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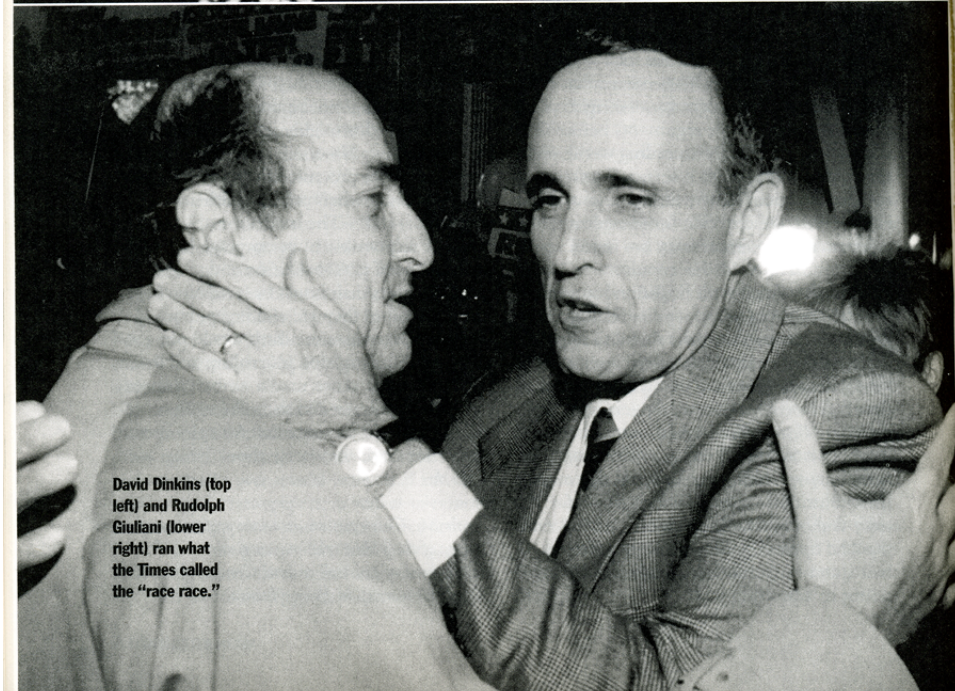
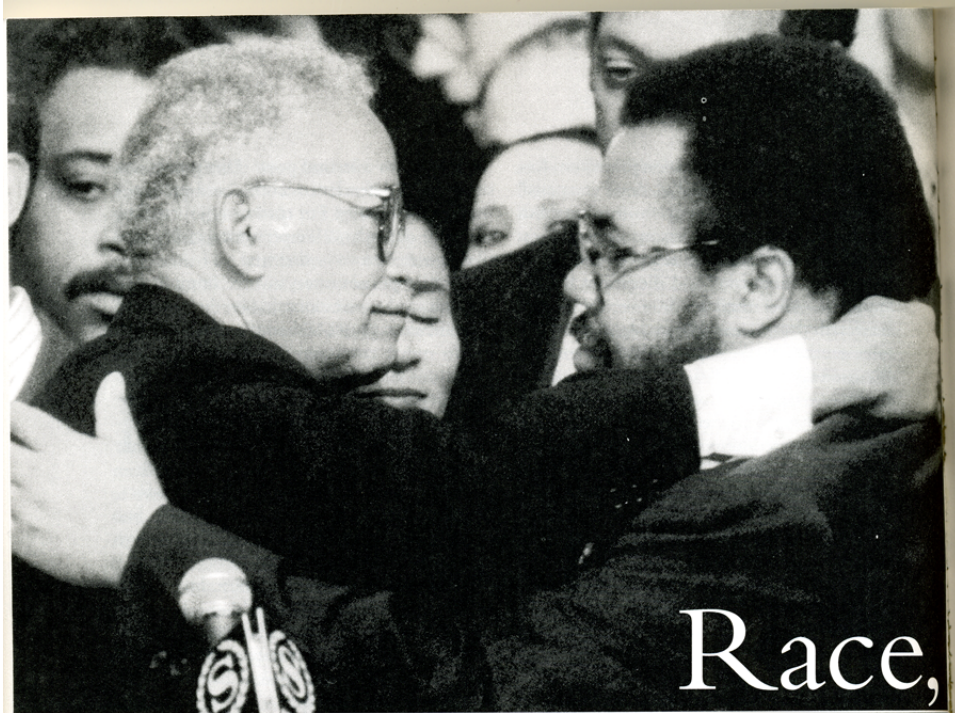
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David Dinkins (top left) and Rudolph Giuliani (lower right) ran what the Times called the "race race."

ACCORDING TO THE *TIMES*, THE CITY'S MAYORAL RACE WAS A REFERENDUM ON RACE. BUT THE REALITY WAS MORE COMPLICATED. THE *TIMES*'S MYOPIA LED TO A DOUBLE STANDARD.

IN WHAT MANY OBSERVERS REGARDED AS THE best speech he ever delivered, New York Mayor David Dinkins was the soul of dignified magnanimity when he acknowledged defeat to Republican-Liberal challenger Rudolph Giuliani late on election night. Meanwhile, on the ballroom floor, an angry undercurrent boiled among his supporters. Cries of "racism" filled the air, and the crowd booed when Dinkins, who became mayor in 1989 when he narrowly defeated Giuliani, asked his supporters to rally behind the new mayor-elect so that the city could heal the wounds of what had become a racially divisive campaign.

line "For Blacks, Loss by Dinkins Spotlights a Painful Racial Gap," Felicia Lee wrote that the election result had "triggered a painful soul searching" among blacks "who saw it as a revealing commentary" on the state of New York City's race relations. A *Times* editorial cited Lee's stories to explain what it described as New York's "troubling" electoral outcome. Dinkins's supporters, it said, can legitimately "argue that white Democrats would have given a white mayor of their own party greater support to begin with and cut him more slack as an incumbent"—a point that might have struck the many whites who had voted for Dinkins in

# Double Standards & *The New York Times*

by William McGowan

Dinkins received 95 percent of the black vote, Giuliani 77 percent of the white vote. Given these numbers, it's hard to contend that race wasn't an important factor in the contest. But to reduce it solely to a matter of race, or racism, fails to do justice to a campaign involving many other issues, a point recognized by *Newsday*'s Sheryl McCarthy as well as several other black columnists at city newspapers. "Despite the heavily racial voting," she wrote, "if [Dinkins] had been a stronger mayor, he would have won."

Nonetheless, strongly racial interpretations were exactly what *The New York Times* chose to highlight in its post-election analysis. In a pair of pieces examining how blacks reacted to Dinkins's defeat, one of which ran on the front page on November 4, 1993, under the head-

line "For Blacks, Loss by Dinkins Spotlights a Painful Racial Gap," Felicia Lee wrote that the election result had "triggered a painful soul searching" among blacks "who saw it as a revealing commentary" on the state of New York City's race relations. A *Times* editorial cited Lee's stories to explain what it described as New York's "troubling" electoral outcome. Dinkins's supporters, it said, can legitimately "argue that white Democrats would have given a white mayor of their own party greater support to begin with and cut him more slack as an incumbent"—a point that might have struck the many whites who had voted for Dinkins in

1989 and switched in anguish to Giuliani in 1993 as simple-minded, not to say offensive. These post-election offerings weren't the first pieces the *Times* had published with such a racial focus. Indeed, throughout the campaign, in both its news pages and its editorials, and to a degree not true of the city's other newspapers, the *Times* insisted that the election was a referendum on race. Because the reality was far more complicated, the *Times*'s racial myopia skewed the story and introduced a double standard that cut hard against Giuliani and soft in favor of Dinkins. In news analyses and editorials, the *Times* refused to see Giuliani's campaign in terms other than borderline racism, even as it undercovered or ignored racial aspects of the Dinkins campaign that elsewhere in the

New York media drew notice and, in editorial columns, were rebuked. Despite repeated efforts by this writer, the *Times* did not agree to an interview for this article, spurning an opportunity to defend its coverage. Readers of the *Times*, for decades one of the nation's most influential newspapers, must wonder why racial politics have clouded its journalistic sight.

During the second week of May, the Partnership of Faith, an organization representing 400 New York churches, synagogues and mosques, asked mayoral candidates to sign a pledge not to resort to appeals based on race, religion or ethnicity. Such appeals, they said, were "racial arson" and would have a destructive impact. Many thought the Partnership noble but naive. After all, as *Times* reporter Catherine Manegold put it, "In a city filled with neighborhoods, clubs and social groups that often define themselves by race, religion and ethnicity, it is, perhaps, impossible to run a campaign in which the theme of race is absent."

In fact, the Partnership of Faith had issued the same appeal in 1989, during the last mayoral campaign, but to little effect, as the racially charged Democratic primary that year proved. Conducted in the shadow of the racially motivated murder of a black teenager by a white gang in Bensonhurst, the primary resulted in Dinkins's unexpected triumph over incumbent Ed Koch. But race was also a factor in the main bout too, as the line between what the *Times* called "tough politics and race-baiting" proved difficult to distinguish. Sam Roberts of the *Times* reported after the election that Dinkins felt he had been held to a higher standard overall than his white challenger. Some Giuliani supporters, however, thought *he* had been the victim of a double standard. "From the outset, Giuliani was on the defensive," wrote *New York Post* editorialist Scott McConnell in *Commentary*. "His campaign's every utterance [was] monitored in the expectation (the hope?) that it would be construed as racially divisive."

In the face of such highly charged racial incidents as Crown Heights and the black-led boycott of the Korean grocery in Flatbush, Brooklyn, race was certain to be an issue in the 1993 rematch. Yet given the way Giuliani had been attacked for several race-related missteps four years earlier, it was clear that even the slightest racial appeal on his part would invite swift condemnation and prove politically counterproductive. Moreover, given that there were now fewer whites in the city than in 1989, any electoral strategy that relied upon racial appeals would be dumb. At a post-election panel dissecting the role of race in the campaign, which

was sponsored by the Columbia Journalism School, *Daily News* columnist Jim Sleeper said that Giuliani had told him in an off-the-record conversation, "If I could make up the two points I lost by in 1989 with only black votes, it would be better for me and better for the city." It was Sleeper's belief that David Garth, Giuliani's campaign adviser, had run the numbers early on in the campaign and told the candidate that "you don't have a prayer of winning unless you come off as the apostle of inclusion."

The stated goal of the Giuliani campaign was to abjure all racial messages and make trans-racial appeals—a decided rejection of identity politics. By contrast, Dinkins, whose "gorgeous mosaic" model of governance was a celebration of identity politics, decided to run a campaign where race was recognized as an issue. According to this strategy, reminders that Dinkins was the city's first black mayor and assertions that he was better able to deal with the city's racial and ethnic diversity than Giuliani would have appeal in a city that was indeed more and more racially diverse. White liberals impressed with historical symbolism and reluctant to challenge the assumption that the city's politics should be "in line with its demographics," as Todd Purdum, the *Times*'s chief metropolitan political correspondent, wrote in the September 19 "Week in Review," would stay with Dinkins.

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On July 25, the Sunday *New York Times Magazine* published Purdum's cover story, "Rudolph Giuliani and the Color of Politics in New York." Racial appeals, he wrote, would be "inevitable," regardless of disclaimers the candidates might make. "Both candidates will run the race race," he said, "taking advantage of the antagonism that has left whites overwhelmingly disapproving of Dinkins and blacks fiercely loyal."

Giuliani's disciplined effort to keep the election focused on competence and to avoid any racial land mines was largely successful in the early phases of the campaign. He did blunder on his own terms when he accused the mayor of racial favoritism by saying that "no one group can have all their agenda." But when Dinkins aide Bill Lynch compared him to David Duke, and when deputy campaign aide Joe Torres said that "people with racist tendencies sympathize with Giuliani," the candidate's response was measured. Giuliani was able to maintain an equanimity not within his grasp in 1989.

This proved a major source of consternation to the Dinkins camp, which had begun to mutter that Giuliani's non-racial campaign was

disingenuous. The press, and especially *The New York Times*, would pounce on Giuliani for any racial missteps. Editorial page editor Howell Raines at the *Times*, for example, wrote in a signed editorial that "Mr. Giuliani is being watched closely for code-word racism." He added that Giuliani's statement that there was "no constitutional right to defecate in the street" signaled that a "[Lee] Atwater-style campaign" was being readied. Dinkins's strategists believed their candidate would gain from any racial contretemps that could be touched off. Not surprisingly, the Dinkins camp was ecstatic when President Bill Clinton came to New York and made his much-celebrated comments bemoaning the electorate's "deep-seated" reluctance "to reach out across racial lines" and vote for "someone different than we are." A glowing, grateful Dinkins said to Clinton: "For me, it doesn't get any better than this."

Not everyone agreed. His remarks were especially irritating to whites whose ability to vote for someone different had given Dinkins his electoral edge in 1989, and who now found it hard to swallow Clinton's claim that Dinkins's

**Mayor Dinkins said that race, "appropriately" used, can transform society.**



**Todd Purdum of the Times wrote that Giuliani was "running against history."**

record was sound. According to an editorial in the *Daily News*, "Bubba Wings It on New York Race," Clinton may have been right to bemoan the polarization on both sides but it was "a leap to...imply...that whites who don't vote for Dinkins are motivated by race." The *News* observed that Clinton's point could equally be applied to blacks who wouldn't vote for someone "different." Of course, as was understood by Bob Herbert, recently hired away from the *News* to become the *Times*'s first black columnist, Clinton didn't mean that. "He...meant of course...that white voters should vote for Mr. Dinkins, not that black voters should vote for Giuliani." Responding to Clinton's speech and Dinkins's argument that when blacks vote for him it's an act of racial pride, but when a white votes for a white candidate it could be an act of racism, the *Daily News* asked: "Even allowing for history's hard facts, where does 'ethnic pride' end and racism begin?"

But the *Times* had little quibble with either the substance or appropriateness of what the President said. Citing studies of elections between black and white candidates around the

country that demonstrated white readiness to cross party lines to avoid voting for blacks, a September 30 *Times* editorial said that Clinton's statement that race matters "is no less true because he made it with partisan intent."

**A**fter Clinton's speech, Dinkins, buoyed by polls showing him closing in on Giuliani, said race should be out openly on the table. "If we use the issue appropriately," he said, "we can transform it from the cancer of our society to its cure."

But along with this new racial frankness came a series of ugly swipes at Giuliani and renewed emphasis on white racism. Standing next to Dinkins at the Bethany Baptist Church in Brooklyn a few days after the President's visit, one black Baptist minister said "the element that can best be described as fascist seems to have grown up and flowered around Mr. Giuliani." Echoing the reference to fascism, another minister associated Giuliani with Mussolini. Given an opportunity to disavow the comments, Dinkins, who had been standing right next to the ministers when the slurs were made, said "it was not my characterization." When he did finally forswear the remarks, he did so in lame



fashion, refusing to denounce by name those who had uttered them.

Reaction from most New York media outlets was harsh. The *Daily News* accused Dinkins of "calculated" reticence and said the "thoughts expressed by the ministers were of a kind that have surfaced regularly from the Dinkins camp." Michael Powell of *Newsday* wrote, "For months the election buzz has centered on Republican Rudy Giuliani and the race card. But when the card finally landed face up on the table the last two weeks, the Dinkins camp was the dealer." John Taylor, a columnist for *New York* magazine, wrote, "The idea that opposition to Dinkins is inherently racist is nothing less than a shameful and cynical effort to expose guilt among the swing group of white liberals." How did the *Times* respond? In short, it blamed the victim.

Seeing a ten-point lead slip in the polls in the weeks following Clinton's comments and the name-calling by the ministers, the Giuliani camp decided it had to respond. It produced two television spots, one featuring Giuliani's wife Donna Hanover, the other featuring Herman Badillo, Giuliani's Puerto Rican running-mate for the office of comptroller. Both spots took a wounded, sorry tone, and beseeched the other side to stop the race-baiting.

Responding harshly to these ads, Dinkins's media advisor Robert Shrum said that they showed Giuliani "in the curiously contradictory position of complaining about the visibility of the issue while increasing its visibility a thousand-fold." Echoing Shrum's accusation a few days later on October 7, the *Times* ran an editorial headlined "A Victim's Mantle for Mr. Giuliani," contending that the Giuliani ads constituted a ploy from "a campaign that stands to benefit from racial fears." The *Times* added, "Not since the heyday of Lee Atwater have we seen such devious artistry when it comes to stirring feelings of racial paranoia among whites."

Other echoes of Shrum could be heard in the news analysis that followed his statement. Some of Giuliani's ads risked seeming disingenuous,

Todd Purdum maintained on October 7. "While ostensibly saying that race should not be an issue, [the ad with Mrs. Giuliani] actually goes to great lengths to highlight and trade on racially inflammatory remarks." By mid-October, the Dinkins camp had put together new television spots, one which cited the *Times* editorial to bolster its charge that Giuliani was using tactics to stir white fear and paranoia. The *Times* had made sure its prophecy came true: Giuliani now was running a "race race."

The *Times*'s seeming tolerance for allegations of Giuliani's "fascist" tendencies was consistent with the stereotype it had regularly encouraged during the campaign. One part of that caricature consisted of Giuliani the intemperate right-winger, the "jut-jawed lawman" and "former federal prosecutor" whose concern for crime was a code for white hostility to minorities. As early as June 13, 1993, Purdum had written that Giuliani "must reassure voters he would not prompt a racial backlash," and throughout the campaign the

*Times* reminded readers that Giuliani had egged on police officers with an expletive-laced speech at an unruly City Hall demonstration in September 1992, and that he had yelled "Shut up" at his supporters during his concession speech in 1989. (In fact, his expletives were only playing off expletives Mayor Dinkins had used in remarks earlier that summer. And a videotape of the last campaign's concession speech showed he did not yell "Shut up" but "Quiet.")

Another component of the Giuliani stereotype was the implication that his "shallow," nostalgic appeals to a safer and more orderly New York showed he was the banner-bearer of bigoted white ethnic restoration. In his Sunday *New York Times Magazine* profile of Giuliani, Purdum referred to the candidate as a "Wonderbread Son of the 50s" out of place in what he characterized as a "hip-hop city." Giuliani seemed "a striking throwback in New York's anything goes atmosphere." Purdum went on: "It's as if his cultural and psychic sensibilities froze about 1961, the year he left the tutelage

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of the Christian Brothers at Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School in Brooklyn." Giuliani's "pitch to nostalgia," Purdum continued, "comes just as New York stands to enter a new political order, made inevitable by demographic shifts in a city where non-Hispanic whites are no longer the majority. In a profound sense, this son of the fifties is running against history."

Portraying him as an anathema to progressive-minded voters, the *Times* neglected aspects of the man and his campaign that might have undermined this image. Giuliani's efforts to reach out to blacks didn't, finally, pay any dividends at the polls. But they were more extensive than the newspaper reported. Nor did the *Times* move beyond perfunctory reporting to analyze the significance of the endorsement given Giuliani by Rev. John Brandon, a veteran of 1960s civil rights battles in the South who is now pastor of Harlem's Salem United Methodist Church. Brandon appeared in a Giuliani television spot that aired heavily in the campaign's closing days. "Race is a convenient way to scare people into a kind of conformity," Brandon told the *Daily News*, which like *Newsday* and the *New York Post* explored Brandon's endorsement at length.

Also, the *Times* didn't report that Giuliani had been spurned by such prominent conservatives as Edwin Meese III, Patrick J. Buchanan and William J. Bennett. This fact cast doubt on the *Times*'s characterization of Giuliani as an apostle of "civic Reaganism." The paper also failed to examine the significance of the endorsement given Giuliani by the now late Robert Wagner, Jr., a moderate Democrat whose defection drew bitter scorn from the black establishment.

Complaining about what he called "the triumph of ideology over experience" in one of the several columns he wrote criticizing the *Times* during the campaign, the *Daily News*'s Jim Sleeper told the Columbia Journalism School panel on race: "I think there was a compulsion on the part of some folks at the *Times*

to inoculate its own liberal readership against any tendency to vote for this man Giuliani."

The way the *Times* dealt with Giuliani contrasted sharply with its approach to Dinkins. The paper treated the Mayor's record in office, particularly those aspects involving race, with kid-glove delicacy. This left a significant gap in coverage. Although being the newspaper of record isn't as important to the *Times* as it once was, other news outlets continue to look to the paper, with its extensive resources and experienced staff, to provide background analysis.

The *Times* did report the "scathing portrait" contained in the findings of a major New York state investigation into Crown Heights, and said there were "major flaws in Mr. Dinkins's leadership." But in subsequent references to Crown Heights during the campaign, the paper offered an abridged, and exculpatory, version of events. A September 12, Sunday *New York Times Magazine* profile of Dinkins said that the mayor and his aides "were too deferential to an inept police command."

Likewise an October 20 editorial commented that Dinkins "had a misstep in Crown Heights when he ceded too much authority to the police, who allowed the melee to continue for the third night when it should have been stopped after the second." Similarly, the *Times*'s endorsement editorial referred to "inept" police, but not the possibility of an inept mayor. A November 1 *Times* profile of Bill Lynch, the Mayor's chief campaign aide, who had been at the center of the Crown Heights controversy, cited only those aspects of Lynch's role in Crown Heights that illustrated his heroic effort to calm the situation. It was not mentioned that Lynch had given testimony about the mayoral office's response to the riot that state investigators found "simply not credible."

In another application of its double standard, the *Times* failed to examine the influence of racial militants in the previous Dinkins campaign and in his administration. In 1989, the links between activists like the Rev. Al Sharpton and Sonny Carson and the Dinkins cam-

*Could the Times  
"stop seeing Dinkins as a black man  
and start seeing  
him as a mayor"?*



paigned had been the subject of intense controversy, and during his tenure in office Dinkins's complicated relationship with the militant wing of his core supporters had been cited often in explaining his reluctance to take action against blacks in Flatbush and Crown Heights. The day after the election, the *Times* ran a photo of Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson conferring with Dinkins. This seemed to imply a close working relationship between Dinkins and Sharpton. Yet, this, as well as Dinkins's relationships with other racial militants like the Reverend Herbert Daughtry, was never explored.

Nor did the *Times* find it appropriate to delve into the Mayor's longstanding relationship with WLIB, a controversial radio station responsible for broadcasting ugly racial demagoguery and occasional death threats to journalists critical of the militant black agenda. Dinkins sold his stake in the company prior to the 1989 campaign, but his family still has significant interests and Dinkins often appears on the station, which is owned by his best friend and political benefactor, Percy Sutton. On October 8 the *Times's* Manegold reported that Giuliani, who had been vilified repeatedly by the station (among other things he'd been called a "crypto-fascist"), had raised the issue of Dinkins's relationship with WLIB. Dinkins, said Giuliani, could stop the pattern of defamation. Despite this obvious opportunity to delve into the issue, Manegold ignored it, downplaying Giuliani's charge as a tactic "consistent with his campaign's efforts to keep alive the issue of race-baiting."

Still another lapse concerned the paper's reluctance to draw attention to the racial code-words Dinkins used to demonize Giuliani. At the Columbia Journalism School panel discussion, Andy Logan of the *New Yorker* said she had heard Dinkins publicly say that Giuliani "isn't running for mayor, he is running for warden" and that "his [opponent's] idea of gun control is target practice." Such remarks were inflammatory, implying that Giuliani was some kind of reverse-image Willie Horton. They also surely contradicted the assertion made in the second of two editorial endorsements, which ran on November 2, that Dinkins was "the quieter man." Yet, Dinkins's remarks that day were never reported in the *Times*.

To be sure, the failure to examine these aspects of the Mayor's tenure and campaign rhetoric could be explained by Giuliani's own failure to raise them as legitimate issues. As a result, there was no ready "peg" of charge and counter-charge upon which to hang a story or a news analysis. But given the double standard the *Times* consistently applied to anything bearing on the subject of race, perhaps there was wisdom in Giuliani's reluctance to respond.

In the November 15 *Newsweek*, columnist Joe Klein wrote that in "work[ing] overtime...to portray the campaign as a crossroads in American ethnic history," the *Times* was in a "continuing descent." Citing as well the *Times's* undependable coverage of Crown Heights and the Flatbush boycott, Klein wrote that the paper "now seems intent on tossing away a century's worth of sobriety in pursuit of a trendy, disingenuous correctness on matters racial."

The *Times* has not publicly responded to this perception of its journalism, nor has it engaged its critics. But one may speculate as to why the paper handled the mayoral contest the way it did. Perhaps it can be related to the paper's determined efforts to promote "diversity" inside the newsroom. After all, the race-conscious premises of newsroom diversity are to journalism what the "gorgeous mosaic" is to New York politics. Perhaps, too, the *Times's* approach can be related to the way many editors at the paper, who cut their teeth as young journalists covering the civil rights movement and are now in positions of considerable influence, see the world. Yet, however the *Times's* journalism on the campaign might be explained, it's hard to dispute what the *Daily News's* Jim Sleeper wrote in a stinging column. As he put it, the question of this election was not whether whites could vote for someone different than themselves, but whether the *Times's* editors could "stop seeing David Dinkins as a black man and start seeing him as just another mayor."★

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