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### Looking Backward, Looking Forward: Puerto Ricans in the Quest for the New York City Mayoralty

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# Looking Backward, Looking Forward: Puerto Ricans in the Quest for the New York City Mayoralty

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This paper examines the history of Puerto Rican efforts to win the mayoralty of the city of New York, highlighting the 2005 election. By doing so, it seeks to fill a gap in the history of Puerto Rican political participation in New York. The struggle of Puerto Rican elites to win representation at the highest level of office in the city is long-standing. The paper chronicles the circumstances and terms according to which they sought political incorporation at that level.

A full survey of the history of efforts by political leaders to secure the nomination and obtain the mayoralty would include a detailed narrative and analysis of the role of party organizations, labor unions, community groups, and voter behavior over time. While this paper offers some references to the larger context in which Puerto Rican political elites carried out their efforts, such account is beyond its scope. The paper looks critically at the issue of runoff elections. The role of money is examined through the lens of the 2005 election. The results of the 2005 vote are also included. The paper concludes with a reflection on the prospects for Puerto Rican (Latino or minority) political representation at the mayoral level in New York.

The experience of Puerto Ricans in New York deserves more detailed scrutiny. Their case is interesting because it provides insights that help us understand the

process of political incorporation of minority elites. A modern polity cannot be fully democratic if the door to political power is permanently closed to any one group or segment of society. Therefore, for the sake of urban democracy, we need to know whether the Puerto Rican experience reflects structural or contingent difficulties.

Efforts to develop insights for the future from historical experience are not without pitfalls.<sup>1</sup> Because nothing remains the same, solutions that worked in the past may not work in the present. The solutions we identify may be misleading if the past is inaccurately represented. We can find lessons in history but we must be self-conscious about their limitations. History can be a guide for action so long as we recognize that *before action* historical knowledge is rarely, if ever, tried and true.

## SEEKING THE NOMINATION, 1969-2001

Puerto Ricans have been present in New York City since the nineteenth century. As early as 1937, the community obtained political representation with the election of Oscar García Rivera, of Manhattan, to the state assembly. At the time, Puerto Rican colonies were scattered throughout the city and their numbers were not as

1 See José E. Cruz, "Pushing Left to Get to the Center, Puerto Rican Radicalism in Hartford, Connecticut," in Andrés Torres and José E. Vélazquez, eds., *The Puerto Rican Movement, Voices from the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), pp. 69-87.



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significant as during the post-World War II period. In 1953, thirteen years after García Rivera's stint in Albany ended, Felipe N. Torres was elected to the assembly; he served until 1962.

Around the end of Torres' incumbency, Puerto Ricans in New York began to engage in a different style of political action. The period from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s was marked by sporadic instances of collective behavior as well as by a radical ferment. During this stage, Puerto Ricans were protagonists of one of the worst civil disturbances the city had ever seen and the first large-scale rebellion in their New York history, the Harlem Riot of 1967. Activists also organized the Young Lords Party (YLP), the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), El Comité-MINP (Movimiento de Izquierda Nacional Puertorriqueño), and the Puerto Rican Student Union (PRSU). These groups tried, unsuccessfully, to bridge mainland and homeland politics, using local issues to rally Puerto Ricans behind the cause of independence for Puerto Rico. At the same time, mainstream Puerto Rican politicians focused their efforts on bureaucratic political incorporation, sidestepping the national question. Nevertheless, they used national identity to incite political participation locally. Puerto Rican leaders were active in the Community Action Program (CAP) agencies and anti-poverty programs of the time. They developed their own anti-poverty agencies, participated in the social movements of the time, and ran for office locally and statewide. During the Wagner and Lindsay administrations a number of Puerto Rican elites became influential as participants in electoral campaigns, as advisors to the mayor, and through appointment or election to positions of responsibility and power. Access to power during that period was the prologue of interventions focused on the mayoralty. In 1969, Puerto Rican Herman Badillo sought the city's mayoral office for the first time.

### STRIKE ONE

In 1960, columnist Babby Quintero wrote: "New York is becoming more and more Hispanic by the day but "El Barrio" has been dismembered. (...) There is no place in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn without Hispanic residents, the majority being Puerto Rican. We fancy that a Puerto Rican mayor is not that far off in the future."<sup>2</sup> Nine years later, the

history of Puerto Rican efforts to control the mayor's office began with the candidacy of Herman Badillo.

Badillo got his start in New York City politics as a stalwart of the Kennedy campaign for the presidency. Through the John F. Kennedy political club he became head of the campaign in East Harlem in 1960. His involvement was prompted by the need to register Hispanics and blacks. When he approached the Italian leadership of the Democratic party with his registration proposal they were simply shocked. According to Badillo, no one had ever thought of registering blacks and Hispanics even though they were at the time the predominant population in the Bronx.

As soon as Badillo began his registration work, he had to contend with the resistance of the party organization headed by Congressman Alfred Santangelo. "You can't believe all the garbage that's being registered," one of Santangelo's workers told him, referring to Puerto Ricans and blacks. This worker did not know that Badillo was Puerto Rican; he didn't even know who Badillo was, because Badillo could pass for Italian. So the worker said: "We got to stop them. The school is supposed to close at 10:30 pm but I'm going to close it at 9:00 pm." Badillo faked agreement and then proceeded to plant himself in front of the school at 9:00 pm to wait for voters to come to register. As they turned away he took their names and then filed a lawsuit on their behalf against the Board of Elections for discrimination. He tried and won the lawsuit. This was "the first time in the history of New York City that it was proven that the Board of Elections and the regular [party] organization discriminated against Hispanics and blacks." According to Badillo, his registration effort and the lawsuit had two major consequences: East Harlem had the largest increase in new registered voters in the 1960 election and he became known politically.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1969, during the course of an interview at City Hall, Badillo, then Bronx Borough president, was asked if he planned to run for mayor. He offered a curious response: "Many think that all Puerto Ricans are short, colored, and unable to speak English. If I run I will go everywhere in the city so that everyone can see that I am tall, proficient in

<sup>2</sup> Babby Quintero, "En Nueva York y en Todas Partes, El Diario de Nueva York, November 2, 1960, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Herman Badillo Interview, August 10, 2006 by José E. Cruz.

English, a certified public accountant, and a lawyer.”<sup>4</sup> Perhaps for the sake of prudence, he did not say that he also wanted people to see that he was white. The subtext was nevertheless there, in the use of the word “colored”: he was a viable candidate because he was qualified and also because he could pass.

Badillo needed to win a party primary scheduled for June 17. In a statement released at the Overseas Press Club on April 2, he specified his qualifications and declared his intention to meet the fiscal, administrative, and political challenges facing the city. His emphasis was on making the city livable. “Sure New York is falling apart,” reads one of his campaign flyers, “but Badillo can put it back together.” Badillo’s solution to the imbalance between annual increases in spending of 15 percent compared to annual revenue increases of only 4 percent was simple: “We will have that deficit regardless of who is mayor and regardless of what promises are made unless income is increased or expenses are reduced.” Reacting to the climate of racial and ethnic hostility that enveloped the city he declared: “There has been an increase in crime and there are some who believe that the Blacks and the Puerto Ricans are the only criminals... There are slums in this city and there are some who look at the people who live in them and blame them for their existence. The fact is that most of the slums in our city were created prior to 1900—before those groups who reside in them now migrated to New York City.”<sup>5</sup> Badillo continued to forge ahead and in May, with Frank Espada, chairman of ASPIRA and vice president of the Urban Coalition, he joined a group of black leaders to form Black Independent Voters, to endorse candidates and to unify the city’s black and Puerto Rican vote.<sup>6</sup>

As the mayoral primary neared, Badillo’s prospects became dimmer. By June 12, Robert Wagner had a slight edge over him according to a poll conducted by the newspaper *Town and Village*. Yet the cumulative results of two weeks of polling put

Badillo ahead of Wagner by three points.<sup>7</sup> Described by the press as “the liberal Democratic president of the Bronx,” Badillo’s campaign focused on service delivery issues. So did Wagner’s. Meanwhile, the conservative wing of the Republican Party attacked Mayor John Lindsay for being soft on crime. The call of conservatives for law and order was expected to resonate among what they called “the Democratic Irish and Italians and others who don’t like Negro lovers.”<sup>8</sup>

By mid-July, Lindsay had enough support to secure his re-election bid and Badillo’s candidacy was over. In the primary Badillo received almost 90 percent of the Puerto Rican vote, over half of the black vote, and over 20 percent of the Jewish vote. But this was not enough. Mario Procaccino won the Democratic nomination with less than a third of the ballots and Badillo lost, not so much because of Norman Mailer’s campaign, as he claimed in 2006, but because of the support that Wagner took away from him from Jewish voters.<sup>9</sup> The multiple expressions of support for Badillo, including a plea from Puerto Rico’s ex-governor Luis Muñoz Marín for Puerto Ricans to register and vote for him, did not translate into the votes needed to win.<sup>10</sup> A voter registration drive that was promised by Puerto Rican activist Gilberto Gerena Valentín—who had just been fired from his post on the Commission on Human Rights—was actually led by H. Carl McCall and Frank Espada. While over 60,000 new voters were added to the rolls, the campaign was considered a failure. The large number of blacks and Puerto Ricans expected to register did not materialize and there were charges of apathy, indifference, and even subversion of the effort on the part of the political parties. Blacks and Puerto Ricans were allegedly discouraged from registering by inspectors doing the bidding of local party leaders. As a result, McCall and Espada called for the abolition of the Elections Board and for the placing of federal supervisors in districts where less than 50 percent of the voters were registered.<sup>11</sup>

7 Lindsay, Wagner Win in Final Poll, June 12, 1969. John V. Lindsay Papers, Subject Files 1966-1973, Box 90 Folder 1676, Municipal Archives, New York City.

8 Law and Order is the Issue in New York City Campaign, June 12, 1969. John V. Lindsay Papers, Subject Files 1966-1973, Box 90 Folder 1676, Municipal Archives, New York City.

9 Chris McNickle, *To be Mayor of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 226-228. In the 2006 interview, Badillo referred to Norman Mailer’s candidacy for the mayoral nomination as a “drunken campaign.” Badillo noted that he lost by less than the amount of votes accrued by Mailer and inferred that those votes would have gone to him if Mailer had not participated.

10 Muñoz’s open letter in support of Badillo was published in Luisa Quintero’s “Marginalia” column in *El Diario-La Prensa*, on June 9, 1969, p. 16.

11 “Badillo Rejects A Mayoral Race: May Back Lindsay,” *New York Times*, July 15, 1969, p. 1; Richard Reeves, “Democratic Group Endorses Lindsay At Unruly Session,” *New York Times*, July 17, 1969, p. 1; “The Anti-Registration Drive,” *New York Times*, August 25, 1969, p. 34; Peter Kihss, “Special Drive for Registration Fails to Draw Minority Voters,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1969, p. 33; “Civic Body Scores Voter Drive Here,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1969, p. 35.

4 “Herman Badillo Hará Campaña en la Calle,” *El Diario-La Prensa*, January 13, 1969, p. 13. In 1965, shortly after his election as Bronx Borough President, Badillo was asked if he intended to run for mayor. His reply was: “People are also mentioning Lindsay’s name as a presidential candidate. I think we are only interested in working hard during the next four years in our new posts.” See “Junta de Elecciones Declara Ganador a Herman Badillo,” *El Diario-La Prensa*, November 9, 1965, p. 3.

5 Herman Badillo Primary Campaign Flyer; Statement of Bronx Borough President Herman Badillo made at Overseas Press Club, April 2, 1969. Jesús Colón Papers, New York Organizations, Box 1, Folder 5. Center for Puerto Rican Studies Archives, Hunter College, City University of New York. Hereinafter referred to as Centro Archives.

6 “Negro Unit Seeks Power Of Ballot,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1969, p. 37. In February, Frank Espada was identified in a *New York Times* report as executive director of the Urban Coalition.

Badillo's aborted bid for the mayoralty was compounded by the loss in the November election of his post as Bronx borough president to Robert Abrams. On November 19, the Misión Vito Marcantonio of the Movimiento Pro Independencia, a Puerto Rican nationalist group seeking to end colonialism in Puerto Rico, issued a public statement declaring that Puerto Ricans should be working in unity with blacks against opportunistic politicians and professionals such as Herman Badillo. "That rotten leadership," reads the statement, "deserves only our repudiation."<sup>12</sup> This appraisal is worth highlighting because, at best, it suggests that one segment of the political leadership of the community did nothing to help Badillo when he needed all the support he could get.

The climate of opinion in 1969 was also not favorable to Badillo. Not only was racial polarization in the city intense but, in addition, the Lindsay administration was perceived as racially biased in favor of minorities. White New Yorkers did not feel represented at City Hall.<sup>13</sup> If they felt abandoned by a white mayor, what were the chances they would think that a Puerto Rican candidate would be any different? Further, minority voters felt adequately represented by Lindsay. In that case, there was no strong reason for them to support Badillo.

## STRIKE TWO

The next time a Puerto Rican sought the Democratic Party's nomination for mayor was in 1973. Once again, the aspirant was Herman Badillo. He faced Ed Koch, Robert Postel, a city councilman, Jerome Kretchner, and assemblyman from the Upper West Side, and Albert Blumenthal, also an assemblyman and deputy minority leader of the State Assembly. The key to the nomination was the endorsement of the liberal group, the New Democratic Coalition (NDC). Badillo assumed he had it and Blumenthal worked for it. Badillo lost the endorsement and in a fit of rage accused the NDC of racism.<sup>14</sup>

This time, a critical element of the context was the court mandate, issued on March 22, ordering the use of bilingual ballots and interpreters at the polls in community school board elec-

tions. This was the result of *Lopez v. Dinkins* (1973), a lawsuit filed by the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF) with Community Action for Legal Services and the New York Civil Liberties Union. In September, building upon the March decision, PRLDEF scored another victory when a federal district judge ruled on a suit filed by the group, ordering the city's elections board to provide bilingual voting instructions and translators for the November election at all polling places in districts where 5 percent or more of the residents spoke Spanish.<sup>15</sup>

This was a condition favorable to Badillo but he was unable to take advantage of the provision. His inability to win the endorsement of the NDC, of the regular party organization, and later the primary against Abraham Beame was due to several factors: a series of credentials challenges that eroded his base of support, his failure to win over non-Puerto Ricans and conservatives, his public "spasm of rage" when things did not go his way, and his rigidity and arrogance. Beame was strong because in the eyes of voters he had the most governmental experience. He was also the favorite of the party regulars, who trusted him as one of their own. Badillo, in contrast, could not even get the support of the black elite. Percy Sutton, Charles Rangel, and Basil Paterson felt the wind blowing in the direction of Beame and with him they went.<sup>16</sup>

Badillo's ethnicity was also considered a factor of his defeat.<sup>17</sup> Yet, if ethnicity was an obstacle, what could explain the election of Ramón Vélez from the Bronx's 11th district, and Luis Olmedo from Brooklyn's 27th to the city council? The answer was simple: in districts configured with large Puerto Rican concentrations, Puerto Ricans won. Citywide, partisan politics, legal requirements, personality features, and racial polarization combined to make success impossible.<sup>18</sup> But racial polarization was part of the context rather than a decisive factor. Badillo acted arrogantly and brashly; the rejection by voters of Mario

15 Murray Illson, "Judge Orders City to Run Bilingual Elections Nov. 6," *New York Times*, September 28, 1973, p. 1.

16 McNickle, pp. 245-246.

17 Frank Lynn, "Blumenthal Tops Badillo For Coalition's Backing," *New York Times*, March 4, 1973, p. 1; Frank Lynn, "Badillo Urged by Abrams To Give Up Mayoral Race," *New York Times*, March 6, 1973, p. 33; Frank Lynn, "He's Out; Who's In?" *New York Times*, March 11, 1973, section 4, p. 1; Tomn Buckley, "Badillo: Mayoral Hopeful Dogged by Problems," *New York Times*, April 2, 1973, p. 37; Frank Lynn, "A Minority Candidacy Is Rejected," *New York Times*, July 1, 1973, section 4, p. 3.

18 Murray Schumach, "Council Creates 6 Districts for City Groups," *New York Times*, December 23, 1972, p. 1.

12 Movimiento Pro Independencia, Misión Vito Marcantonio, Declaración de Prensa, November 19, 1969. Jesús Colón Papers, New York Organizations, Box 1, Folder 4. Centro Archives. Citation translated from the Spanish by José E. Cruz.

13 McNickle, pp. 216-218.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 243-244.



Procaccino in favor of Lindsay in 1969 demonstrated that arrogance and vitriol was unacceptable regardless of ethnicity. Further, Badillo was weak citywide, not so much because he was Puerto Rican but because he was perceived to be, truly or not, simply a Puerto Rican/minority candidate.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, both the *New York Times* and the *New York Post* endorsed Badillo as the best hope for the city as a whole. At the same time, Italian and Irish voters were disinclined to support him because he was Puerto Rican. But Badillo could have won if only he had persuaded a sufficient number of Jewish voters that he was a better choice than Beame. Beame was the party regular and Badillo was not and party support was critical in the mobilization of voters. Racism was present during the campaign but it did not determine the outcome.<sup>20</sup>

### STRIKE THREE

Badillo tried to win the nomination for mayor a third time in 1977. In February he was only *considering* a run. Bella Abzug and Edward Koch were also thinking about seeking the mayoralty. In March, the Democratic National Committee discounted the possibility of either Badillo or Koch being successful. The committee declared that incumbent Abraham Beame had the best chance of winning a primary. By April, the scuttlebutt on Badillo was that without an endorsement from the Liberal Party he would not run. Koch described him as far behind the pack. In May, Badillo saw his chances diminished by the entrance into the race of Abzug. He blasted her in public for not honoring a promise to back him. According to Badillo, Abzug had offered her support in exchange for his endorsement of her U.S. senate candidacy in 1976. Against all odds, in June he decided to enter the primary. He felt confident in his ability to defeat Beame in a runoff.

At the same time, Manhattan Borough President Percy Sutton began campaigning for the Democratic nomination, with support from black leaders David Dinkins and Charles Rangel. This was a move that could only diminish black support for Badillo. Badillo was certain that support for him among blacks would erode only in Manhattan. This belief was shattered when more than a dozen black mayors as well as

black elected officials from across the country rallied behind Percy Sutton. In August, sociologist Herbert Gans declared Badillo the most competent candidate of all. WCBS-Radio endorsed Badillo but WCBS-TV endorsed Mario Cuomo, who had entered the race as Governor Carey's preferred candidate. Badillo was also given a "preferred" rating by the New York Political Action Council, a newly formed, nonpartisan organization of gays and lesbians. A key challenge for Badillo was persuading voters that he was concerned with the interests of all New Yorkers rather than just Puerto Ricans. But in this he was not alone. The race as a whole was perceived as an ethnic contest between Italians, represented by Cuomo, blacks, represented by Sutton, and Jews, represented by Abzug, Koch, and Beame. There was even a candidate that was considered representative of the business class, Joel Harnett, but he was really nobody's candidate.<sup>21</sup>

Badillo came in sixth place in the primary with just 11 percent of the vote. Koch and Cuomo came in first and second respectively and had to fight for the nomination in a runoff.<sup>22</sup> Badillo decided to support Koch. Koch went on to win the nomination and then the election, with more support from blacks and Puerto Ricans than Cuomo, who ran on the Liberal Party line.<sup>23</sup>

### STRIKE FOUR?

When Koch ran for re-election in 1981, there was a challenger from the Hispanic community but his candidacy was so marginal that anyone other than a historian looking backward could easily miss it. It was not Herman Badillo, although he did consider running. In 1978, Koch made Badillo a Deputy Mayor and by 1979 Badillo was out. Now he was down and out and therefore did not pursue the position. The challenger was Dr. Jerónimo Domínguez, who also ran for Bronx borough president in 1979 on the Right to Life Party line. During a debate with Koch he told the audience: "Everyone must vote. If you don't vote you cannot complain." He promised to end crime and drug abuse, to rebuild the subway system, to maintain the city's infrastructure, and to rehabilitate the more than 10,000 buildings that had been

<sup>19</sup> McNickle, p. 247.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 250-252.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 260-261.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

abandoned during the four years of Koch's administration. Domínguez also ran on a platform of higher taxes for the rich and the promise of a crackdown on absentee landlords. "If you are rich or a landlord, then vote for Koch," said Domínguez, "because I am declaring war on rich people."<sup>24</sup> Councilman Luis Olmedo, who was neither rich nor a landlord, exhorted all Hispanics to re-elect Koch. In his view, Koch had done a great job. Olmedo disputed the notion that Koch was hostile to minorities in the city. Further, Olmedo claimed that Koch's victory was inevitable and that voting for someone else would be a wasted vote.<sup>25</sup> Koch won by a landslide, running on the Democratic and Republican party line.

**LA TERCERA (NO) ES LA VENCIDA  
(THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE [NOT] OUT)**

In 1984, Latinos were starkly divided in their attitude toward Koch. Those opposing him were 54 percent of the total compared to 46 percent who were supportive.<sup>26</sup> According to a 1984 poll, had Herman Badillo run against Koch in that year, he would have lost the Latino vote 38 to 46 percent.<sup>27</sup> The rejection of Badillo by Latinos suggested that, in his case, as the Spanish saying goes, "La tercera es la vencida" [Three strikes and you're out]. In Hispanic culture, just as in baseball, you have three chances to make it; after that you are done. But in American politics, one failed candidacy is often enough to finish a politician's career for good. By running for a fourth time, Badillo went against the conventional wisdom and then some.

In January 1985, Badillo declared that he would run for the mayoralty. He made his participation conditional on garnering support from a broad-based coalition.<sup>28</sup> His announcement was immediately followed by a blanket rejection from Stanley Hill, deputy executive director of District Council 37 of the State, County, and Municipal Employees Union. District 37 was key to developing an anti-Koch coalition, and Hill's rejection

of Badillo was a severe blow to his candidacy, an emblem of Badillo's weak standing with African-American elites.<sup>29</sup>

A week after Hill's statement, the *New York Times* published the results of a poll of 1,329 adults conducted between January 5 and 10. A majority of respondents, 53 percent, thought that Koch deserved re-election. Among whites, support for Koch's re-election was 65 percent. Only 31 percent of blacks supported his re-election compared to 49 percent of Hispanics. Support for Badillo was only 34 percent. He was viewed most favorably by Hispanics, but even among them only a minority of 45 percent had a favorable view of his candidacy; only 33 percent of blacks shared the feeling.<sup>30</sup> Poll results notwithstanding, black leaders invited Badillo to be interviewed as a potential candidate at a meeting to be held on January 26. According to Assemblyman Al Vann, a group of black leaders, union officials, and liberal Democrats would interview up to eight candidates and then announce an endorsement.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the Spanish saying and the evidence from the polls, if Badillo ever had a good chance of securing the Democratic nomination for mayor, it was in 1985. A coalition of Hispanic leaders supported his candidacy. At the end of January, after the Coalition for A Just New York completed the process of interviewing candidates, he and Carol Bellamy appeared to be the two hopefuls with the strongest support among black politicians.<sup>32</sup> Yet, after heated deliberations within the Coalition, support for Badillo was split. Under such circumstances, the Coalition endorsed Assemblyman Herman "Denny" Farrell, Jr. True to his word that he would not run without coalition support, Badillo dropped out. "I can understand there will be disappointment by those who expected that Mr. Badillo would be our candidate," Al Vann said.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Farrell's last-minute entry into the race caused widespread resentment among Hispanics. The unhappiness of Hispanic Democrats was so

24 "Si usted no vota luego no se queje, dice Domínguez," *El Diario-La Prensa*, November 2, 1981, p. 7. It is not certain that Domínguez was Puerto Rican.

25 Manuel de Dios Unanue, "Concejal Olmedo: que todos voten mañana," *El Diario-La Prensa*, November 2, 1981, p. 7.

26 New York City Chapter's Approach to Electoral Question, n.d., p. 2. Lourdes Torres Papers, Series IV National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, Box 4 Folder 4, Centro Archives.

27 Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, "The 1985 Mayoral Race and the Puerto Rican-Latino Community in New York City," December 1984, p. 4. Lourdes Torres Papers, Series IV National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, Box 4 Folder 4, Centro Archives.

28 Susan Heller Anderson and David W. Dunlap, "Who Will Finally Decide to Run Against Mayor Koch?," *New York Times*, January 5, 1985, p. 24.

29 Frank Lynn, "Koch Foes Discussing Blacks for Council President," *New York Times*, January 12, 1985, p. 25.

30 "Poll Favors Koch for 3d Term but City Services Rate Poorly," *New York Times*, January 17, 1985, p. 1.

31 Frank Lynn, "Koch Agrees to Meeting With Blacks at City Hall," *New York Times*, January 18, 1985, p. B4.

32 Frank Lynn, "6 Mayoral Contenders Give Views to Black Group," *New York Times*, January 27, 1985, p. 18; Susan Heller Anderson and David W. Dunlap, "New York Day by Day; Coalition Time," *New York Times*, January 30, 1985, p. B5.

33 Frank Lynn, "Bellamy Enters Race for Mayor; Black Coalition Endorses Farrell," *New York Times*, February 9, 1985, p. 1.

great that some even demanded the dissolution of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus in Albany.<sup>34</sup> On November 5, Koch was reelected to serve a third term with over 80 percent of the vote.

#### NEXT MAN AT BAT

After the 1985 debacle, Badillo's successor in Congress, Robert García, considered running for mayor. His plan to run focus groups to gauge the willingness of nonHispanics to vote for a Puerto Rican was thwarted by the explosion of the Wedtech scandal, a case of corruption, extortion, and bribery involving federal funds, which terminated his political career.<sup>35</sup> Thus, no Puerto Rican pursued the mayor's office until 1997 when Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer stepped up to the mayoral plate for the first time. Ferrer began his involvement in politics as a student activist. His Wikipedia biography notes that "in 1968, as an Aspirante, he was part of a major student protest at the NYC Board of Education that resulted in such reforms as bilingual report cards and the recognition by the public schools of Puerto Rican Discovery Day (November 19th)."<sup>36</sup> It should be no surprise to anyone that the impact of this demonstration, whose specific demands were more courses on Puerto Rican culture and history and proportional representation of Puerto Ricans in the Board's decentralization plan,<sup>37</sup> is greatly exaggerated in the Wikipedia profile. Be that as it may, the event marked the early political activism of Ferrer.

Ferrer entered politics as a candidate for office in 1974 by running against Assemblyman Luis Nunez, the incumbent in district 78 in the Bronx since 1970. His life as a public official began the following year. He occupied staff posts until his election to the city council in 1982, to represent the Bronx's district 13. He was appointed Bronx borough president in 1987, after the incumbent, Stanley Simon, was sent to prison for his involvement in a municipal scandal that rocked the Democratic Party. In September, he defeated Rafael Méndez on a primary and was elected in November to complete Simon's term. During the general election, he defeated

Republican Victor Tosi. Méndez stayed in the race on the New Alliance Party line, to no avail.<sup>38</sup> Ferrer served for 14 years as borough president.

To Ferrer, the symbolic power of Badillo's 1969 run for the mayoralty was tremendous, a source of inspiration for his own efforts.<sup>39</sup> Yet, his 1997 campaign was a brief and feeble attempt that ended with him dropping out of the race to seek re-election of the borough presidency.<sup>40</sup> On May 13, he declared: "A paramount part of my decision is the belief that we as Democrats must promote a stronger sense of purpose in order to defeat the Republican agenda of Rudolph Giuliani . . . I believe in the Democratic Party. It is for that reason, and after much deliberation, that I am taking the first step to unify behind one Democratic candidate, Ruth Messinger."<sup>41</sup>

Puerto Ricans were not happy with this turn of events. The excitement over Ferrer's candidacy was so high that it prompted some to do what they had never done before: contribute money to the campaign. To many, his exit was a blow to what they considered the best opportunity to finally put a Puerto Rican in the city's highest office.<sup>42</sup> In addition, his withdrawal may have prevented the election for the first time of a Puerto Rican woman to the Bronx borough presidency. This was the hope of Shirley Remeneski but her aspiration was dashed by Ferrer's decision. She considered herself a long shot because the party was not behind her but she never had a chance to confirm that guess.<sup>43</sup> Once Ferrer was out, the Democratic Party endorsed Ruth Messinger. She went on to lose to incumbent Rudy Giuliani by over 200,000 votes. Giuliani obtained 757,564 votes or 57 percent of the total to Messinger's 540,075, or 41 percent. Interestingly, even though Giuliani's support was mostly from white voters, he managed to make inroads into black and Latino constituencies.<sup>44</sup> His

38 Frank Lynn, "Ferrer Seen as Choice in the Bronx," *New York Times*, April 11, 1987; Josué R. Rivas and Sandra Rodríguez, "Eligirán hoy al próximo presidente de El Bronx," *El Diario-La Prensa*, November 3, 1987, p. 2.

39 Video interview with Fernando Ferrer, c. 2004, used for the production of documentary *Politics Con Sabor*, Terramax Entertainment, LLC, Centro Archives.

40 Jonathan P. Hicks, "Primary Races Expose Cracks in Once Unified Bronx Democratic Machine," *New York Times*, September 22, 1997, p. B3.

41 "In His Own Words," *New York Times*, May 14, 1997, p. B5.

42 Jonathan P. Hicks, "If His Party Was Unsurprised by Ferrer's Move, Some Voters Are Crestfallen," *New York Times*, May 14, 1997, p. B5.

43 Video interview with Shirley Remeneski, 2004, used for the production of documentary *Politics Con Sabor*, Terramax Entertainment, LLC, Centro Archives.

44 Marjorie Connelly, "A Portrait of New York City Voters," *New York Times*, November 9, 1997, p. 21; Adam Nagourney, "The 1997 Elections: The Parties; Evolving From Ideology Toward Pragmatism," *New York Times*, November 6, 1997, p. B3.

34 Frank Lynn, "Divided Opposition," *New York Times*, February 16, 1985, p. 27.

35 Video interview with Robert García, June 19, 2004, used for the production of documentary *Politics Con Sabor*, Terramax Entertainment, LLC, Centro Archives. For a full and vivid account of the Wedtech scandal see William Sternberg and Matthew C. Harrison, *Feeding Frenzy: The Inside Story of Wedtech* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1989).

36 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando\\_Ferrer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fernando_Ferrer) <accessed June 9, 2008>.

37 See "Demonstración Ante la Junta de Instrucción," Photo by Nury Hernández, *El Diario-La Prensa*, November 20, 1968, p. 1.



advantage of 16 percentage points over Messinger was 14 points greater than his margin over David Dinkins in 1993.

In 2001, Ferrer tried his luck for the second time. Badillo came back briefly for the fifth time, seeking the nomination against Michael Bloomberg on the Republican line. At this point he was dubbed the perennial candidate. Like Badillo in 1973, Ferrer was not able to make it past the primary. His demise came in the runoff election against Public Advocate Mark Green. The contest between Ferrer and Green was nasty and bitter. Ferrer was accused of being racially and ethnically divisive. Green was accused of engaging in racist tactics. In the end, Democrats confronted newcomer candidate Mike Bloomberg weak and divided. Green lost to Bloomberg narrowly, in large part due to the decision by many Latino voters to either sit out the election or vote for the Republican candidate. The example of Raul Amador, a 61-year-old accountant from Queens is emblematic of this behavior. "If it wasn't going to be Ferrer, then, frankly, it didn't matter that much who among these two Americans won," he said. "Ferrer was one of us. The other two are about the same." Nevertheless, had he voted, he added, he would have chosen Bloomberg.<sup>45</sup>

## THE 2005 ELECTION

The clarion call of the 2005 campaign, sounded by the *New York Times*, was negative for Mayor Bloomberg. According to the *Times*, his challenge was to persuade New Yorkers that he deserved another chance to steer the city through the combined problems of a multibillion-dollar budget shortfall, disgruntled teachers, firefighters, and police officers waiting to get contracts, a financial crisis in public transportation and in public hospitals, a critically short supply of affordable housing, increasing numbers of homeless people, and a dearth of teachers and classroom space in the public school system.<sup>46</sup> For his part, Bloomberg fired his own first shot of the campaign right in the heart of enemy territory. At Hostos Community College in the Bronx he touted his record, recalling that in 2001 he was presiding over a city full of doubts about its ability to overcome the effects of September 11. Now, he was proud to

say, the city was safer, fiscally stable, and enjoying economic growth.<sup>47</sup> On January 18, he went to the Canaan Baptist Church of Christ in Harlem to address a largely African-American crowd on the commemoration of Martin Luther King's birthday. There, Al Sharpton stung him by saying that it was not enough to quote King nor to remember him only once a year. Bloomberg took it all in stride and when it was his turn to speak was given a hearty reception by the audience.<sup>48</sup>

Meanwhile, the Democratic contest for the nomination began with revelations that Gifford Miller, the city council speaker, was planning a smear campaign against Fernando Ferrer and Anthony Weiner. His plan included ignoring the black candidates Charles Barron, a city councilman from Brooklyn, and C. Virginia Fields, the Manhattan borough president. Weiner was combative in his reaction, declaring himself ready for a fight. Ferrer's camp put itself above the fray. "Fernando Ferrer is not concerned by or focused on other candidates' strategies or what they may say about him," said Ferrer's campaign spokeswoman, Jen Bluestein. "Mr. Ferrer is completely focused on providing an alternative vision for New York City, and providing real leadership to address the affordability crisis New York's families are facing: finding affordable housing, after-school programs for their kids, health care."<sup>49</sup>

Above the fray or not, New Yorkers were not persuaded that Ferrer was the best candidate. According to the results of a poll conducted by Quinnipiac University, released in January 20, both Ferrer and Bloomberg enjoyed almost equal support from likely voters. This was not good for Ferrer. Since February of 2004 he had held an advantage over Bloomberg of between four to seven percentage points.<sup>50</sup> Now Bloomberg was making inroads among minority voters with his numbers rising 4 percentage points among blacks and 2 points among Hispanics. Also, 50 percent of voters gave him a favorable job rating compared to only 31 percent doing so in July 2003.<sup>51</sup>

47 Tatsha Robertson, "Mayor Fights Own Image In N.Y. Race," *The Boston Globe*, April 11, 2005, p. A1.

48 Michael Slackman, "A Day for Dr. King, Sharpton and Politics," *New York Times*, January 18, 2005, p. B3.

49 Winnie Hu, "Sparring Begins Among Democrats for Mayor," *New York Times*, January 13, 2005, p. B1.

50 Jim Rutenberg, "Metro Briefing New York: Manhattan: Bloomberg Catches Ferrer," *New York Times*, January 20, 2005, p. B8.

51 David Saltontall, "Bloomy On Up & Up In Poll," *Daily News*, January 20, 2005, p. 19.

45 Mirta Ojito, "The 2001 Elections: The Voters; City's Hispanics Shift, Moving Toward G.O.P.," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2001, p. 5.

46 "A Wish for a Campaign Promise," *New York Times*, January 2, 2005, Section 14, p. 9.

This was remarkable given efforts by his rivals to portray him as a billionaire who was out of touch with the concerns of poor New Yorkers and more interested in catering to powerful corporate figures. Perhaps what was important to voters was the mayor's unwavering attitude. Even though a majority was cool to the idea of building a new stadium on the west side of Manhattan, they could still see favorable leadership qualities in the incumbent. After all, it was hard to reject the possibility that the future might prove the mayor right. As he put it himself: "When people look back 10 years, 20 years, 30 years from now, they'll say, 'Thank God New Yorkers had the courage in tough times to go ahead and not listen to the naysayers, but to do the great things.'"<sup>52</sup>

At the end of January, Ferrer suffered a blow from within. Bloomberg's Republican rival in 2001, Herman Badillo, announced his endorsement of the mayor. The mayor "is doing fine," said Badillo to the *New York Times*. "Crime overall has gone down. He has a housing program. He did a good job of cleaning the streets in the last snowfall. He's created jobs. Overall, his performance is very good, but more important is his work on education."<sup>53</sup> Badillo's standing among Latino voters was insignificant but his gesture was symbolically powerful. To Ferrer, more challenging than Badillo's endorsement of Bloomberg was the candidacy of C. Virginia Fields, which posed a dilemma for black leaders. It also raised the possibility of fostering debilitating racial divisions and conflict among Democrats.

In February, Ferrer was reportedly seeking to broaden his base of support, picking up endorsements from Democratic politicians who had backed Mark Green in 2001 and "talking extensively about the middle class."<sup>54</sup> Key support came in mid-month from the Village Independent Democrats, a group whose chosen candidate had won the Democratic nomination consistently in the four previous mayoral campaigns. His endorsement by Eliot Spitzer was also seen as key in the mobilization of white voters.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, a minor insurrection took place within Ferrer's camp when he expressed support for Judge

Doris Ling-Cohan's decision to make gay marriage legal in New York. The Rev. Rubén Díaz Sr., a state senator from the Bronx, said that such support was the equivalent of "slapping us in our faces," and warned Ferrer to be careful if he wanted support from Latinos. "We can tell our people throughout the Hispanic community and churches, don't vote, stay home," said Díaz. Another evangelical leader from the Bronx, Rev. Fernando Rodríguez, head of the Latin American Chaplain Association, said that "We're closing our churches down for him to even visit." Ferrer responded: "I'm consistent about not liking discrimination, and so when you're faced with something like this, you have to act in the way that your heart tells you."<sup>56</sup>

In March, New Yorkers were reminded of a remarkable fact:

"The percentage of black New Yorkers who have voted for the Republican mayoral candidate has increased fivefold since Rudolph W. Giuliani defeated Mr. Dinkins in 1993. Mr. Giuliani took only 5 percent of the black vote that year. That percentage grew to 20 percent for Mr. Giuliani in 1997. Mr. Bloomberg took 25 percent of the black vote in 2001 against Mark Green. Last time around, Mr. Bloomberg won with 47 percent of the Hispanic vote, clearly benefiting from a racially divisive primary between Mr. Ferrer and Mr. Green that left many Hispanic voters alienated when Mr. Green won a runoff election."<sup>57</sup>

No wonder that Bloomberg put a great deal of effort in reaching out to minority voters—going to Hostos Community College and Canaan Baptist Church in January as well as ceremonies commemorating the death of Malcolm X and the achievements of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., among other events targeting blacks and Latinos.

The one issue where the mayor could not get a firm footing on was his proposal to build the west side stadium. In March, a Quinnipiac University poll found that most respondents did not think the mayor cared about them. Ferrer was seen as

52 Jim Rutenberg, "Stadium Push by Bloomberg May Come at His Political Peril," *New York Times*, January 23, 2005, p. 29.

53 Michael Slackman and Jim Rutenberg, "Mayor Gets Big Boost From Elders Of His Party," *New York Times*, January 27, 2005, p. B4.

54 Maggie Haberman, "Ferrer Gets Early Votes From Two Key State Pols.," *Daily News*, February 2, 2005, p. 22.

55 "Spitzer's man," *Financial Times*, February 25, 2005, p. 12.

56 Jim Rutenberg, "No Less Than Bloomberg, His Opponents Face a Test Over Stands on Gay Marriage," *New York Times*, February 13, 2005, p. 39.

57 Jim Rutenberg, "Bloomberg Works to Keep Blacks Switching to the G.O.P.," *New York Times*, March 2, 2005, p. B1.

more sensitive to their problems and needs and 47 percent supported him compared to 39 percent for Bloomberg. Bloomberg was firm in his position. "I'm 63 years old and I'm not going to spend my life pandering to anybody," he declared. "I'm going to do what I think is right for this city and I'm going to lead from the front and not the back."<sup>58</sup> At that point Ferrer was favored 61 to 23 percent by blacks and 65 to 27 percent by Latinos. Bloomberg had the white vote 53 to 32 percent.<sup>59</sup> The question that kept surfacing about Ferrer was "Can he move beyond a minority coalition and attract white voters suspicious of a candidate who views the city as divided into two New Yorks? And can he shake off the sense that he is the product of a Bronx Democratic machine that has long been tainted by accusations of favoritism and even corruption?"<sup>60</sup>

Then Amadou Diallo came storming in.<sup>61</sup> At a meeting with members of the Sergeants Benevolent Association on Tuesday, March 15, Ferrer declared he did not believe the shooting of Diallo had been a crime. Further, he claimed that those responsible had been over-indicted. These statements were shocking to many, especially since Ferrer had protested the killing vehemently in 1999 and had called for a criminal trial. Charges of flip-flopping and pandering followed immediately in what the *New York Times* described as a political firestorm.<sup>62</sup> A poll taken after Ferrer made his remarks showed 37 percent of 924 registered voters interviewed saying they would be less likely to vote for him because of his comments. But Ferrer stayed ahead of the mayor 49 to 35 percent.<sup>63</sup> Two major African-American public figures, Congressmen Major R. Owens and Edolphus Towns, endorsed Ferrer a week after the remarks were made. Puerto Rican Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez joined them, and all three tried to deflect attention from the Diallo issue by emphasizing Ferrer's record of

accomplishments on socioeconomic issues and his progressive stance on racial relations.<sup>64</sup> This came at the same time that Al Sharpton decided to back Bloomberg's west side stadium project and Congressman Charles Rangel announced his endorsement of C. Virginia Fields. These announcements were seen as cracks in the black-Latino coalition that Ferrer needed to win.<sup>65</sup>

In April, Ferrer's fortunes began to change dramatically. He was described as a blubbering candidate who had begun to show signs of weakness in adversity. At a private meeting, former Mayor Ed Koch claimed that [Ferrer] had "slit his own throat" with the Diallo remarks.<sup>66</sup> According to Michael Goodwin, a reporter for the *Daily News*, it was "business as usual. The wanna-bes are running on platforms with just two planks: ethnic and racial appeal, or platitudes suggesting Abe Lincoln was wrong—you really can fool all the people all the time."<sup>67</sup> Also in April, public speculation on the reasons for Al Sharpton's and Charles Rangel's open support of Bloomberg's stadium proposal, Sharpton's coy attitude towards Ferrer, and Rangel's endorsement of C. Virginia Fields suggested that black leaders wanted Bloomberg to win. The rationale behind this was that a Bloomberg victory would allow their preferred candidate, Comptroller William "Bill" Thompson, to run in 2009 against a white candidate as opposed to a Latino incumbent. "Blacks and Hispanics have formed coalitions," wrote Joyce Purnick, "but black-Hispanic rivalries are strong, too. Do black political leaders want to risk an eight-year run by a Mayor Ferrer, or would they rather have another four years with a grateful Mr. Bloomberg to clear the way for Mr. Thompson?"<sup>68</sup> From the Sharpton camp the answer to the question was that to have such a plan was not only unnecessary but ridiculous.<sup>69</sup>

Ferrer continued to poll ahead of Bloomberg but his margin slipped from 14 to 6 percentage points, largely as a result of

58 Winnie Hu and Charles V. Bagli, "Obstacle Rises for Bloomberg On West Side Stadium Plan," *New York Times*, March 3, 2005, p. B1.

59 David Saltonstall, "Freddie Leading Mike Poll has Ferrer Ahead of Mayor by 8 Points," *Daily News*, March 3, 2005, p. 4.

60 Diane Cardwell, "Ferrer Promoting Mayorality as a National Democratic Goal," *New York Times*, March 10, 2005, p. B1.

61 On February 4, 1999, Diallo, a 22-year-old Guinean immigrant, was shot at 41 times by New York City police officers who were searching his Soundview neighborhood for a rapist. His body was hit by 19 bullets, killing him instantly. See Ginger Thompson with Garry Pierre-Pierre, "Portrait of Slain Immigrant: Big Dreams and a Big Heart," *New York Times*, February 12, 1999, p.1; Leslie Casimir, Bill Egbert, and Bill Hutchinson with Maureen Fan, "Throngs Say Farewell 'Justice' For Amadou is the Cry in Procession From Harlem," *Daily News*, February 15, 1999, p. 7.

62 Diane Cardwell, "For Ferrer and the Police, A Shifting Relationship," *New York Times*, March 18, 2005, p. B3.

63 Jim Rutenberg, "Two Polls Show Ferrer Leading In a Race Against Bloomberg," *New York Times*, March 22, 2005, p. B7.

64 Diane Cardwell, "Three in Congress Back Ferrer In Aftermath of Diallo Remark," *New York Times*, March 24, 2005, p. B4.

65 Jim Rutenberg, "Lions, Lambs, Elephants, Donkeys and City Hall," *New York Times*, March 30, 2005, p. B1; Randal C. Archibold, "Rangel Backs Fields in Race To Challenge Bloomberg," *New York Times*, April 1, 2005, p. B3.

66 Patrick D. Healy, "Strategists' Advice to Bloomberg? Show You're No Born Billionaire," *New York Times*, April 8, 2005, p. A1.

67 Michael Goodwin, "Four Blind Mice On The Mayorality," *Daily News*, April 6, 2005, p. 43.

68 Joyce Purnick, "Foraging For the Truth In City Politics," *New York Times*, April 11, 2005, p. B1.

69 Diane Cardwell, "Sharpton Backs No Candidate In the Primary," *New York Times*, April 21, 2005, p. B1.

the Diallo remarks.<sup>70</sup> On April 11, in a forum at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center, in the West Village, he was booed and hissed by the same people who had been cheering him before his statement. “What about Diallo,” shouted two members of the audience as Ferrer spoke. “Why did you say what you said?” screamed another. Visibly upset, Ferrer sat down and remained silent. “I think Freddy Ferrer is in real trouble, and I don’t know if he even realizes how much,” said Percy Sutton while also wondering if the Democrats could beat Bloomberg.<sup>71</sup> On April 14, journalist Juan González came to Ferrer’s aid with a tortured defense of his “consistency” on the Diallo issue. His charge that the press was promoting racial divisions and his attack of C. Virginia Fields for siding with Giuliani and the police in 1999 was of little help.<sup>72</sup> For his part, Ferrer tried to shift attention from the issue by proposing a reinstatement of a tax on stock transfers to pay for public education costs. Predictably, this did not go well in the financial community. More damaging was the reaction of Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver who joined those who rejected and ridiculed the proposal by arguing that it would not help the economy of the city.<sup>73</sup>

Anthony Weiner called the stock transfer tax “sheer folly” and Bill Thompson quickly distanced himself from the proposal by hedging. The *Daily News* called it simplistic, silly, and nutty. According to the paper “kicking a political campaign into high gear by calling for a tax hike was, to put it charitably, a bold gambit,” a remark that was more sarcastic than laudatory. “What Ferrer sloughed off,” continued the editorial, “is that investors are not bound to the New York Stock Exchange and other trading floors. In these days of computerization, they can just as well do their transactions elsewhere, and avoid paying the tax. And there go thousands of financial-sector jobs.”<sup>74</sup> The *New York Times* added its voice to the chorus of critics by calling Ferrer’s proposal unimpressive and charging that it undermined the mayor’s negotiating position with the state.<sup>75</sup> The

proposal was also called an “economy killer” but it could have been called a candidate killer just as well. This was, in the short span of a month, the second major self-inflicted wound of the Ferrer campaign. Immediately after the fiasco, Al Sharpton announced that he would not be supporting anyone in the Democratic primary.<sup>76</sup>

At this point, Ferrer was dubbed “gaffe-prone and ignorant” by *New York Times* reporter Diane Cardwell. The problem, in her view, was his “slip-ups, his seeming misstatements and the substance of his proposals.” Ferrer’s own response to these criticisms unwittingly reaffirmed them: “Look, I know that you’re running for the most important job in this city, the second-most important in the country, and you’re going to get scrutinized,” he said to Cardwell in a telephone interview. “I don’t mind the scrutiny. I do mind using a tense of the verb or any other linguistic device as a convenient way to ignore 1.1 million kids.”<sup>77</sup> One could easily visualize a puzzled reader going, “huh?”

On April 27, a Marist Institute poll drove another nail into Ferrer’s campaign coffin. After leading the mayor by six points in March, Ferrer was now behind by a whopping 13 points, 38 to 51 percent.<sup>78</sup> “Polls are going to go up or down,” was Ferrer’s lame response to the news. The poll also showed an alarming slippage in support among blacks and only a small advantage over the mayor in support among Latinos.<sup>79</sup> In March, 66 percent of blacks supported Ferrer compared to 45 percent after the Amadou Diallo remarks. On the other hand, Bloomberg’s currency among blacks had gone up from 24 to 44 percent. Among Latinos, Bloomberg was now trailing Ferrer by only six points—43 to 49 percent—compared to a disadvantage of 32 points—31 to 63 percent—in March.<sup>80</sup>

This was simply amazing and there was still a primary to worry about. Ferrer endorsed Bloomberg’s subway-frisking policy (only to criticize it during the July television debate),<sup>81</sup> accused the

76 Diane Cardwell, “Sharpton Backs No Candidate...”

77 Diane Cardwell, “Ferrer Tries to Shift the Debate, and It Shoves Back,” *New York Times*, April 24, 2005, p. 39.

78 Maggie Haberman, “Bloomy Zooms By Ferrer In New Poll,” *Daily News*, April 27, 2005, p. 3.

79 Michael Saul and Maggie Haberman, “Freddy’s Fall vs. Mike Just 1 Of His Woes,” *Daily News*, April 28, 2005, p. 12.

80 Maggie Haberman, “Blooming Good News For Mayor. Polls & Spirits On Rise,” *Daily News*, May 1, 2005, p. 19.

81 Patrick D. Healy, “In Debate, Candidates Unite in Criticizing Bloomberg,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 2005, p. B6. Ferrer called the policy ridiculous but only as the centerpiece of an anti-terrorism policy. In his view, the city needed bag searches as well as surveillance cameras, more police officers on subways and buses, and more workers in token booths.

70 Tatsha Robertson, “Mayor Fights Own Image...”

71 Patrick D. Healy and Jim Rutenberg, “Democratic Leaders Worry Over Mayoral Race,” *New York Times*, April 12, 2005, p. B1.

72 Juan González, “Ferrer Never Flip-Flopped,” *Daily News*, April 14, 2005, p. 20.

73 Diane Cardwell, “Ferrer Proposes Return of Tax on Stock Trades to Aid Schools,” *New York Times*, April 19, 2005, p. B8.

74 Editorial, “Freddy’s Stock Takes a Plunge,” *Daily News*, April 20, 2005, p. 38.

75 “About that Stock Transfer Tax,” *The New York Times*, May 1, 2005, p. 13.



mayor of making contributions to anti-abortion politicians, lambasted Bloomberg for endorsing push-polls attacking him, but nothing stuck. The mayor was still considered competent, smart, and even good-looking, a reference that was played out in the press as a factor with the female vote.<sup>82</sup> Yes, he seemed to be using his wealth to the tune of \$140 million a year in charitable donations to buy political support from 843 recipient organizations.<sup>83</sup> But the press found Ferrer's flip-flopping a bigger flaw worth highlighting repeatedly. This enhanced Ferrer's image as inconsistent and incompetent.<sup>84</sup> Reporter John Podhoretz declared the Democratic candidates hopeless. "Not a single one of these four [Democrats] has a snowball's chance in hell of beating Mike Bloomberg—short of the mayor being caught on video doing a Paris Hilton with a yak," he said.<sup>85</sup>

### THE 2005 PRIMARY ELECTION

By mid-August Ferrer was ahead of the Democratic pack but, according to a Quinnipiac University poll, he was still short of the 40 percent needed to avert a runoff election. The poll showed Ferrer with 33 percent of the Democratic vote, Gifford Miller with 17 percent, and Virginia Fields tied at 16 percent with Anthony Weiner.<sup>86</sup> At the end of August, the *New York Times* reported that the contest between Miller and Weiner could prove decisive to the fortunes of Ferrer. "If the two each win large shares of the electorate," reads the *Times* report, "and a third candidate, C. Virginia Fields, holds her own, the three could deprive Fernando Ferrer, who is leading in all [primary] polls, from winning 40 percent of the vote, resulting in a runoff between the top two finalists."<sup>87</sup> At this point, Ferrer was essentially relying on his ethnic base for a strong showing. Polls consistently set support for his candidacy at 30 percent of likely primary voters.<sup>88</sup>

82 David Seifman, "Mike Scores in Terror Fight," *The New York Post*, July 23, 2005, p. 8; Carl Campanile, "Leftover Green Dirt Gets Flung at Freddy," *The New York Post*, July 23, 2005, p. 8; Mike McIntire, "Mayoral Race Has Whodunit: The Anti-Ferrer Pollster Calls," *The New York Times*, August 30, 2005, p. B1; Michael Saul, "Freddy Jokes: I Really am Chopped Liver," *Daily News*, July 22, 2005, p. 2.

83 Thomas J. Lueck, "What's Up and Spans City? Bloomberg's Philanthropy," *The New York Times*, August 17, 2005, p. B4.

84 Stefan C. Friedman, "Freddy's Latest Flip-Flop: Tax Rebates," *The New York Post*, August 7, 2005, p. 19; Carl Campanile, "'Flip-Flop Freddy' - '01 Attack Document Rich With '05 Ammo," *The New York Post*, August 22, 2005, p. 6; Stefan C. Friedman, "Ferrer Flip-Flops on Alien Voters," *The New York Post*, September 12, 2005, p. 4; Carl Campanile, "Foes Fry Freddy Over Latest Death-Penalty 'Flip-Flop,'" *The New York Post*, October 8, 2005, p. 2.

85 John Podhoretz, "Dem Four: Walking Dead," *The New York Post*, August 12, 2005, p. 33.

86 David Seifman, "It's a Three-For-All to Face Ferrer in Runoff," *The New York Post*, August 19, 2005, p. 2. A *Daily News* story also published on August 19 had Fields and Gifford tied at 17 percent and Weiner having only 16 percent support. See Michael Saul, "Suddenly, a 3-Way Race for No. 2 Dem," *Daily News*, August 19, 2005, p. 2.

87 "Trying to Step Out of the Other Guy's Shadow," *New York Times*, August 29, 2005, p. B1.

88 "Trying to Step Out..."

On September 3, Ferrer received a lukewarm and backhanded endorsement from the *New York Times*. "If Mr. Ferrer is going to be a decent candidate in the fall," reads the editorial, "he's going to have to start talking like the intelligent public servant he used to be. If we're going to make a leap of faith, we prefer to do it with Mr. Ferrer."<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, Bloomberg continued to amass support. The same day that Sharpton announced he *might* endorse Ferrer, Bloomberg was endorsed by the hotel and textile workers' unions as well as by District Council 1707 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. These groups had a combined membership of 75,000.<sup>90</sup> Two days before the primary, Sharpton finally came through with his endorsement. The press questioned the benefits of his support, arguing that Sharpton's days as a kingmaker were essentially over, while suggesting that he could move voters but not so late in the game.<sup>91</sup>

On September 13, primary day, as Ferrer campaigned in lower Manhattan a passerby shouted to him that he should win because "Rev. Al says so!"<sup>92</sup> A WNBC/Marist poll suggested otherwise. Most registered Democrats declared that Sharpton's endorsement would make no difference in their decision. The poll also showed that 26 percent of white Democrats were less likely to vote for Ferrer because of the endorsement, while 15 percent of black Democrats expressed the opposite feeling. Latino Democratic voters were equally divided with 11 percent saying the endorsement made them less likely to support Ferrer and 11 percent saying it made them more likely to vote for him.<sup>93</sup>

Preliminary primary results showed that the concern over the share of the vote obtained by Miller and Weiner was on the mark. After all the precincts reported their results, Ferrer had 39.949 percent of the vote, a fraction shy of the 40 percent

89 Editorial, "A Democratic Candidate for Mayor," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2005, p. 20. In October the *Times* proceeded to endorse mayor Bloomberg for re-election despite his "obscene unlimited spending on his political campaigns." See Patrick D. Healy, "Times Endorses Mayor Bloomberg for Re-election," *The New York Times*, October 23, 2005, p. 38.

90 Patrick D. Healy and Diane Cardwell, "Endorsement By Sharpton To Go to Ferrer," *The New York Times*, September 10, 2005, p. B1.

91 Patrick D. Healy and Diane Cardwell, "Endorsement By Sharpton..."; Michael Saul, Celeste Katz and Maggie Haberman, "Al's Rewed for Freddy. Sharpton Throws His Support Behind Democratic Mayoral Front-Runner," *Daily News*, September 11, 2005, p. 3.

92 Michael Saul, "Democrats in a Cliffhanger," *Daily News*, September 14, 2005, p. 4.

93 Michael Saul, "Rev. Al Shakes up The Primary," *Daily News*, September 13, 2005, p. 6.



needed to avoid a runoff.<sup>94</sup> Anthony Weiner obtained 29 percent and Gifford Miller a mere 10 percent. This combined tally was significant enough to suggest that had the primary been a two- or even a three-way contest, Ferrer would have easily obtained the nomination. “The road has been long my friends,” said Ferrer after the precinct results were in. “And we’re almost there,” he added, “because we’re about to make history.”<sup>95</sup>

Not surprisingly, the 2005 primary vote was low. This had been predicted by forecasters all along. Their estimates, however, proved to be higher than the actual turnout. The high point of enthusiasm for a primary race was in 1989 when 49 percent of registered Democrats turned out to choose between David Dinkins, Ed Koch, Harrison Goldin, and Richard Ravitch. By 1993 that enthusiasm had waned to 22 percent. In 2001, there was a slight surge in participation when 29 percent of Democrats bothered to cast a ballot.<sup>96</sup> On primary day 2005, of 2,639,845 active registered Democrats, 478,818 participated or 18.1 percent.<sup>97</sup> This was considerably lower than the August estimates of between 600 and 650,000 voters and lower than in previous contests.<sup>98</sup>

The primary electorate appeared sharply divided by race. A preliminary analysis of selected districts published by the *New York Times* showed that Ferrer was largely supported by Latinos, Fields was largely supported by blacks, while Weiner and Miller were more strongly supported by whites than Ferrer and Miller were by Latinos and blacks respectively. This preliminary analysis also showed that, of all the candidates, Ferrer had the greatest support among Latinos and blacks with a combined 94 percent support in selected districts; in contrast, in those districts support for Fields was 88 percent.<sup>99</sup> In Richmond, the city’s whitest county (71 percent white), Ferrer lost to Antony Weiner by 2,420 votes. In the

Bronx, where Latinos and blacks were 80 percent of the population, Ferrer won with 62 percent of the vote.<sup>100</sup> These results still begged the question whether the divisions were a reflection of racism or other factors.

## THE ISSUE OF RUNOFF ELECTIONS

The event that triggered the consideration of runoff elections in New York was the 1965 Democratic mayoral primary that selected Abraham Beame as the party’s mayoral candidate with only 32 percent of the vote. In 1969, when Mario Procaccino captured the Democratic nomination with only 33 percent of the vote to run against John Lindsay, a serious effort to institute the runoff primary got underway. A bipartisan mayoral panel was established and upon its recommendation the state legislature established the runoff effective in 1973. The law called for a runoff if no candidate for the offices of mayor, city council president, or comptroller received more than 40 percent of the votes in a primary. As noted earlier, that was the year when Herman Badillo sought the mayoral nomination for a second time. It is ironic that he lost the nomination to Abraham Beame in a runoff, given that he was a member of the bipartisan panel that recommended its institution.<sup>101</sup>

In 1985 a federal judge struck down the runoff law declaring it unconstitutional. But the law was upheld on appeal because, according to the court, “the record shows that the primary-runoff law was never intended to deny minority voters—and does not have the effect of denying them—an equal opportunity to participate in the political process.” Badillo was disappointed and in a turnaround on his early attitude and position, called on the legislature to eliminate the requirement.<sup>102</sup>

In subsequent elections, the runoff contest did not involve any minorities. But in 1997, Ruth Messinger found herself pitted against a black candidate, the Rev. Al Sharpton. In this case, just as in 2005, a runoff was averted after the count of absentee ballots helped her reach the minimum 40 percent support required to become the candidate. In contrast to 2005, the loser in 1997 did not bow out gracefully. Instead, Sharpton claimed fraud in the

94 Patrick D. Healy, “Weiner Concedes Race for Mayor to Avert Runoff,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2005, p. A1.

95 Sara Kugler, “Ferrer Leads in Mayoral Primary,” *Times Union*, September 14, 2005, p. A3.

96 “Democratic Primary Voter Turnout,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2005, p. B8; <http://vote.nyc.ny.us/pdf/results/2001/primaryelection/2001p.pdf> <accessed September 15, 2005>; Sam Roberts, “Rethinking the Runoff,” *New York Times*, September 18, 2005, p. 37.

97 [http://vote.nyc.ny.us/pdf/documents/boe/enrollment\\_totals/enrollmenttotals.pdf](http://vote.nyc.ny.us/pdf/documents/boe/enrollment_totals/enrollmenttotals.pdf) <accessed November 28, 2005>; <http://vote.nyc.ny.us/pdf/results/2005/primary/DemMayorPubAdvbyBoro.pdf> <accessed November 28, 2005>

98 David Seifman, “‘Low’ Vote a High Note For Mayor & Freddy,” *The New York Post*, August 21, 2005, p. 8; David Saltonstall, “Voter Turnout or Tuned Out? Low Numbers Expected Tuesday,” *Daily News*, September 10, 2005, p.10.

99 “Where the Candidates Found Support,” *New York Times*, September 15, 2005, p. B8.

100 <http://vote.nyc.ny.us/pdf/results/2005/primary/DemMayorPubAdvbyBoro.pdf> <accessed November 28, 2005>.

101 Sam Roberts, “Rethinking the Runoff...”

102 William G. Blair, “New York Runoffs Are Called Biased,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1985, p. B5; Arnold H. Lubasch, “Runoffs in New York’s Primaries Barred by U.S. Judge in Bias Suit,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1985, p. 1; Arnold H. Lubasch, “City Runoff in Primaries Is Upheld,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1985, p. 29.

absentee ballot count and sued. The lawsuit was dismissed but Messinger's candidacy was weakened and her support among black voters was undermined. It is said that 2001 was similar to 1997 in one regard: just as many blacks refused to support Messinger after her feud with Sharpton, the runoff contest between Fernando Ferrer and Mark Green was so bitter that many Latinos refused to support Green. This enabled Bloomberg to win the mayoralty despite running as a Republican with no experience.

One key argument against runoff elections is that they create divisions, often along racial and ethnic lines, that prevent opposition groups from working together to defeat a common adversary. After his 1973 defeat, Badillo supported a civil rights challenge to the runoff election by arguing that they encouraged negative campaigning and discriminated against candidates with little money. Al Sharpton was opposed to runoffs until 1997 when the runoff became his only opportunity to win the mayoral nomination. Later on he changed his mind reverting to the position that runoffs were biased against challengers and slowed down the selection process.<sup>103</sup>

In truth, runoff elections channel divisions, acrimoniously or not, without necessarily creating them. Consider, for example, the lengths to which Anthony Weiner went to avoid disunity among Democrats after losing the primary by not only withdrawing from the 2005 race but also by emphasizing the need for all Democrats to support Ferrer. Whatever pragmatic calculations may have motivated his decision, it also reveals a moderate, conciliatory leadership style. A leadership style that exacerbates conflict makes divisions deeper, runoff or not. Al Sharpton was not conciliatory in 1997 nor in 2001. Ferrer chose to do nothing for Green in 2001. Was that an effect of the runoff or simple payback? Whether minority or coalition candidates are able to win the nomination in a runoff election is more a function of their access to resources and their ability to manage conflict than of the runoff itself. Further, in a racially polarized environment the runoff election matters little. If they are the majority, voters who are unwilling to support a minority candidate will carry the day whether there is a single primary or not.<sup>104</sup>

## AFTER THE PRIMARY

On September 19, uncertainty over the runoff ended with the announcement by John Ravitz, executive director of the elections board that "it is our determination, after doing a very thorough recanvassing of the paper ballots and machines, that there will not be a runoff between Anthony Weiner and Fernando Ferrer."<sup>105</sup> Many thought the board had lost its senses by insisting on holding the runoff even after Weiner dropped out of the race. Thus, this news was greeted by all with a sigh of relief. The recanvassing put the vote for Ferrer at 192,243 or 40.15 percent of the total. The day after, 1199/SEIU endorsed Ferrer.<sup>106</sup> "Dennis Rivera has been a close friend of mine, we've fought on the same side of issues, for years now," Ferrer said in response to 1199's endorsement.<sup>107</sup> This meant that he would have the support of his base plus the assistance of a well-oiled vote-getting organization. He was also poised to receive the backing of former mayor David Dinkins. "I like the mayor," said Dinkins, "I consider [Bloomberg] a friend, but that does not mean that I am going to endorse his candidacy."<sup>108</sup>

After vowing to fight Ferrer to the bitter end, Weiner reconsidered his position and withdrew from the race. Ferrer was both surprised and elated. "I'm proud to support Freddy Ferrer," Weiner declared, "He has the record, he has the brains, he has the commitment, he has the understanding, to not only run in circles around Republican Mike Bloomberg, but to lift up our city."<sup>109</sup> Weiner may have been sincere when he declared himself willing to lose rather than to be part of an in-house fight that would doom the chances of defeating Bloomberg in November. Yet to the press it was clear that his decision was a mix of lofty and pragmatic considerations.<sup>110</sup> On September 18, Congressman Charles Rangel switched his endorsement to Ferrer. To highlight black-Latino unity after the primary, Ferrer marched up Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard in Harlem with Rangel, C. Virginia Fields, and Al Sharpton during the African-American Day Parade.<sup>111</sup>

105 Diane Cardwell and Nicholas Confessore, "Ferrer is Likely to Get Backing of Workers In Health Care," *New York Times*, September 20, 2005, p. B1.

106 Patrick D. Healy, "Facing United Challenge, Bloomberg Tacks Left," *New York Times*, September 21, 2005, p. A1.

107 Diane Cardwell and Nicholas Confessore, "Ferrer is Likely to Get Backing..."

108 Diane Cardwell and Nicholas Confessore, "Ferrer is Likely to Get Backing..."

109 Patrick D. Healy, "Weiner Concedes Race..."

110 Michael Saul and Celeste Katz, "Weiner Concedes," *Daily News*, September 15, 2005, p. 7.

111 Al Baker, "In Harlem, Old Questions Cool Welcome for Ferrer," *New York Times*, September 19, 2005, p. B1.

103 This and the previous paragraph are based on Sam Roberts, "Rethinking the Runoff..."

104 Harold W. Stanley, "The Runoff: The Case for Retention," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 18:2 (Spring 1985): 231-236. Other research suggests that attitudinal changes over time, better minority candidates, and class explain minority success in runoff elections better than the runoff itself. See Charles S. Bullock, III and A. Brock Smith, "Black Success in Local Runoff Elections," *The Journal of Politics*, 52:4 (November 1990): 1205-1220.

On September 21, *New York Times* reporter Patrick Healy declared that Ferrer was “in solid shape for the general election” after having “quickly united old rivals, labor leaders, and party elders behind him while also proving unexpectedly nimble at putting Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg on the defensive.”<sup>112</sup> This gloss on reality was strange given that Bloomberg continued to enjoy widespread support in the polls. At this point, Bloomberg’s campaign strategy seemed to hinge on broadening his support among white Democrats and good-government liberals while chipping away at Ferrer’s African-American and Latino base. He came out against the nomination of John Roberts to be the chief justice of the Supreme Court. He also criticized the Bush administration for a racially insensitive response to the devastation caused by hurricane Katrina. According to Stu Loeser, a spokesman for Bloomberg’s campaign, Ferrer was stuck with his traditional supporters. In contrast, the mayor was making inroads among Ferrer’s base. “We are playing on his turf; he’s not playing on ours,” Loeser said.<sup>113</sup>

When Ferrer’s campaign unveiled its slogan—“It’s a great city. It could be greater”—the snide remarks immediately followed.<sup>114</sup> According to some, the endorsements of David Dinkins, Charles Rangel, and SEIU/1199 were just “low-hanging fruit.”<sup>115</sup> Ferrer needed a bigger television presence, which the campaign could not afford, a focus on policy issues, an emphasis on competence and efficiency in governance, a rejection of partisanship, and a greater emphasis on class inequality.<sup>116</sup> Instead of following this advice Ferrer claimed that he would win because “God is on my side.”<sup>117</sup> He was immediately blasted by Bloomberg. “I don’t know that God makes political endorsements. I’ve never heard God do that,” said the mayor facetiously during a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Brooklyn.<sup>118</sup> A Bloomberg supporter, the Rev. A.R. Bernard of the Christian Cultural Center in southeast Queens, added: “I spoke to God

this morning and he never mentioned anything about Freddy Ferrer.”<sup>119</sup> When asked by a reporter if God was indeed on his side, Ferrer lamely replied: “I hope so.”<sup>120</sup> In October, Ferrer alienated some of his gay supporters by standing side by side at a campaign event with homophobic Senator Rubén Díaz, Sr. “It’s disappointing that Mr. Ferrer has chosen to campaign with someone with such a history of anti-gay comments,” said Patrick Murphy, a gay candidate for city council in Manhattan and a member of the national board of directors of the Log Cabin Republicans.<sup>121</sup>

From thereon, nothing worked for Ferrer. If he didn’t attack the mayor he was too soft; if he attacked the mayor he was too negative. His criticism of Bloomberg as racially insensitive for refusing to debate him at the Apollo Theater was thrown back at him as race-baiting.<sup>122</sup> His calls for more affordable housing and universal health insurance became cries in the wilderness. How could anyone take seriously a candidate who campaigned in Puerto Rico to persuade Puerto Rican New Yorkers to vote for him?<sup>123</sup> This was one of the silliest and most wasteful moves of his campaign. On October 16, *Daily News* reporter Michael Goodwin wrote: “In the Bible, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are named Death, War, Famine and Pestilence. If you’re a New York City Democrat, they are named David Dinkins, Ruth Messinger, Mark Green and Fernando Ferrer. Like some ancient scourge, those four have taken turns killing their party’s dreams of winning City Hall.”<sup>124</sup> At that point, even the Democratic Party was certain Ferrer would lose. By then the party put a hold on a February promise of \$1 million in campaign funds. According to party insiders it was imprudent to invest so much money on a candidate with no chance of winning.<sup>125</sup>

## NOVEMBER 8: REGISTRATION AND TURNOUT

In 2001, there were 2.4 million registered Democrats in New York City. By 2005 the enrollment figure was 2.6 million. The

112 Patrick D. Healy, “Facing United Challenge...”

113 Patrick D. Healy, “Facing United Challenge...”

114 Patrick D. Healy, “Who’ll Dispute This New Slogan? Who Will Remember It?,” *New York Times*, September 26, 2005, p. B4.

115 Patrick D. Healy, “Who’ll Dispute...”

116 Patrick D. Healy, “Who’ll Dispute...”

117 Stephanie Gaskell and David Seifman, “Mayor Lords it Over Freddy for God Claim,” *The New York Post*, September 27, 2005, p. 2.

118 Stephanie Gaskell and David Seifman, “Mayor Lords it...”

119 Stephanie Gaskell and David Seifman, “Mayor Lords it...”

120 Stephanie Gaskell and David Seifman, “Mayor Lords it...”

121 Michael Saul, “New Freddy Stump Slip Appears With Anti Gay Advocate,” *Daily News*, October 1, 2005, p. 6.

122 Patrick D. Healy, “Ferrer’s Debate Issue: Smart Move or Racially Divisive?,” *The New York Times*, October 6, 2005, p. B7.

123 Heidi Singer, “Freddy Tries to Get Out The Vote - In Puerto Rico,” *The New York Post*, October 16, 2005, p. 13.

124 Michael Goodwin, “United, They Stall,” *Daily News*, October 16, 2005, p. 39.

125 David Seifman and Carl Campanile, “National Dems Have Stuffed Ferrer for \$1M,” *The New York Post*, October 11, 2005, p. 2.

200,000 increase was unprecedentedly high, much of it the result of intense voter registration efforts in 2004 during the presidential election.<sup>126</sup> In contrast, Republican registration in the city did not grow in any significant way. This was not surprising. In 2004, Republicans had wisely ignored not just New York City but the entire state, despite having chosen the city for their national convention. It was one thing to use New York to energize the party for the last stretch of the presidential race and another to invest resources in a state that was guaranteed to go to the Democrats. Could it be that turnout by newly registered Democratic voters could beat the odds against Ferrer?

A count of Spanish surnames on the voter rolls in 2005 revealed that at 680,000, Latinos were 26 percent of Democratic registrants. According to reporter Juan González, this suggested that Latinos accounted for as much as half of the 200,000 increase in Democratic registrations since 2001. "The person most likely to benefit from all of this is Fernando Ferrer," he wrote. "Many Hispanic residents have grown tired of being regarded as second-class citizens in this town. They've longed for decades to see one of their own leaders become mayor. That's why Ferrer captured more than 80 percent of the Latino vote in his losing runoff four years ago against fellow Democrat Mark Green."<sup>127</sup>

González suggested that in 2005 Ferrer could count on 65 percent of Latino Democrats. That was the case in March, but after the Amadou Diallo remarks, Latino support for Ferrer decreased by 16 points to 49 percent. During the primary, Latinos were steadfast in their support of their compatriot. But even in the Bronx, his 62 percent tally included the votes of blacks. An October 26 poll revealed that among Latino voters Ferrer led Bloomberg by only five points, 48 percent to 43 percent.<sup>128</sup> He was behind with everyone else—liberals, blacks, women, even Democrats. Democrats represented 53 percent of the voters but only 37 percent intended to support Ferrer. In contrast, 49 percent were expected to vote for Bloomberg.<sup>129</sup>

The general election vote went just about as predicted by many after the primary, except that it was worse than predicted for Ferrer. In September, it was expected that Ferrer would lose to Bloomberg 47 to 53 percent. The results were not even close to the prediction. Ferrer received 477,903 votes to Bloomberg's 723,635, losing 39 to 59 percent.<sup>130</sup> This was the highest victory margin in a mayoral race since 1937. Ferrer completed the race as the lowest Democratic vote-getter in the city since 1917.<sup>131</sup> About half of the black vote went to Bloomberg and close to 3 in 10 Latinos supported the incumbent. Bloomberg lost Harlem but the vote for him there was a significant 45 percent. Most of his black support came from middle-class African-Americans and West Indians. In southeastern Queens he carried the entire 29th assembly district and also beat Ferrer in several largely Caribbean districts in central Brooklyn. For his part, Ferrer won the Bronx, Washington Heights, and did best in neighborhoods with high Puerto Rican concentrations.<sup>132</sup>

According to a poll by Pace University, 30 percent of Latinos supported Bloomberg; they were the least likely to vote for him. Jews were the most likely to support Bloomberg's reelection with 7 out of 10 doing so. This poll attributed less support for Bloomberg from blacks—46 percent compared to 53 percent for Ferrer. In this survey, Ferrer also edged Bloomberg among Democrats—50 to 48 percent. The findings for Latinos were 62 to 36 in favor of Ferrer. Bloomberg was found winning the votes of whites at 66 percent and the votes of all religious groups—72 percent of Jews, 58 percent of Protestants, and 57 percent of Catholics. Astonishingly, even a majority of those making less than \$20 thousand a year—56 percent—voted for Bloomberg.<sup>133</sup>

Ferrer was certain that his populist message had been heard. In his view, his defeat was not his fault. "I have the dubious distinction of having run against the best-financed candidate

126 "The Races in New York City," *New York Times*, November 10, 2005, p. B6.

127 Patrick D. Healy, "Bloomberg Cruises to Re-election Victory," *The New York Times*, November 9, 2005, p. 1.

128 Sam Roberts, "Mayor Crossed Ethnic Barriers For Big Victory," *The New York Times*, November 10, 2005, p. A1.

129 Carl Campanile, "The Mike Spike: Breakdown of Mayor's Landslide Victory," *The New York Post*, November 10, 2005, p. 29. According to Juan González, "Higher-income neighborhoods, whether black or white, went for Bloomberg, while the poorest neighborhoods, including all those with big Latino populations, went for Ferrer." He provided no evidence to support this claim. See Juan González, "Freddy Holds Head High," *Daily News*, November 10, 2005, p. 8.

126 Juan González, "Hispanics Can Win It For Freddy," *Daily News*, August 18, 2005, p. 14.

127 Juan González, "Hispanics Can Win It..."

128 Frankie Edozien, "Freddy Losing Latin Edge: Poll," *The New York Post*, October 26, 2005, p. 2.

129 Patrick D. Healy and Marjorie Connelly, "Even Among Democratic Voters, Poll Finds Ferrer Is Well Behind," *The New York Times*, October 28, 2005, p. A1.



in the history of American politics,” Ferrer said. “I wouldn’t change the last year for all the money in the world.”<sup>134</sup> Was money the explanation for defeat?

### THE ROLE OF MONEY IN 2005

At the beginning of the campaign, the money issue took a surreal turn. The *New York Times* noted the well-known fact that the incumbent was “a billionaire capable of spending hundreds of millions of dollars of his own money on the race.” At the same time, Molly Watkins, the press secretary for the Campaign Finance Board, declared that “The whole point of the [matching funds] program and why it’s good in a situation like this is it really equalizes everybody, at the end of the day everybody will have about the same money to spend.”<sup>135</sup>

According to Ferrer’s chief fundraiser, Leo Hindery, Jr., Bloomberg’s deep pockets were Ferrer’s biggest challenge. “Mike has something we’ve never seen before, which is literally a bottomless checkbook,” he said during a private conversation that was inadvertently broadcast to a reporter’s voice mail. “We live in this \$4,950 world [referring to the limit per donor set by the Campaign Finance Board]—we’re thrilled to get a \$250 check—and we can’t do it without reaching outside the city.”<sup>136</sup>

By May, Bloomberg had spent about \$5.6 million on his campaign out of \$6.5 million he had at his disposal from his own money. In contrast, Ferrer had spent only \$245,000.<sup>137</sup> Ferrer was limited by law to spending only \$5.7 million in the primary race. The mayor faced no limits due to his reliance on private resources. Another angle in the use of personal resources concerned the role played by philanthropic giving by the mayor in his political fortunes. In 2004 Bloomberg’s giving to city charities amounted to millions of dollars, including organizations in black and Hispanic neighborhoods. To many this was an avenue for obtaining political support that was not only questionable but also unavailable to the mayor’s opponents.<sup>138</sup> The practice and the charges were repeated in 2005.

Was Bloomberg predestined to win because of his financial resources? In 2001, he spent \$74 million of his own money on the campaign, outspending Mark Green five times over. Yet his victory was initially too close to call.<sup>139</sup> Ultimately, his money advantage earned him a margin of a little over 43,000 votes or 3 percentage points. Bloomberg received 719,819 votes, or 50 percent, while Green had 676,560 or 47 percent.<sup>140</sup> Only those willing to ignore the role of incumbency, Democratic infighting, racial conflict and resentment between blacks and Latinos, and the contrast between the campaign performances of Ferrer and the mayor can claim that his money was everything in 2005. According to reporter Clyde Haberman: “even without the tens of millions of dollars that he can spend, Mr. Bloomberg would have the upper hand.” New Yorkers “may not collectively adore him. But neither are they turned off by him.”<sup>141</sup>

Two days before the election, Democratic leaders were already providing a money rationale for Ferrer’s anticipated defeat. “This is now a major problem for us,” said Charles Rangel, “that the guy from the block who works hard for the party doesn’t stand much chance against the guy who has \$75 million.”<sup>142</sup> In a post-election analysis, another Democratic Party leader claimed that “money was everything” in the race. According to Assemblyman Herman “Denny” Farrell, Bloomberg spent so much money in advertisements that his campaign de facto suppressed the vote. In his view, this was all with the blessing provided by the rules of the city’s Campaign Finance Board.<sup>143</sup> Turnout was indeed dismal. According to the Board of Elections, the total number of active registered voters in the city as of March 2005 was 3,903,852. According to the *New York Times* of November 10, 2005 the mayoral vote was 1,201,538 or 30.7 percent of registered voters. Thus, if turnout was critical to a Ferrer victory, the explanation of his defeat is simple. Bloomberg deployed close to 10,000 volunteers on election day in a get-out-

134 Michael Saul, “Freddy: We Were Heard. Loser is Upbeat After His Defeat in Uphill Battle,” *Daily News*, November 9, 2005, p. 5.

135 Michael Slackman, “Mayoral Candidates Show Early Fund-Raising Prowess,” *New York Times*, January 13, 2005, p. B8.

136 Jim Rutenberg, “Misstep on Voice Mail System Reveals Ferrer Backers’ Strategy,” *New York Times*, March 4, 2005, p. B1.

137 Patrick D. Healy, “Mayor’s Reported Spending Dwarfs That of His Democratic Rivals,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2005, p. B6.

138 David Saltonstall, “Mike’s Camp Eyes Ferrer Funding,” *Daily News*, June 19, 2005, p. 24.

139 Adam Nagourney, “The 2001 Elections: Mayor Bloomberg Edges Green in Race for Mayor,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 2001, p. A1; Michael Saul, “Mike Barely Misses Mark: Set By Fiorello,” *Daily News*, November 30, 2005, p. 14.

140 Stefan Fatsis, “Mayoral Race in New York is too Close to Call,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 6, 2001, p. A12; David Osborne, “Campaign Against Terrorism: Billionaire Who Swamped City With Dollars Inherits a Troubled Legacy,” *The Independent* (London), November 8, 2001, p. 3.

141 Clyde Haberman, “Long Shots Do Come In. Ask the Mayor,” *The New York Times*, May 17, 2005, p. B1.

142 Patrick D. Healy, “For the City’s Democrats, a Grim Future Could Last Long Beyond Tuesday,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 2005, p. 41.

143 Remarks by Assemblyman Herman “Denny” Farrell, Workshop on the 2005 New York City Mayoral Election, Somos el Futuro Winter Conference, November 13, 2005, Wyndham El San Juan Hotel, Isla Verde, Puerto Rico.



the-vote (GOTV) blitz. Ferrer had only a few thousand people working the streets and the phones. His GOTV effort was highly reliant on hope—on the wish that his supporters would turn out in droves.<sup>144</sup>

There is no reason why the Democratic party organization had to be left behind by the Bloomberg campaign's GOTV effort. Bloomberg mobilized volunteers rather than paid workers. The Democratic Party could have matched that number instead of making a minimal effort and wishing for the best. In fact, it could be argued that the abandonment of Ferrer by the party contributed more to his defeat than his money troubles.<sup>145</sup> In any event, turnout in 2005—31 percent—was much higher than in 2001—14.5 percent—even though Bloomberg overspent his rivals in *both* elections by large margins. This inconsistency makes the claim of vote suppression due to campaign spending suspect.<sup>146</sup>

In 2005 Bloomberg spent just as much as in 2001. Was his victory a case of “votes count, but resources decide”? If that was the case, how does one explain a similar amount of money producing widely different margins of victory in two different elections? The answer to the question comes down to this: Despite his failings, Bloomberg was a relatively popular incumbent and Ferrer proved to be an ineffectual challenger. As the *New York Post* put it on election day: “Michael Bloomberg, he’s proven his competence, kept crime down and breathed hope into the schools; his opponent, Fernando Ferrer, has no viable plan.”<sup>147</sup> Money or not, Bloomberg had so much going for him that even a better and better-funded challenger than Ferrer may not have stood a chance of defeating him.

### A PUERTO RICAN (LATINO OR MINORITY) MAYOR FOR NEW YORK?

Herman Badillo was able to win a seat in Congress in 1970 for a number of reasons, the most important being running in

a congressional district that was demographically tailored for victory. This was not the case when he sought the mayoral candidacy in 1969, 1973, and 1977. Babby Quintero was right in noticing the demographic spread of Puerto Ricans in the city during the 1960s but she overestimated the impact of their growth in population. By 1970, Puerto Rican numbers had increased by 33 percent but they were only 10 percent of the total population and about 9 percent of the electorate.<sup>148</sup> Fourteen years later, their share of the electorate had increased by only one percentage point. In 1977, an important segment of the white electorate may have been ready for a Puerto Rican mayoral candidate, as reflected in the endorsements of the New York Political Action Council and sociologist Herbert Gans, but, as the actions of Percy Sutton, David Dinkins and Charles Rangel suggest, African Americans were not. Even in 1985, when Badillo’s chances for the nomination were best, the city’s Puerto Rican/Latino electorate was still small and African Americans were still not ready for him.<sup>149</sup>

The problem of the size and nature of the electorate was an issue later on as well. In 2001 Hispanics were between 15 and 18 percent of voters but the Hispanic electorate was highly fractured and riddled with fault lines and tensions.<sup>150</sup> In 2005, Rodríguez was the most common surname in New York voter registration rolls and the city was majority minority. But Mexicans felt ignored by Ferrer, C. Virginia Fields drew resources away from him in the Dominican community, and unlike in Los Angeles, Hispanics were not key coalition partners.<sup>151</sup> In 2001 and 2005, these contextual factors simply compounded a critical situation created by the lack of an effective candidate.

For Badillo, ethnicity was a double-edged sword. But ethnicity was not the only factor that militated against him. He was perceived as rigid and arrogant, did not have support from key elements of the labor movement, and in one instance was stymied by his inability to meet the legal requirements necessary to

144 Patrick D. Healy, “Bloomberg Cruises...”

145 The Clintons for example, did for Ferrer only what they were asked and not more. In 2001 President Clinton campaigned three times with Mark Green but only once with Ferrer in 2005. Hillary distanced herself from Ferrer lest she alienate a mayor that by all accounts acted more like a Democrat than a Republican. See Patrick D. Healy, “Clintons Give Ferrer a Hand While Staying at Arm’s Length,” *The New York Times*, October 21, 2005, p. A1; Errol Louis, “Disgrace of The Dems. Vaunted Party Organization Abandoned Ferrer & Its Principles,” *Daily News*, November 9, 2005, p. 39.

146 See Diane Cardwell, “The 2001 Elections: The Voting: Confusion, but It Was No Florida,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 2001, p. D1

147 “Vote Today,” *The New York Post*, November 8, 2005, p. 32.

148 Peter Kihss, “Census Disputed on Puerto Ricans,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1972, p. 36; “*El Diario-La Prensa* Speaks,” editorial, November 7, 1972, p. 17; Miguel Gallastegui, “Millones de Votantes Hispanos Concurrirán A Ejercer su Deber Cívico en las Elecciones,” *El Diario-La Prensa*, November 7, 1972, p. 15.

149 At least not African-American *political leaders*, as Chris McNickle shows. Op. Cit., pp. 285-286.

150 Elizabeth Kolbert, “That’s Freddy; Can race politics make Fernando Ferrer the next mayor?” *The New Yorker*, March 19, 2001, p. 52; Sam Roberts, “New York’s Ever-Changing Electorate: Next, The White Minority,” *New York Times*, September 13, 2005, p. 1.

151 Roberts, “New York’s Ever-Changing...”; Diane Cardwell and Jonathan P. Hicks, “On West Coast, A Lesson Plan for Ferrer Bid,” *New York Times*, May 20, 2005, p. 1.

run. Badillo prided himself as a maverick but this also cost him. He was not always able to rally the necessary troops fully behind him in part because of his reputation as nobody's yes-man and in part because Puerto Rican elites and the community itself were divided.<sup>152</sup> All this notwithstanding, given his background and the context in which he did so, it is remarkable that he was able to mount four credible attempts to gain the mayoral nomination. To follow his ambition Badillo had to fight the party organization and he had to fight the system. But neither the party structure nor the political establishment was foreclosed to his overtures. He was never a party regular but he used party resources when it suited him. He successfully challenged the rules of the game when they were unfavorable to his goals and he did so with the very tools provided by the political system. Ultimately, he was an odd figure: a reformer to some, a loose cannon to others. When the party was king, he fought the party. Others were successful running as outsiders, most notably Wagner in 1961 and Frank Torres in 1962. But Torres ran in an assembly district, not citywide, and Wagner had a citywide base of support outside the machine that Badillo never had.<sup>153</sup>

In 2005 Fernando Ferrer was rightly characterized as an imperfect candidate. He had his three chances and in his case the Spanish saying applies; in the future there will be no Freddy to kick around. If there had been a better Puerto Rican candidate, would have he been a loser as well? This is quite likely. As early as August, Latinos, for example, were persuaded that Bloomberg had a good record. The leadership qualities they were looking for in the next mayor pretty much described the incumbent: independent, knowledgeable, and decisive.<sup>154</sup> Bloomberg had plenty of money to get his message across in targeted fashion. But he was also able to craft a message that appealed to a broad spectrum of voters across class, race, and ethnicity. Another factor was his ability to distance himself from President Bush. His criticism of the administration's response to the Katrina disaster in Louisiana helped him with minority voters. His rejection of John

Roberts for the Supreme Court endeared him to pro-choice Democrats. Finally, his campaign was managed efficiently, in a way that Ferrer's was not. Compared to Ferrer, whose gaffes destroyed his credibility, the mayor appeared to be a superb manager.<sup>155</sup>

According to *Newsday*, Ferrer lost because he ran an inefficient campaign. Money disadvantages were a factor but the lack of an effective message also played a role. The Amadou Diallo remarks in March and his stock trades tax proposal in April turned the tide of support against him. His lack of a concrete agenda and Democratic defections were crucial as well.<sup>156</sup> In Brooklyn and Queens County, party leaders provided little or no support to Ferrer's campaign.<sup>157</sup> One reason given for the absence of support by some Democrats was lingering resentment against Ferrer. Many Democrats blamed his campaign manager Roberto Ramírez for handing Bloomberg the mayoralty in 2001 as a result of the refusal of Ferrer's campaign to support Mark Green.<sup>158</sup> Ferrer's appeal to Democrats was also undermined by the fact that Bloomberg endorsed income tax increases for wealthy New Yorkers, health care for the uninsured and other social services, and considered an extension on a temporary tax surcharge on individuals with incomes of \$500,000 a year. This made the mayor appear more like the Democrat he had been all his life before he switched to the Republican Party in order to be able to run in 2001.<sup>159</sup>

Ferrer also fought against significant historical odds. Only twice in fifty years had a challenger unseated a mayoral incumbent after one term—when Abraham Beame was replaced by Ed Koch in 1977 and when Rudolph Giuliani defeated David Dinkins in 1993. In both cases the voters perceived the incumbents as failures, an assessment that very few shared about Bloomberg. Ferrer's place in history was ironic, an example of Puerto Ricans being in the right place at the wrong time; he was a product of the regular Democratic

152 Lisa L. Colangelo and David Saltonstall, "Bloomberg Wins by a K.O. Crushes Ferrer by Nearly 20-point margin," *Daily News*, November 9, 2005, p. 3.

156 Bryan Virasami and Graham Rayman, "Election 2005; In Defeat Ferrer Silent on his Future," *Newsday*, November 9, 2005, p. A20.

157 Dan Janison, "Big Win for Bloomberg," *Newsday*, November 9, 2005, p. A2.

158 Diane Cardwell, "Racial Politics of 2001; Unhealed Wounds in 2005," *The New York Times*, May 8, 2005, p. 33.

159 Jim Rutenberg and Patrick D. Healy, "3 Democrats and the Mayor Vie for Third Party's Nod," *The New York Times*, May 12, 2005, p. B3.

152 He was considered "a loner" and not particularly interested in advice from others. See video interviews with Manuel "Manny" Diaz, June 10, 2004 and Armando Montano, 2004, used for the production of documentary *Politics Con Sabor*, Terramax Entertainment, LLC. Centro Archives.

153 Video interview with Frank, Austin, and Alma Torres, 2004, used for the production of documentary *Politics Con Sabor*, Terramax Entertainment, LLC. Centro Archives.

154 National Association of Elected and Appointed Officials, *Voces del Pueblo Project* (2005).

organization at a time when machine politics was discredited.<sup>160</sup> Widely reported feelings of despair among Democrats about their prospects, including public discussions about the possibility of the late entrance of a better challenger, also undermined Ferrer's standing among voters.<sup>161</sup> Had the nomination been a formal contractual arrangement, such discussions would have been tantamount to a breach of contract.

Did polls cause Ferrer's defeat, as Roberto Ramírez emphatically declared after the election?<sup>162</sup> Polls both reflect and shape public opinion. Push polls in particular, shape more than reflect public opinion. The polls that suggested that Ferrer might not be able to avoid a runoff and the ones that measured his popularity and predicted his defeat were not push polls but rather legitimate surveys. It is impossible to know whether the forecast that he would be short of the 40 percent support required to avoid a runoff primary was a factor shaping the primary result. But if anything, Ferrer beat that particular poll by a significant margin—the prediction was that he would receive 33 percent of the vote; instead he obtained a little over the required 40 percent. One thing is clear: as Ferrer's behavior became more and more erratic, his support in the polls began to go down. The positions Ferrer took were his own. No poll told him to flip-flop or to show incompetence. The fact that polls predicted his failure is no evidence that pollsters conspired against Ferrer.

Did the election show that pragmatism and competence trump ideology? Giuliani's wide-margin victory over Ruth Messinger in 1997 was seen as proof that competence was more important than ideology. The same claim was made immediately after the 2005 election. To win, the Democratic Party should

emphasize managerial ability, not ethnic appeal. But why should it be one or the other? If the history of New York City politics shows anything is that ethnic appeals are part and parcel of the city's political process. Ethnicity is real, it cannot be wished away. Changing demographics change the character of ethnicity over time but ethnic identity and the role it plays in the political process, for better or for worse, is a constant variable.

Before ballots were cast in New York, many wondered if Ferrer would be able to follow in the footsteps of the newly elected mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa. Ferrer even sought the endorsement of the Los Angeles mayor, hoping it would help his efforts.<sup>163</sup> In fact, the Los Angeles mayoral election holds a lesson for the future but it is not that competence trumps ideology. James Hahn's inability to consolidate his alliance with African-Americans benefited Villaraigosa. Hahn also alienated key supporters by fighting the secession movement in the San Fernando Valley and was hurt by charges of administrative improprieties. He was unlucky rather than incompetent. Villaraigosa did not campaign on the basis of competent solutions to the city's problems. He avoided ideological posturing rather than ideology. His plans were ambiguous and his emphasis was on the need for change. He also built a broad coalition of supporters. He was competent but, perhaps more importantly, he was also lucky.<sup>164</sup>

Finally, there is the issue of race and ethnicity. Bloomberg did very well among minority voters, particularly among Latinas who were the segment of the electorate least likely to favor him. This strongly suggests that racial and ethnic prejudice was not Bloomberg's trump card against Ferrer. Nevertheless, what do we make of the racially divided primary vote? Despite the primary's racially delineated results it is unlikely that racial and ethnic prejudice were the driving force. By September it was clear that Ferrer's overall loss of credibility and support was the result of other factors. Ferrer still held sway over black and Latino voters and his support among whites was significant. The willingness of whites, mostly hardcore liberals but also some Catholics, to support an out-group candidate was demonstrated

160 "Ferrer came of age in the days when the Bronx Democratic organization was still a robust (and largely Jewish) enterprise, and he got ahead not by challenging the machine but by working within it." Elizabeth Kolbert, "That's Freddy: Can race politics make Fernando Ferrer the next mayor?" *The New Yorker*, March 19, 2001, p. 52. Mollenkopf, et al. characterize New York City as "highly centralized and politicized, with a persistent 'machine politics' style." (p. 2) In John Mollenkopf, Ana Champeny, Raphael Sonensheim, and Mark Drayse, "Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration in the 2005 Mayoral Elections in Los Angeles and New York," paper presented at the American Political Science Association meetings, September 2, 2006, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It is true that in New York City the Democratic party organization is alive and well but the electorate and the media are not keen on the idea. As Fernando Ferrer found out, his association with regular machine politics was a negative with the press and the public. More recently, speculation on what lies ahead for New York after Bloomberg has suggested that economic notables "value a business resumé over party affiliation" and the public worries that once Bloomberg is gone the city may "revert to a traditional partisan-infused bureaucracy." See Michael Barbaro, "As Bloomberg's Time Wanes, Titans Seek Mayor in his Mold," *New York Times*, July 7, 2008, p. A1.

161 Patrick D. Healy, "Democrats Still Searching For a Stronger Challenger," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2005, p. B3.

162 Remarks by Roberto Ramírez, Workshop on the 2005 New York City Mayoral Election, Somos el Futuro Winter Conference, November 13, 2005, Wyndham El San Juan Hotel, Isla Verde, Puerto Rico.

163 Michael Saul, "A Big Lift for Freddy. L.A. Mayor Set to Endorse Him," *Daily News*, August 25, 2005, p. 2.

164 Raphael J. Sonensheim and Susan H. Pinkus, "Latino Incorporation reaches the Urban Summit: How Antonio Villaraigosa Won the 2005 Los Angeles Mayor's Race," *PS: Political Science and Politics* XXXVIII:4 (October 2005): 713-721.

in 1989 with the election of David Dinkins.<sup>165</sup> Polls in 2004 and early 2005, suggested a Ferrer victory over Bloomberg in accordance to perceptions of Ferrer as an attractive alternative to an embattled incumbent. Once Ferrer's true colors began to show he began to lose support; nothing he did after the primary stemmed the tide. Thus, the racial and ethnic delineation of the primary vote is more likely a case of ethnoracial solidarity and racial inoculation than racial polarization.<sup>166</sup>

Divisions in partisan voting by race and ethnicity are sharp and persistent, for African Americans more so than for Latinos.<sup>167</sup> Racial and ethnic divisions in voting generally are problematic but survey research has shown that, even though they are willing to support out-group candidates, given the choice, Latinos prefer to support a co-ethnic. No one can question the willingness of African Americans to support white candidates but they also tend to prefer their own candidates.<sup>168</sup> This dynamic may have been at play during the primary. The statement by Raul Amador in 2001 that he was willing to support Bloomberg but only if Ferrer was not a candidate because Ferrer was "one of us," suggests a calculation along those lines. While Latinos, blacks, and whites could agree that Ferrer was not the best candidate, Latinos and blacks were more willing than whites to put that aside for the sake of ethnic solidarity. The fact that some blacks were readier than some whites to overlook Ferrer's position on the murder of Amadou Diallo was a good illustration of inoculation: blacks were more tolerant

than whites even though Ferrer's position was an affront to blacks.

In sum, this historical account suggests that the path to mayoral power in New York City is open to all. The keen reader can rightfully say that this is not news. Recent studies support the contention that the urban political system is open.<sup>169</sup> Perhaps the best confirmation that overall the political system is open and pluralistic can be found in the volume edited by Rodolfo Espino, David L. Leal, and Kenneth J. Meier, titled *Latino Politics, Identity, Mobilization, and Representation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007). In this volume, the question of pluralism is not even addressed except for a remark by Rodney Hero in the Foreword that the status of Latinos in the political system shows "some signs of pluralism and inclusion, other evidence of relatively low status within a hierarchy and a minimal presence in certain institutions." (p. xiv). The question of representation, for example, is examined in terms of process and substance but the possibility of representation is taken for granted. At the national level, the nomination of Barack Obama as the Democratic presidential candidate and his election in November, offers unequivocal evidence of accessibility. The cost of this particular opportunity was substantial but it was real and it produced results as well.

The study of New York City mayoral politics by Chris McNickle, cited throughout this paper, clearly shows that access to the mayoralty is pretty much open to all. McNickle concludes his analysis showing how blacks treaded that path successfully. He suggests that "the times [mid-1990s] do not yet favor a Hispanic candidate for mayor."<sup>170</sup> But why not, exactly? Puerto Ricans have yet to make it but this reflects their inability to match capability with feasibility rather than being the result of insurmountable structural obstacles or entrenched racism. To say that the system is open is not to reduce the process to cultural traits or agency factors, as some

165 See McNickle, Op. Cit., p. 305 and Asher Arian, et al., *Changing New York City Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991). Dinkins' downfall had little to do with his race. See John Mollenkopf, *A Phoenix in the Ashes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 219.

166 See Susan Howell, "Racial Polarization, Reaction to Urban Conditions, and the Approval of Black Mayors," in Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh and Lawrence J. Hanks, eds. *Black and Multiracial Politics in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 60-83. In the case that Howell analyzes, polarization entails evaluations of black mayors that are sharply delineated by race regardless of performance while inoculation entails evaluations that are more or less harsh depending on racial identity. Inoculation means that black voters go easier than whites on black mayors, even if both agree that mayoral performance is substandard.

167 For race see William J. Keefe and Marc J. Hetherington, *Parties, Politics, and Public Policy in America*, (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2003), pp. 228-230. For ethnicity see Kim Geron, *Latino Political Power* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005), pp. 104-105. According to the 2006 Latino National Survey, while 45 percent of Latinos voted Democratic, only 36 percent considered themselves Democrats. See Luis R. Fraga, et al. *Latino National Survey* (LNS), 2006 [Computer File], ICPSR20862-v1. (Miami, FL: Geoscape International [producer], 2006. Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2008-05-27), pp. 67, 69.

168 For Latinos see Rodolfo De La Garza, et al., *Latino Voices: Mexican, Puerto Rican, And Cuban Perspectives On American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 136, 138. In this survey, Puerto Ricans were more likely than Mexicans or Cubans to support a co-ethnic candidate if they had a choice. The 2006 Latino National Survey suggests that, while for 50 percent of Latinos ethnicity is very important as a criterion for candidate preference, 60 percent are willing to overlook ethnicity for the sake of issues. See Op. Cit., pp. 6-7, 75-76. In the case of Puerto Ricans, the campaigns of Badillo and Ferrer provide evidence in support of the proposition concerning ethnic preferences and there's evidence from Hartford, Connecticut as well. See José E. Cruz, *Identity and Power: Puerto Rican Politics and the Challenge of Ethnicity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998). For African Americans see Marcus D. Pohlman, *Black Politics in Conservative America*, third edition (New York: Sloan Publishing, 2008), pp. 190, 210, n.28. The findings cited by Pohlman are for presidential elections.

169 See Philip Kasnitz, John Mollenkopf, and Mary C. Waters, "Becoming American/Becoming New Yorkers: Immigrant Incorporation in a Majority Minority City," *International Migration Review* 36:4 (Winter 2002): 1020-1036; John Mollenkopf and John Logan, *People and Politics in America's Big Cities*, (Drum Major Institute and Century Foundation, May 2003). "Becoming American..." notes the existence of social prejudice and discrimination while also observing that the response is often "increased effort and a sustained focus on success." (p. 1030) The study also notes that "the struggle for minority empowerment has established new entry points into mainstream institutions and created many new minority-run institutions." (p. 1032) The system is open but nothing is given away without struggle. Similarly, *People and Politics...* notes the existence of a representation gap between minorities and their elected officials while suggesting that it is possible to close it over time.

170 McNickle, Op. Cit., p. 323.



claim.<sup>171</sup> The burden of proof is sometimes systemic and sometimes not. When Puerto Ricans had a good candidate the context was not favorable and when the context was favorable they did not have a good candidate; the lack of a good candidate magnified the impact of unfavorable contextual factors. When the party mattered most, their candidate was a reformer; when the party was over, their candidate was an organization man. This is what the mismatch between capability and feasibility is about. Puerto Rican ethnic identity is part of that equation and it has played contradictory roles, thrusting and energizing candidates as well as being the proverbial albatross around the candidate's neck. It has been a source of support, a rationale for participation, and a proxy for substantive concerns—an element of capability. But it has also been a barrier to participation, an artificial boundary, and a rationale for prejudice and discrimination—an element of feasibility.

In the future, to be successful, Puerto Rican (Latino or minority) candidates should exhibit a moderate, conciliatory leadership style that is also principled. They must be firm enough to win respect and flexible enough to avoid acrimony and stalemate. In 1997, Ferrer behaved accordingly and Al Sharpton did not. After the primary and runoff election, Ruth Messinger was distracted by Sharpton's continued challenge. His accusations of fraud created suspicion and discord among Democrats, especially blacks, and this contributed to Messinger's loss to Giuliani. Weiner's decision in 2005 to drop out, whether calculated or selfless, also evidenced a moderate and conciliatory disposition that was useful to Ferrer. It is easy to know this and not know the best way to behave in specific situations. How do we know when to be conciliatory as opposed to feisty? We may think we do know and still blunder. The important thing above all is to be pragmatic without appearing to lack conviction.

A successful candidate will also be careful enough to avoid association with polarizing figures. This is extremely difficult because we cannot fully control the actions of others; but it is not impossible. Ferrer could not tell Sharpton to be quiet but he had no need to court him either. If a candidate is endorsed by an extremist, he can talk himself blue in the face dissociating himself from the endorser and the damage will still be irrevocable. Moreover, if rejecting an unpopular supporter means alienating an in- or out-group member, the risk of losing support from the in-group at-large is much greater. Sharpton's support created such a dilemma for Ferrer and his campaign did not address it properly. When the in- or out-group in question is a numerical minority of the electorate, the consequences of alienating its members are not dire. But even in that case, the dilemma is real and significant, especially if it is not entirely clear whether the polarizing figure is such because of unpopular but legitimate views or because of racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice.

A variant of this challenge is the problem of in-group division and/or lack of support from akin out-groups. It is not reasonable to expect unanimous support for any given individual, but Puerto Rican (Latino or minority) candidates must aspire to maximum feasible support from co-ethnics. The easiest and often quite powerful way to dismiss a minority candidate (or any candidate, for that matter) is to point out that he/she is not fully supported by his/her own, e.g. Puerto Ricans not supporting Badillo or Ferrer (and in other examples, a son not supporting his father, a state not supporting a native son, a husband undermining his candidate wife, etc.). A group like the MPI, and its successor the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, would not have supported Badillo or Ferrer under any circumstances. But for MPI leaders to call Badillo a rotten leader in 1985 was more than just being unsupportive. Maximum feasible support from akin out-groups is also critical. Badillo fumed over Bella Abzug's reversal of promise in 1977 but this was minor compared to the entrance of Percy Sutton in the race. Black support was critical to a Puerto Rican mayoral candidacy then and it will be so in the foreseeable future, just as Puerto Rican support was critical to David Dinkins in 1989 and Mark Green in 2001; the former had it and won, the latter didn't and lost. Blacks (Puerto Ricans or Latinos) do not necessarily have to be the

171 This is the view of José R. Sánchez in, "Puerto Rican Politics in New York: Beyond 'Secondhand' Theory," in Gabriel Haslip-Viera and Sherrie L. Bayer, eds. *Latinos in New York* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), pp. 259-301. One does not have to believe that culture is the only factor that affects participation to recognize that agency is still critical. A national survey of black Americans conducted in October and November 2007 revealed that while 82 percent of respondents believed that prejudice was a reality in America, 60 percent agreed that "things are getting better for me." More than half were positive about the future of blacks. Without that kind of attitude it makes no difference whether the system is open or not. See Charisse Jones, "Blacks in America Diverse and Optimistic," *Times Union*, June 27, 2008, p. A4. In the case of Latinos, some of the questions in the 2006 Latino National Survey can be considered proxies for the measurement of openness. For example, why would anyone naturalize if they felt that the political system offered no opportunities to them? Some Latinos do it for the benefits but 48 percent do it to be able to vote or to benefit from existing legal, political, and civil rights. See Fraga, et al. *Latino National Survey (LNS)*, 2006..., p. 49.



predominant element within a coalition of akin out-group supporters, but they have to be included and the coalition must be sufficiently broad to make a difference.

Instead of rejecting ideology and projecting pragmatism, it may be more important for Puerto Rican (Latino or minority) candidates to avoid running against an incumbent with a good record. Major campaign gaffes should not be the norm in their performance. As far as projections are concerned, a positive message emphasizing collective goods can go a long way in luring either the broadest aggregation of the electorate or the broadest electoral segment necessary to win. Candidacies based on radical normative platforms such as that of Jerónimo Domínguez are doomed to fail. In fact, in 2001 there was a faint echo of Domínguez's 1981 campaign against the rich in Ferrer's "other New York" slogan which, however mild by comparison with Dominguez's war cry, was perceived as racially divisive.<sup>172</sup> Four years later, Ferrer was unable to allay the suspicion of many voters that his administration would favor only the "other" New Yorkers. Thus, a serious challenge facing Puerto Rican (Latino or minority) candidates in the future is figuring out how to avoid the so-called Dinkins trap. In 1993, Dinkins was unable "to appease the city's influential white voters and business community while satisfying the black and Latino activists who formed his core support." He secured the support of 60 percent of Latino voters but Giuliani finished the race with 70 percent of the more mobilized white vote. Dinkins lost the business community and therefore he lost the race.<sup>173</sup>

Anthony Weiner's sensible decision to withdraw from the race shortly after the September 2005 primary echoed Fernando Ferrer's decision to let Ruth Messinger run in 1997. This is what the *New York Times* said concerning Ferrer's exit: "If Mr. Ferrer did the sensible thing in withdrawing, however, it should also be said that in four months of campaigning he showed an impressive command of city government, a feel for its issues and a personable style. As a strong favorite for

re-election as Bronx Borough President, Mr. Ferrer still has an excellent future in city politics."<sup>174</sup> Unfortunately, doing the right thing in 1997 meant nothing for Ferrer's prospects in 2001 or 2005. Once it became clear that his qualifications were a mirage, he was done for.

Democratic prospects for 2009 looked better before October 2008 when the New York City Council waived term-limits to allow Mayor Bloomberg to run for a third term. Projecting Bloomberg's standing into the future, mayoral aspirants felt that the only way the mayor would be defeated in 2009 would be if a chance development brought him ill-repute with the voters. Some hoped that the public would hold onto its disapproval of the process whereby term-limits were suspended and punish Bloomberg by denying him re-election. But discontent can be sustained only for so long and politics is contingent only to a certain extent. To win in the future, in addition to remembrance and luck, a Puerto Rican (Latino or minority) candidate will need to have sufficient money to get his/her message across, an efficient campaign, a machine-like GOTV effort, and broad support across class, race, and ethnicity. Such a campaign will also have to be palatable to the corporate and professional world. Whomever the future Democratic contender may be, the worst thing the party could do is to choose a candidate at the end of a bitter internecine fight. As far as Puerto Ricans (Latinos or minorities) go, this account shows that they need to match capability with feasibility to be successful. The point is worth reiterating: Historically, when the Puerto Rican candidate has been good the context has not been favorable and when the context has been favorable the candidate has been inadequate. When the party mattered the most, their candidate was a reformer; when the party was over, their candidate was an organization man. Running a good candidate in a favorable context is what matching capability and feasibility is about.

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172 Dave Saltonstall, "Ferrer's Camp Proud of Way it Ran the Race, Latinos and blacks in coalition," *Daily News*, October 12, 2001, p. 22.

173 IPS-Inter Press Service, "United States: Republicans Boosted in Off-Year Elections," November 3, 1993. According to one news report Giuliani won 77 percent of the white vote. See Howard Goldberg, "Polls: Male Voters Help Woman Win in N.J., Democrats Defect to Giuliani," *The Associated Press*, November 3, 1993.

174 "Mr. Ferrer Drops Out..."