right to insist there's a principle involved here, too:

"This is a city not of Italian-Americans, Irish-Americans, African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, but of larger, more important



In like Flynn?

groups. Ethnic groups are very important for developing ethics, family values, a sense of self-worth. But one of the confusions we face is, we've begun to think we get *rights* from being Italian-Americans or African-Americans. *It's not true.* Our human and civil rights come from being human beings, Americans and New Yorkers. When we look back, you will have made a historic contribution by getting this city to lift its eyes up from little groups to larger ones."

I think the people at the Roosevelt applauded so loudly because nothing gnaws at them more than liberals' easy dismissal of them as bigots. The contempt is stirred by code words ("divisive") and oozes from between the lines of some reportage. It's unenlightened and stunningly counter-productive for the city. After all, it isn't only Giuliani and his white supporters who believe what he said about rights. So do many people of color, including those who risked their lives on the high seas to get here.

That's why Giuliani's earned reputation for overweening ambition and Strangelovian lurches into creepy rhetoric is so sad. He *knows* he can't win, much less govern, unless he runs like Boston's Mayor Ray Flynn, a South Boston pol who shocked his "base" by often jumping out of his beatup car for pickup games with blacks. In 1982, Flynn beat a smart black-activist legislator, partly because Bostonians felt their city badly needed to ratify Flynn's evolution from Southie boy to racial healer.

New York won't get its act together until we liberals similarly atone for our moral arrogance by ratifying someone like Flynn. Maybe this election isn't the occasion, but Giuliani is working hard to prove he's the right vessel.

Whatever you think of him, catch his act next time he comes your way. Try to square what you hear with what you've heard. You may be surprised.

15 C

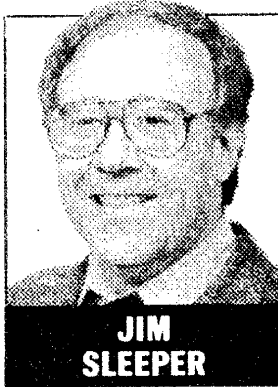
The historic rise and fall of Dinkins

11/4/93

How do you win an election like this without saying you're sorry?"

— Giuliani media adviser David Garth, May 1993

The development of New York City broke the bones of Irish and Italian laborers and condemned Jewish seamstresses to death in industrial fires or to miserable lives of arthritic despair. But it also gave its white-skinned victims legal and economic opportunities undreamt-of by their Old World ancestors. If you were white during those years of ascendancy, becoming a New Yorker meant knowing that, even though you'd been raised in an ethnic community, you could



JIM SLEEPER

rise above anything in your past that made you small. You could join great, trans-ethnic movements for social justice, or you could pour your gifts of imagination into an urban experi-

our silent tears," I found myself weeping. Reflecting now on the heartless tribalism consuming the world, I believe that I was weeping then because I had become an American. In me and many others, the very Americanization that once oppressed blacks had become their margin of hope.

Many blacks who came here from the South took hold of the American prom-

ise in the usual way. Others didn't. Even as they won legal opportunities, economic opportunities left town, deepening racism's cultural, educational and economic devastation.

The depth of black disappointment, and the havoc it wreaked on black families and communities that had survived the South only to be blighted in the ghettos of the North, cost us a generation of black leaders. Dinkins' starchy pride and preoccupation with his status as our first African-American mayor were the least of that problem.

But they may have made him accommodate the bitterness of others who'd gotten stuck on the race-consciousness New York is supposed to dissolve.

Last week, the Rev. Ben Chavis of the NAACP came here with 200 young black Southern "freedom riders" to help Dinkins — a gesture of reciprocity, he claimed, for the '60s. But sheriffs don't rule here; *Dinkins* runs the machinery. And there is no sadder symbol of what had become of the civil rights movement than the spectacle of Chavis' kids being welcomed off their buses by Hazel Dukes and Laura Blackburne, two of the generation of lost leaders.

Equal standards

By now, some white New Yorkers are embittered, too. Some of them never became Americans or New Yorkers worthy of the name in the first place. But even some of those who did, some of us who have kept the faith, now believe that America works best when it grants individuals very few exemptions for past injustices. "The concept of historic reparation grows out of man's need to impose a degree of justice on the world that simply does not exist," writes Shelby Steele. "Suffering can be endured and overcome; it cannot be repaid."

For better or worse, some of us loyal New Yorkers now feel that the highest compliment we can pay African-Americans is to hold them to the same New York standards we applied to one-termers Abe Beame and George Bush. That, and not racism, is the reason why Dinkins' margin of hope became his margin of defeat.

the election
and for Giuliani,
Op Ed page
Special 16-page
Out Section.

ment that E. B. White called "cosmopolitan, mighty and unparalleled." For you and your children, becoming an American meant leaving the old neighborhood and finding the world. And the City of New York was your stairway to the stars.

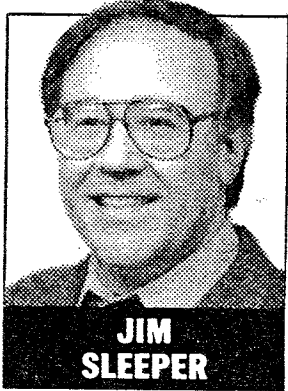
But the bittersweet experience of Americanization never prepared us children of European immigrants to grasp how this country had stripped African-Americans of their ancient cultures and depersonalized them as property. In the cruelest of ironies, our Americanization taught us to despise blacks, who are the most American of us all.

They endured that contempt and fought its institutionalization in our national life. The civil rights movement was part of that reckoning, and the election of David Dinkins as the 106th mayor of New York was a belated tribute to our role in the struggle. New York was never hospitable to blacks, yet it was a staging ground for a black cultural renaissance and struggles for equality. It was natural for white New Yorkers to go South as freedom riders.

And it was natural that when the Rev. Gardner Taylor of Bedford-Stuyvesant's Concord Baptist Church rose on the cold January morning of Dinkins' inauguration to intone, "God of our weary years, God of

10/5/93

A 'race man' views mayoral contest



JIM SLEEPER

"Anybody who portrays me as a purveyor of ethnic slurs just doesn't know me and is perverting grossly what I said," intoned the Rev. William Augustus

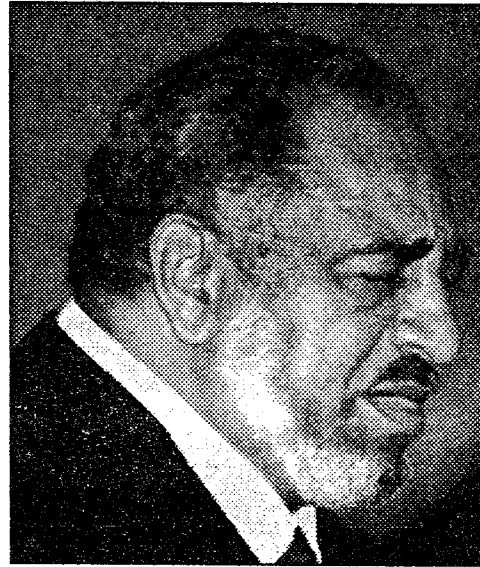
lowering people into the water with strong arms, as his father had done before him in the Kentucky bluegrass country's oldest black congregation. As we sat together later, I asked him why he feels that Rudolph Giuliani's backers include "elements that can best be described as fascist."

Not for nothing has Daily News religion editor Charles W. Bell called Jones one of New York's most eloquent preachers. Even in repose, his gargantuan frame exudes majesty, his bass voice rumbles like a diesel in a railyard, hinting at the anger behind his erudition. Once a colonel in the Army Engineers, he could have been a Colin Powell.

One of the first black graduates of the University of Kentucky, with a doctorate from Crozer Theological Seminary, Jones came to Bethany in 1962 and helped build its imposing gothic structure on Marcus Garvey Blvd. He was also president of the National Black Pastors' Conference.

Jones has written that a true black Christian is a race man: "Though not a racist, the race man is the embodiment of racial pride and has absolute distaste for the system. He begs no favors from the establishment, but demands justice for his people."

With Jesse Jackson, Jones led Operation Breadbasket in the '60s, pressuring white businesses in black communities to hire blacks. I have a 1970 photo of Jones and a 16-year-old Sharpton confronting an A&P



The Rev. William Augustus Jones Jr.

executive. "Only authentic 'race men' can creatively confront a racist world," where integration is laced with white superiority yet separatism is impossible, Jones writes.

He admires "an interim ethic of black asceticism," in which blacks withdraw from white society psychologically and culturally to plumb their own history, arts and religion, "a step in the movement from (being) property to pride to power."

No wonder Jones told Mayor Dinkins and Baptist ministers Thursday, "If the mayor has made any error, it's in attempting to effect a marriage of idealism and pragmatism in the gorgeous mosaic. It's impossible to make that marriage in a racist culture."

The ministers asked Jones to present the mayor to the press. "No one asked me what I was going to say. I said it more out of fear than anything else. As I move about the city, I sense a deliberate distortion and perversion of reality to demonize Dinkins, to gain political control. It's a storm-trooper mentality. You needn't be Mussolini to have it. You can be Bob Grant or Phil Caruso. There are black fascists — Roy Innis."

Maybe so. Caruso's contempt for civilian control of cops is scary, and Giuliani's charge of Italian-bashing is a ploy. But, as Herman Badillo noted yesterday, it's Dinkins' allies who are peddling vicious stereotypes; indeed, hours earlier, a Bob Grant clone on WLIB had called Giuliani "fascistic" and "deranged" just minutes after hosting Dinkins, who's on the show often.

Jones admits that his own sense of menace is "subjective." Is the city really more racist than in '89? Or is the idea of a black losing his mayoralty just scarier than not winning it in the first place? Racism's victims will surely lose if they turn such fears into an absurd black counter-reality. Will Jones proclaim that part of freedom's story?

tus Jones Jr., brooding in his pulpit high above the worshippers at Brooklyn's Bethany Baptist Church. "I have been the victim of the worst ethnic slurs all my life, and I know better, by experience and professional training, than to portray anybody as less than human. I did not call Mr. Giuliani a fascist. I said that some supporters of Mr. Giuliani appear to have fascist leanings.

"Mr. Giuliani had the audacity to suggest that the mayor ought to silence Jones. I am a free man in a free pulpit, proclaiming freedom's story. The easiest way to upset people in power is to tell the truth."

I do know Bill Jones well enough to know he wouldn't purvey an ethnic slur. But I also know that anyone who has mentored both the Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood of East Brooklyn Congregations and the Rev. Al Sharpton (who found the Brawleys sanctuary in Jones' church) is a complex man.

So I waited Sunday as Jones pronounced the baptismal formula in stentorian tones,

Attn: Gray Ladies & guilty white libs

AS BILL CLINTON sat in the Future Diner on Sunday and honored this city with a candid exposition of his national health plan, David Dinkins looked about as comfortable in his booth as I would in a seat on the Cyclone.

But when Clinton insulted the city later that night by remarking that "too many of us are still too unwilling to vote for people who are different," Dinkins beamed and said, "It doesn't get better than this."

It doesn't get any older, anyway. Clinton's admonition comes four years too late.

Set 1989's "racist" vote at whatever level you want: All of Giuliani's 49% vote? Half of it? Whatever. The fact remains, Dinkins won. If he loses now, it'll be because people who *did* reach across racial lines in 1989 to vote for someone who's "different" have changed their minds about the specific person they made mayor.

If Dinkins loses, it'll be because this city's electorate, which is less white now than in 1989, has decided to treat him no differently than it treated one-termer Abe Beame. It'll be because ex-Dinkins voters — Lubavitcher Hasidim, Korean merchants, untold Hispanics, even some white liberals — have switched to Rudolph Giuliani or stayed home, for lots of different reasons.

Doesn't anyone see that, depending on the particulars, this could be *progress*? That a guilt-driven vote for Dinkins would be regress? That a two or three-point defection from Dinkins could reflect half a dozen things besides the fear of someone who's different — things such as the lousy economy; the grievances of the aforesaid Hasidim and Koreans; the considered belief of many people that Dinkins is not a decisive, hands-on mayor; the considered belief that some of his "rainbow" initiatives are so deeply flawed that they actually promote division and retard healing?

You can see why Dinkins wouldn't understand this. He can't afford to. He must wage a do-or-die campaign to inoculate wavering liberals against any temptation to desert. That means pumping up his record, brandishing his "future prints" of the glorious city to come and bringing in Clinton on the first floodtide of genuine liberal optimism about government in 12 long years. But it also means stoking liberals' fears of "Republican Rudy" and, more ominously, goosing their racial guilt. Put all that together, and most wavering liberals will slouch back to Dinkins on Nov. 2.

The New York Times has decided to join Dinkins in stoking liberal guilt. "Decided" may be the wrong word, since The Times itself, and its core readers, is precisely the wavering constituency we're talking about. The liberal crisis of faith is the paper's own, and it must be quelled. Like good Protestant missionaries, publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr., editorial page editor Howell Raines (a rich Southern liberal come North to give us the Word) and Midwestern small-towner Todd Purdum, of City Hall, are hellbent on smothering a city they don't understand, in their own displaced racial guilt, in story after story.

Liberals; find your world in ours.

The racial agonizing began with Purdum's Sunday magazine profile of Rudolph Giuliani this summer. It presented Giuliani as the candidate of nostalgia, "running against history" in

**JIM
SLEEPER**



a majority nonwhite city. Never mind that as cities like Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia have become more nonwhite and multi-racial, it is their *black* mayors who've proved to be trapped in the past, out of touch with new racial minorities, especially immigrants of color. Never mind that, here in New York, Giuliani leads Dinkins in polls of Asians and Hispanics. According to Purdum's Giuliani profile and a more recent Sunday commentary, a majority nonwhite city simply must have a nonwhite mayor to bring its "politics in line with its demographics." And therefore, it is very important that Giuliani remain the candidate of white ethnic restoration.

Giuliani begs to differ: "If I could make up the two points I lost by in 1989 with only black votes, it'd be healthier for me and the city." True enough, but you read it here, not in The Times.

Next came Purdum's profile of Dinkins. Insightful and fair, it nevertheless focused so relentlessly on the mayor's victimization by real and perceived racial double standards that it forced a reader to ask: Could I, as a decent person, ever vote against a proud, prickly man preoccupied with his own racial embattlement? If I vote against Dinkins, aren't I a racist?

After all, Purdum insisted in yet another Sunday piece, Dinkins' low-key racial pride hasn't changed "one iota" since 1989, when we made him a healer; his record hasn't been bad, considering the economy. So if Giuliani calls this election a referendum on competence, he's just trying to "give voters a race-free excuse for voting against Mr. Dinkins."

With coverage like this, Dinkins needed only a little private time with Clinton to jog the President's Southern-liberal sensibilities and make him sound the only false note of his visit.

AS I watched Bill Clinton at the Future Diner, I wondered why we haven't seen *Dinkins* in dinners taking questions from New Yorkers these past four years. Now, thanks to Clinton's miscue and to The Times' racially saturated coverage, I have the approved answer. As he sat in his booth at the Future, Dinkins couldn't help thinking about how he may have been refused service there 40 years ago. No wonder he couldn't quite make himself at home.

Dear Bill, Pinch, Howell and Todd: Please try to understand that New York City, 28% black, made David Dinkins its mayor. So the question of the hour really isn't whether New Yorkers are blinded to his record because they fear someone "different." It's whether out-of-town white liberals like you can stop seeing David Dinkins as a black man and start seeing him as just another mayor.