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SHATTERED MOSAIC:
DAVID DINKINS, RUDOLPH GIULIANI, AND SOCIAL AND ELECTORAL
POLARIZATION IN LATE-20TH CENTURY NEW YORK CITY

by

GABRIEL S. TENNEN

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2016

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New York City

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in
satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Masters of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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David Dinkins, Rudolph Giuliani, and Social and Electoral Polarization in Late 20th Century
New York City

By

Gabriel S. Tennen

Advisor: Dr. Robert Singer

On Tuesday November 2, 1993, New Yorkers went to the polls to vote in the mayoral election between the incumbent Democratic candidate, David Dinkins, and the Republican-Liberal Party candidate, Rudolph Giuliani. As with most local New York elections, several additional candidates were on the ballot. Jimmy McMillan, known now as the “Rent is Too Damn High” candidate, made his first bid for public office that year. The clear frontrunners, Giuliani and Dinkins, would finish just percentage points apart, with Giuliani garnering 50.9% of the popular vote and Dinkins only 48%. This was a near mirror image of the previous election in 1989, when Giuliani lost to Dinkins with only 47.84% to Dinkins’ 50.42% of the vote.¹ The election not only ousted New York’s first, and thus far only, black mayor from office after just a single term, but also solidified a conservative, urban social movement in a city that had traditionally been overwhelmingly liberal.

This movement’s roots could be found as early as William Buckley’s unsuccessful run for mayor in 1965 in the wake of the 1964 Harlem riots. It gained traction during the teachers strike in Ocean Hill-Brownsville in 1968 and the city’s fiscal crisis of 1975, when Mayor

¹Our Campaigns: New York City Mayoral Election, 1993.

Abraham Beame was forced to decimate social welfare and city services in order to stave off citywide bankruptcy. It was not until 1993, though, that the movement was vindicated with a major electoral victory.

Amidst the election of Mayor Giuliani, the city experienced a turbulent, anxious era in its social and political history. The late-1980s and early-1990s were marked by retrenchment, conflict, and polarization, often demonstrated in violence and confrontation, as David Dinkins' "beautiful mosaic" nearly shattered. Under these circumstances, and riding a rising national sentiment of conservatism and a fierce local debate about the city's "quality of life," Giuliani, a former federal prosecutor, seemingly of a New York that was by then long lost, became the city's first Republican mayor in a generation.

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POLARIZATION, CONFLICT, AND THE 1980s

Major changes in demographics and economics within New York City presaged the 1993 election, leading to conflict, tension, and sweeping changes in electoral politics. Between the end of World War II and 1990, New York had been transformed in nearly every sense: economically, spatially, and socially. Industry had crept from the city's interior to the expanses inland and, eventually, off American shores entirely. New highways swept commuters, many of them former New Yorkers, from suburban neighborhoods into glistening Manhattan office towers. Bland brick high-rise housing projects dotted the inner city's landscape, replacing blighted but often socially sustainable tenement neighborhoods with veritable warehouses for what became the city's least fortunate.

Just as stark was the change in the city's people themselves. What had been in 1950 a city with more than 7.1 million white residents had fewer than 3.9 million whites by 1990. Conversely, the Great Migration of black Americans from the rural south to cities like New York, in conjunction with an influx of Puerto Ricans, and the opening of American shores to new citizens with the Immigration Act of 1965, changed New York's complexion entirely. By 1990, the city was 26% black as opposed to less than 10% in 1950, and nearly 25% Latino. The city's former residents fled their old neighborhoods, and Queens, Staten Island, Long Island and New Jersey began to absorb the inner city's shrinking population. Most of these New York "expats" were white, as restrictive housing covenants consigned the city's nonwhite population to the most deteriorated and underserviced neighborhoods.

During the 1980s, these decades-long demographic and economic trends appeared to have determined the fate the city, as income inequality, racial and ethnic segregation, and a host of new social ills plagued New York. Yet even as the city remained in crisis, some bright spots

emerged. Population loss, falling real incomes, and the loss of white residents, many of who were replaced by black and Hispanic New Yorkers, defined the 1970s; by the 1980s, New York would begin to reverse these trends.

During the 1980s, the city again became a major destination for swaths of new immigrants. Unlike their Irish, Jewish, Italian, and other ethnic European 19th and 20th century counterparts, these new groups arrived en masse from areas in Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean. By 1990, almost one million of the city's 7.3 million residents were foreign-born and had arrived within the last ten years. Entire neighborhoods were transformed, as new Chinatowns, Little Odessas, and Little Indias replaced formerly Italian and Jewish enclaves throughout the five boroughs. In 1980, the city had counted 43.8 percent of its population as native-born white, 16.5 percent as native-born black, and 10.5 percent as native-born Hispanic. By 1990, those numbers had shifted to 35.3 percent, 19.6 percent, and 15 percent, respectively, while 5.4 percent of the city's citizenry was counted as foreign-born Asian, 8 percent were foreign-born Hispanic, and 6 percent were foreign-born black.

While whites were still the largest single racial group in the city, they were no longer a majority, as New York became a darker-hued, more diverse city, serving again as a hub for the nation's new immigrant groups.¹ Pervasive feelings of the city slipping from "us" to "them" became a dominant narrative, as the fictionalized mayor of New York soliloquizes to his fellow white New Yorkers in Tom Wolfe's *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987):

Do you really think this is *your* city any longer? Open your eyes! The greatest city of the Twentieth Century! Do you think *money* will keep it yours? Come down

¹ Mollenkopf, *Atlas*, 6.

from your swell co-ops, you general partners and merger lawyers! It's the Third World down there. Puerto Ricans, West Indians, Haitians, Dominicans, Cubans, Colombians, Hondurans, Koreans, Chinese, Thais, Vietnamese, Ecuadorians, Panamanians, Filipinos, Albanians, Senegalese, and Afro-Americans! Go visit the frontiers, you gutless wonders! Morningside Heights, St. Nicholas Park, Washington Heights, Fort Tryon- *por que pagar mas!* The Bronx- the Bronx is finished for you!²

In spite of their shrinking share of the population, some whites began returning to the city during the 1980s, as the financial sector and advanced corporate services industries replaced heavy industry as the key economic drivers in New York, attracting a new, elite managerial class. Coupled with this influx of well-to-do corporate and financial workers was a 26 percent increase in real household income.³ These newcomers also contributed to the transformation neighborhoods, as gentrification swept across Manhattan into areas like the East Village and Lower East Side, displacing minority residents and accentuating to a heightened sense of impending conflict. Simultaneously, as incomes for top earners soared, so too did income inequality, and racial and class tension became a hallmark of the decade.

Social problems like the crack and AIDS epidemics, huge increases in homelessness, and high rates of crime became sad realities of life in graffiti-pockmarked New York during the 1980s. Projected by film and media, these tensions and anxieties became ubiquitous in any account of life in Gotham. Films like *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974), *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1967), *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976), and *The Incident* (Larry Peerce,

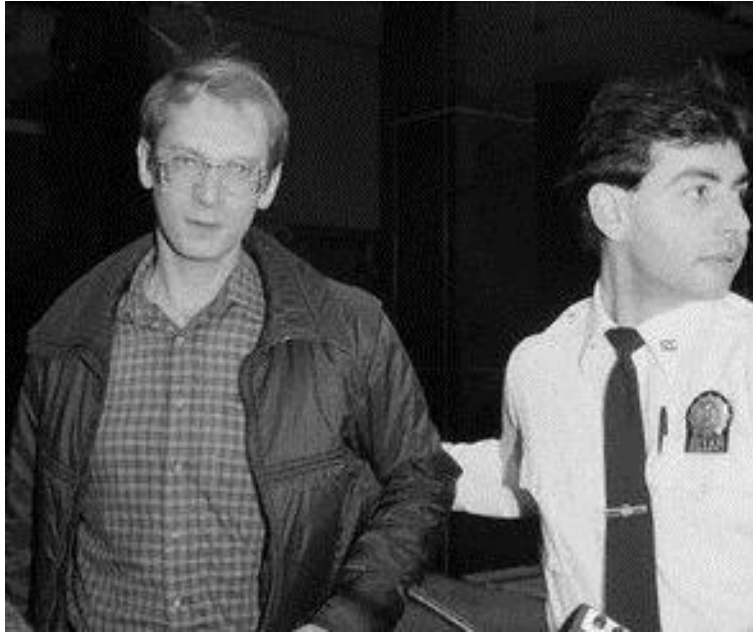
² Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, 5.

³ Mollenkopf, *Atlas*, 5.

1967) had, since the late-1960s, offered a dark and menacing image of America's largest metropolis. Concurrently, alarmist tabloid headlines, sparking moral panics and social retrenchment, offered frightening warnings to everyday New Yorkers that their lives were constantly in jeopardy.

Amid this foreboding milieu, several highly publicized incidents of violence, conflict, and disorder, often tinged with racial and ethnic subtext, contributed to the growing sense that, despite its gains, New York was still very much a "city in crisis." Rather than the dazzling city of white lights, glitz, and glamour that it had been considered a few short decades before, New York's most defining characteristic, both to much of the country as well as to the city itself, had become racial and class polarization, which evidenced itself violently and often, highlighting disparities that were so striking in late-20th century New York.

By the time the 1989 Democratic Primary for mayor rolled around, when then-Manhattan Borough President David Dinkins aimed to unseat incumbent Mayor Ed Koch in what was then considered the city's "real" election, unrest and polarization seemed to be simply a quintessential fact of life in New York. Just five years earlier, during the winter of 1984, four black teenage boys were behaving rowdily on a southbound 7th Avenue train. Fearing a mugging as two of the teenagers approached him, Bernhard Goetz, a white West Villager and Queens native, pulled a gun, shooting five bullets and seriously wounding each of his perceived assailants. Goetz escaped that night, but turned himself in just a week later.



1.) Bernhard Goetz in 1985.

Predictably, public opinion on the incident was often determined by racial identity and class status. Media coverage by local tabloids, especially the *New York Post*, lionized Goetz, comparing him to Charles Bronson's vengeful vigilante from the *Death Wish* films of the 1970s.⁴ Conversely, the *Amsterdam News*, published in Harlem, voiced the sentiment of many of in New York's minority communities. "Paint Goetz black or Puerto Rican. Name him Jones or Suarez. Give him the college degrees and a similar lifestyle. Let him shoot four whites, two of them in the back, for any reason. See what happens to him. You can be sure that it will not be applause."⁵

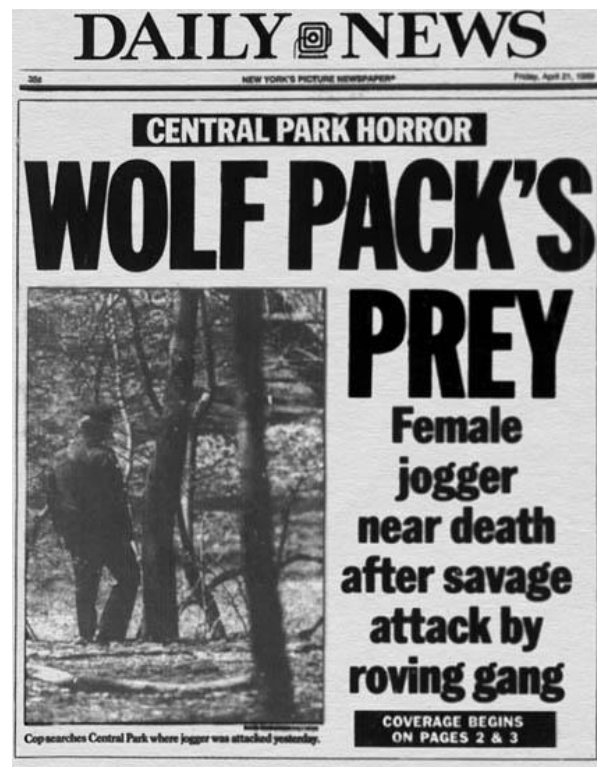
Though he was eventually found liable in a civil suit in 1995, Goetz was acquitted in 1985 of all charges in a criminal court, as a jury of his peers found his actions to be within the limits of reason. While minority communities rued the ruling, much of white, middle-class New York cheered the verdict. Reactions to the decision revealed themselves along the fault lines of

⁴ Brooks, "Stories and Verdicts," 91.

⁵ *Amsterdam News*, "Vigilante."

race and class, in a trend that would become even more familiar as polarization continued to exhibit itself violently throughout the decade.

The roiling tensions made so apparent by the Goetz case would continue to boil over into the late-1980s. As Koch and Dinkins campaigned for the Democratic nomination for mayor during the spring and summer of 1989, New York experienced two wildly controversial violent incidents, each with their own racial overtones. In April of that year, a 28-year-old white investment banker who lived on the Upper East Side named Trisha Melei was found raped, brutalized, and near death in Central Park. The night before, reports of unruly groups of teenagers trickled in to the Central Park police precinct, and after the shocking discovery of Melei, investigators, prematurely, as it later turned out, determined that the perpetrators of the crime were part of those groups.



2.) Cover of *New York Daily News* in the wake of the Central Park jogger case, April 21, 1989.

Five juveniles, four of who were black and one Hispanic, and all from nearby East Harlem, were subsequently arrested. Mayor Ed Koch decried the incident, which came to be known as the “Central Park jogger case,” as the “crime of the century.”⁶ In the *Daily News*, Donald Trump took out a full-page ad calling for the execution of the five young suspects.⁷ After a hasty trial that relied on questionable evidence, the boys were each sentenced to lengthy prison terms. While they were cleared of all charges and freed after the real perpetrator stepped forward over ten years later, the rush to judgment and calls for blood by the city’s white establishment, and corresponding protests by the black community led by leaders like Reverend Al Sharpton, again revealed the deep rifts in New York City’s body politic leading into the final city election of that decade.

Just a few months later, during the long, hot summer of 1989, racial violence again dominated local headlines, this time in Bensonhurst. After heading into what was then a heavily Italian-American enclave in South Brooklyn to look at a used Pontiac, a group of four black teenagers, including 16-year-old Yusef Hawkins, were attacked by a brutal mob of between 10 and 30 local whites. In a scene eerily reminiscent of the Jim Crow South, rumors that one of the teenagers in the group was dating a local white girl sparked the violence, which culminated in the shooting death of Hawkins.⁸

Three days later, when a group of 300 black New Yorkers led by Sharpton and the civil rights lawyer Alton Maddox descended on Bensonhurst to protest Hawkins’ racially charged murder, a scene erupted that again echoed more “Bull” Connor’s Birmingham than the borough

⁶ Dargis, “The Documentary, ‘The Central Park Five.’”

⁷ Laughland, “Donald Trump and the Central Park Five.”

⁸ Chan, “The Death of Yusef Hawkins, 20 Years Later.”

of Brooklyn. Marchers were taunted with jeers of, “Niggers, go home!” Watermelons were hurled at peaceful protestors. Evoking the widespread presumption of the guilt of the five suspects in the Central Park jogger case, crowds chanted, “Central Park! Central Park!” New York was veering on the edge of explosion as racially charged powder keg, and into this atmosphere stepped David Dinkins.



3.) An angry mob in Bensonhurst taunts protestors in the wake of Yusef Hawkins’ murder.

THE 1989 MAYORAL ELECTION

Vying to become New York’s first African-American mayor in an era of heightened racial turmoil, the outrages surrounding the Central Park jogger case and the murder of Yusef Hawkins drew large swaths of black voters to the polls on the September 12, 1989 Democratic Mayoral Primary. Still, Dinkins needed more than simply high turnout of his core constituency in order to usurp the city’s still powerful Democratic machine. While considerably weaker than it had been during the days of Tammany Hall, when ward bosses ensured unanimous Democratic victory in

citywide elections by doling out favors and jobs or, if that failed, resorting coercion and outright violence, New York's Democratic bosses still wielded tremendous influence, especially in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens. Ironically, Dinkins would be gifted a huge political opportunity by his eventual rival in the general election, then-United States Attorney Rudolph Giuliani.

In 1986, Queens Democratic County Leader and Borough President Donald Manes came under criminal investigation by Giuliani's team of prosecutors, and Manes subsequently committed suicide. His death, as well as the death of Congressman Joseph Addabbo, wildly diminished the capacity of the Democratic organization of Queens. Meanwhile in the Bronx, Giuliani earned criminal convictions for Democratic County Leader Stanley Friedman, Congressmen Mario Biaggi and Robert Garcia, and Borough President Stanley Simon, decimating that borough's party machine. All of those officials were strong backers of Mayor Koch, which was much to the eventual benefit of Manhattan's first black Borough President, David Dinkins.

Riding the wave of change that followed the removal of Democratic bosses in the Bronx and Queens, black and Latino politicians, who were often relegated to the lower ranks of party organizations, seized their opportunity to take what was by then their rightful place among the city's political hierarchy. Addabbo had served in what was by then a heavily African-American district, the 6th Congressional in Queens, and his replacement was an upstart black candidate, Reverend Floyd Flake. In the Bronx, black and Latino politicians threw their weight behind Robert Johnson, a civil rights attorney, who won the borough's election for District Attorney.⁹ No longer were white representatives, beholden to the Democratic machine, shoo-ins for office.

⁹ Thompson, "David Dinkins Victory in New York City," 146.

Elected representatives in city politics more and more resembled the complexion of the city they represented.

Nationally, Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 bids for the Democratic nomination for United States presidency also helped to propel Dinkins in the 1989 mayoral primary against Koch and, eventually, in the general against Giuliani. Jackson, attempting to repudiate the tepid form of liberalism that had come to define the national Democratic Party since its implosion in the late-1960s, nearly succeeded in cobbling together a progressive force akin to the Popular Front of the 1940s of labor, civil rights, and immigrant groups, known as the "Rainbow Coalition." Jackson went on to capture victory in the Democratic primary in New York City, winning a national contest in a city that had up until that point never elected a black official to local citywide office. The electoral returns signaled a potential realignment of the city's body politic, as Jackson won 88.2 percent of the city's black vote, 71.4 percent of the city's Latino vote, and a surprising 22.8 percent and 17.7 percent of the Catholic and Jewish vote,¹⁰ despite his infamous referral to New York City as "Hymietown," which was perceived as a slight to the city's large Jewish community.¹¹

Dinkins looked to capitalize on this broad progressive coalition in the primary, and even made a concerted effort to distance himself from Jackson in light of his derogatory remarks about Jews.¹² He was hugely successful, appealing to the voters during that particularly tense summer that he alone, and certainly not Koch, who was by then a wildly divisive figure, could bring racial harmony to the city. Koch, who himself was Jewish, won heavily Jewish districts like Forest Hills and the Upper West Side by only 3-to-2 margins, and only two-thirds of white

¹⁰ Mollenkopf, *Atlas*, 82.

¹¹ Dionne, "Jackson's Burden Amongst Jews: Fear Overpowers Unity on Civil Rights."

¹² Thompson, "David Dinkins' Victory," 146.

voters as a whole.¹³ Dinkins won the primary handily, 51 percent to 42 percent. He would next have to face Giuliani in the general election.

Though polls showed Dinkins with a clear path to victory in the general election, in reality, he would have anything but. Giuliani, on the eve of his successful campaign four years later, noted that Dinkins' 50% to Giuliani's 41% lead in a WNBC/*New York Daily News* poll did not seem daunting in 1993, as he "was 18 points behind on election day last time, and it was a 2 point election" in 1989.¹⁴ The campaign was highly vitriolic, as the two candidates vied for the city's highest office in an era of anxiety.

The candidates met in two cantankerous televised debates, both of which quickly devolved into accusations of graft, corruption, and immorality. Though WNBC and its host, Gabe Pressman, requested a one-on-one debate between the two frontrunners, Dinkins asked that they honor the "politics of inclusion" and also invite of the Right to Life candidate Henry Hewes, who was earning only around 2% of votes in most polls. In each debate, Giuliani questioned his main opponent's "character, integrity, and decency," as he cast aspersions on Dinkins' association with municipal unions, insinuated that he was paid off by organized labor, and suggested foul play in a stock transaction through which the Democratic candidate made a large sum of money. For his part, Dinkins accused Giuliani of dishonesty with regards to his stance on abortion rights (an accusation that the Right to Life candidate Hewes seemed to rejoice in substantiating), and painted him as Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega's former lawyer while Giuliani worked for the law firm White & Case.¹⁵

¹³ Lynn, "The New York Primary."

¹⁴ TVNewStand, "NEWSFLASH."

¹⁵ C-Span, "New York City Mayoral Debate."

Giuliani attempted to seize on the city's fear of crime, contending that under his administration and as a former prosecutor, law and order would be "handled in a way that it's never been handled before, because" he had "the experience to do it." Giuliani tried to tie Dinkins to the longstanding Democratic control of city politics, arguing that he saw "a connection between the corruption we tolerate in this city, the rotten political system, of which David is a part. He continued, "Don't fool yourself by thinking that the money that is taken out by the crooked politicians and the corrupt businessmen, that doesn't come down from trees, it comes out of the pockets of the middle class and the productive people in this city."¹⁶

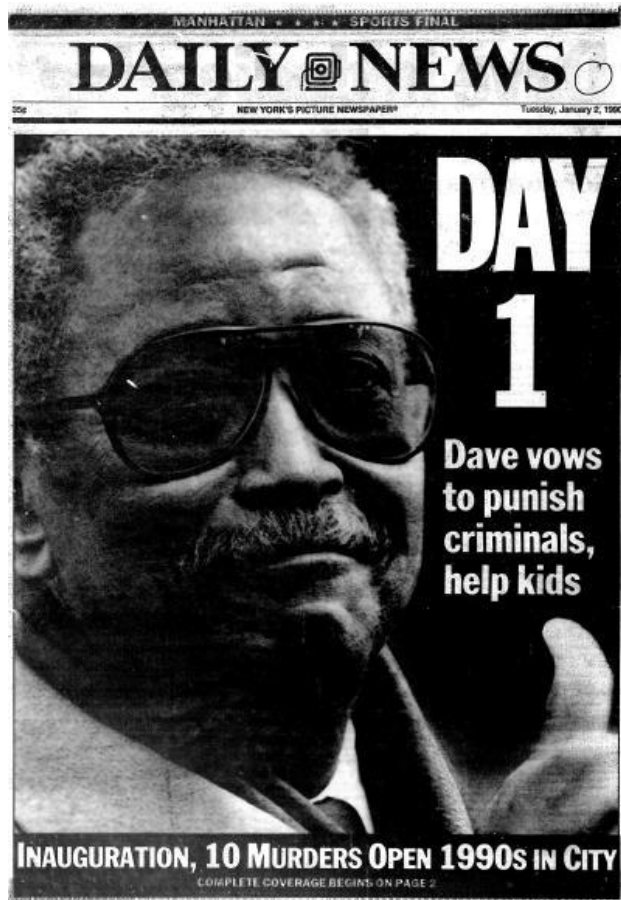
While Giuliani admonished him, Dinkins presented himself as "a friend of labor, a friend of those people who clean bedpans, and tend to the frail elderly, and mold young leaders in schools." Rather than the Tammany machine of Boss Tweed, and "part of the Democratic corruption," he was "part of the Democratic Party of Mario Cuomo, and John Kennedy, and Robert Kennedy."¹⁷ In 1989, New York was not yet ready to abandon that Democratic Party. David Dinkins, in spite of a Giuliani's borderline prosecutorial campaign and the agitated social landscape of late 1980s New York, became the first African-American elected to the city's highest office. Yet though he was predicted to win in a landslide, he would enter office having obtained just more than 2% of the vote than his Republican rival.

¹⁶ C-Span, "New York City Mayoral Debate."

¹⁷ C-Span, "New York City Mayoral Debate."



4.) Outgoing mayor Ed Koch shakes David Dinkins' hand on inauguration day. January 1, 1990.



5.) "Inauguration, 10 Murders Open 1990s in City." *New York Daily News* cover, January 2, 1990.

THE “TOUGH ON CRIME” 1990s

David Dinkins’ election to mayor in 1989 general election indicated a solidification of a shift with regard to citywide social trends and demographics, as returns signaled realignments in ethno-political affiliation. Jews, who had been ardent Democratic voters in city politics since the late 19th century when they arrived en masse to New York, only voted one in three for Dinkins. White Catholic voters cast their votes for Dinkins at a rate of only one in six, while white voters as a whole cast seven in ten votes for Giuliani, a Republican in a city where registered Democrats outnumbered the opposition five to one. Dinkins, on the other hand, garnered 90% of the black vote, with black voters constituting 28% of the total vote, a percentage higher than their total population in the city at the time.¹⁸

Dinkins followed his predecessor Ed Koch in a pattern of employing aggressive and retributive policing tactics by the NYPD, neoliberal policies like public-private partnerships with corporations like Walt Disney, and evictions of homeless encampments from public spaces, which mirrored the policies later enacted by Mayor Giuliani, though to a somewhat lesser extent. Dinkins did make some positive strides as mayor, and crime rates, mirroring a national trend, fell through 1991, 1992, and 1993, with murders finally dipping below the 2,000 mark for the first time in three years by 1992.¹⁹ Yet New York in 1993 was still very much a city thought to be in crisis, and addressing “quality of life” issues became a way for the Giuliani campaign to tap into the deeper-seated fears and resentments of the city’s shrinking white middle-class.

By 1993, when Giuliani and Dinkins again found themselves competing for votes, the political landscape that had been seemingly inching leftward, buttressed by electoral victories like Dinkins successful run for City Hall and Bill Clinton’s victory for the United States

¹⁸ Roberts, “The 1989 Elections.”

¹⁹ James, “Crime Down in New York for 2d Year in a Row.”

President, seemed to abruptly reverse course. This trend was felt nationally, as well as in the neighborhoods of New York City. In cities across the country, crime was falling for the first time since dramatic increases decades earlier, and all indicators pointed towards a better, more prosperous national economy. In spite of this, “tough on crime” rhetoric took on a new life in public discourse.

This shift was not inevitable, especially considering the fact that national crime rates were dipping in the early-1990s after peak violence during the crack epidemic of the mid-to-late-1980s. Indeed, those urging a more sensible conversation about crime and those advocating for reform had reason to be optimistic in the years leading up to Giuliani’s election to mayor. After two decades of increasingly retributive crime policies, Janet Reno became the United States Attorney General, coming into the office on a platform that was almost entirely the opposite of that of her predecessor, William Barr. Barr, serving President George H.W. Bush, echoed the Commander-in-Chief’s cries for longer sentences, more prisons, and tougher punishments. Reno, however, was known as a proponent of prevention rather than incarceration, arguing in 1992, “we can’t build our way out of the prison overcrowding crisis.” The public was surprisingly receptive to her message.

Outside of the executive branch, calls for reform came from elsewhere in the federal government. Much of the conversation drew from new studies that illustrated the overwhelmingly detrimental effect on poor communities of color felt by draconian crime policy. By 1994, one in four African-American males between the ages of 20 and 29 were in some aspect involved in the criminal justice system.²⁰ Voices came out in favor of reform from unexpected corners, including many Republican-appointed federal judges.

²⁰ Mauer, “The Fragility of Criminal Justice Reform, 19.

Mandatory minimum sentencing, enacted during the 1980s, was especially a target of the ire of even non-reform minded judges, many of whom called for the repeal of these policies, which handcuffed judges to hand out long sentences that many felt were excessive. In Congress, Democrats, and even some Republicans like Orrin Hatch, argued for alternatives to prison and for a more sensible approach to criminal justice. However, within the first year of Bill Clinton's presidency, the same year that Giuliani would defeat David Dinkins to become New York's mayor, a sudden shift became apparent, and reformers' hopes were quickly dashed.

In January 1994, the month that Giuliani would be sworn into office, polls showed that 31% of Americans believed that crime was the most important issue facing the nation, up from just 5% in June the previous year.²¹ Several high profile cases of violence, including a mass shooting on a Long Island Railroad train, incurred new fears about crime throughout the country. In 1994, California enacted the country's first "three-strikes-and-you're-out" legislation and President Bill Clinton would initiate a host of new crime control policies by signing into law the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act.²² In New York, newly elected Republican Governor George Pataki, riding the same wave of conservative sentiment that ushered Giuliani into Gracie Mansion, reinstated the death penalty, which had been outlawed statewide since 1984. This fervor would reverberate on the local level in New York City with the 1993 mayoral election.

In New York City politics, the new clamor for harsher policies against crime and the perception of disorder manifested itself in what was the issue du jour that voting cycle, "Quality of Life." The term had its roots in the Johnson presidential administration's liberal efforts of the 1960s, with Johnson referring in a letter to Congress to "the *quality of lives*" that people "lead." He went on to proclaim that, "We want to build not just housing units, but neighborhoods; not

²¹ Mauer, "The Fragility of Criminal Justice Reform, 15.

²² Mauer, "The Fragility of Criminal Justice Reform, 24.

just to construct schools, but to educate children; not just to raise income, but to create beauty and end the poisoning of our environment.”²³ Used in the milieu of the Great Society, the term “quality of life” connoted directly improving the quality of poor peoples’ lives. Just thirty years later, however, in the divisive urban politics of the early-1990s, the term conjured another meaning entirely, more specifically, the quality of lives of the middle and upper classes, especially with regards to their dealing with the cities’ least fortunate and most vulnerable.

This particular brand of urban neoliberal social policy was termed by Neal Smith *revanchism*, which “blends revenge with reaction. It represents a reaction against the basic assumption of liberal urban policy, namely that government bears some responsibility for ensuring a decent minimum level of daily life for everyone.”²⁴ Smith argued that New York’s particular brand of *revanchism*, in contrast with national discourse and federal policies that dismantled the social safety net, was an assault on the rights of citizens, especially the city’s most vulnerable. Through policies like *Police Strategy No. 5*, which aimed at “reclaiming the city’s public spaces of New York,” the Giuliani administration sanctioned state action against those deemed responsible for the city’s deterioration and anxieties.²⁵ Yet these policies were rooted in a Democratic tradition that had been set in motion by the new mayor’s predecessors, including David Dinkins.

The paradox of the 1993 election was Giuliani’s ability to portray himself as a candidate who would reign in out of control disorder and homelessness. Dinkins, beginning in 1991, had reversed a decades-long trend of rising crime, eventually decreasing violent crime appreciably in spite of a persistent drug trade and large numbers of weapons on the streets. He also decreased

²³ Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 33.

²⁴ Smith, “Giuliani Time,” 1.

²⁵ Smith, “Giuliani Time,” 2.

the city's homeless shelter population to its lowest level since 1973. Dinkins was no enemy of private capital, either. He leased swaths of the Times Square area to the Walt Disney Company in 1992, building on his predecessor Ed Koch's fondness for using public-private partnerships to revitalize the central city, a key tool in neoliberal urban planning. His own actions towards the city's homeless population mirrored those of his successor. In 1991, the city enacted a campaign to drive homeless camps from the central city, clearing shantytowns throughout Gotham and pushing their residents towards the fringes of Manhattan Island, under highway overpasses, and into the outer boroughs.²⁶

How, then, was Giuliani able to galvanize a base of conservative voters in a city that had not elected a Republican in a generation? Race was the elephant in the room. The term "the Dinkins Effect" was coined to describe white liberals' tendency to indicate to pollsters that they would cast their ballots for a black candidate, but do the opposite once in the privacy of the voting booth.²⁷ Giuliani's base consisted mostly of white ethnics in outer-boroughs, many of whom were former stalwart Democrats, but were now a growing minority in a city that had undergone rapid changes in the latter half of the 20th century. Municipal workers, long the unionized backbone of New York's middle-class, were laid off; CCNY began charging tuition when it had up until that point been almost entirely free; landlords set their buildings on fire to collect insurance; and unrest and riots shook neighborhoods from the Bronx to Bushwick. Much of the country, and much of the city itself, still viewed New York as a city in crisis.

²⁶ Smith, "Giuliani Time," 5.

²⁷ Derbyshire, "The Dinkins Effect."

STATEN ISLAND SECESSION, THE CROWN HEIGHTS RIOTS, AND THE 1992

POLICE RIOTS

Three key incidents illustrate how this conservative movement was able to emerge in New York City during the early-1990s. These include Staten Island's movement to secede from the five boroughs that make up the city, the 1991 riots that shook Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and a demonstration by the New York Police Department against Mayor Dinkins' policies in 1992 that turned violent. Each illuminated the growing social tension in New York that was instrumental to Giuliani's unseating of Dinkins in 1993. Most exemplary was the Staten Island secession movement.

Staten Island remains New York's least populous and most suburban borough. In 1990, the borough had fewer than 379,000 residents, approximately 85% of whom were non-Hispanic white.²⁸ The borough tilted heavily conservative. George H.W. Bush won nearly 62% of the vote in the 1988 presidential election, whereas the city as a whole voted over 66% for Michael Dukakis, the Democratic candidate. In his winning 1989 campaign for mayor, David Dinkins, who was referred to as "Public Enemy No. 1" by an editorial in the *Staten Island Advance*, would garner only 20% of Staten Island's vote.²⁹ Richmond County was an outsider among the five boroughs, but its movement towards secession, which had been and continues to be discussed since it joined the city in 1898, was enabled a 1989 United States Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Board of Estimate of the City of New York v. Morris*.

Under the city's 1898 charter, when the five boroughs, previously independent entities, were first amalgamated into one city, the Board of Estimate was formed as the government body that determined budget and land-use decisions. The Board had an eight-person membership

²⁸ Gibson and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics."

²⁹ Kramer and Flanagan, *Staten Island*, 128.

made up of the mayor, comptroller, council president, and each borough president. Board of Estimate v. Morris was argued in 1988, and the next year The United States Supreme Court found the body unconstitutional. The court cited Brooklyn's equal footing on the board with Staten Island, noting the massive disparity in the two boroughs' populations, as a basis for its decision. The Board of Estimate was subsequently disbanded.

Furious with the decision and fearing a loss of power in city government for their already outlying community, Staten Islanders put a bill before the state legislature that would allow them to decide whether or not to secede from New York City. Albany passed the bill, which would allow Staten Islanders to vote on a referendum on secession after 1990, which was quickly signed into law by Governor Mario Cuomo, a politician with strong ties to the borough.³⁰ A committee was put together to explore secession, but out of thirteen members, there was only one African-American.³¹ It was not until 1993, during the Dinkins-Giuliani mayoral contest, that the referendum was actually added to the ballot in the form of a new Staten Island City Charter, a document that amounted to a borough-wide declaration of independence. It passed overwhelmingly, 65% to 35%.³² In his loss to Giuliani that year, Dinkins took home ever fewer of Staten Island's votes than he had four years earlier, barely earning 16% of the borough's ballots.

³⁰ Kolbert, "New York Legislature Approves Staten Island Secession Measure."

³¹ Kramer and Flanagan, *Staten Island*, 129.

³² Kramer and Flanagan, *Staten Island*, 130.



6.) Governor Andrew Cuomo signs into law the bill legalizing Staten Island’s ability to vote on a referendum in favor of secession from New York City, 1990.

THE WINNERS

MAYOR DELOACH 51%	BORO PRES. WOLFE 67%	COUNCIL OVERMAN 58%	COUNCIL FRISCH 77%	COUNCIL CROSSLAND 58%	SENATE DEGASIS 58%	COMPTROLLER MORSE 58%	ADVOCATE WISER 58%
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Staten Island Advance

Vol. 108 No. 2451 128 pages
 Website: www.statenisland.com
 Wednesday, November 3, 1993
 Rate: \$1.00 per copy (Retail) \$1.00 per week

65% SAY YES TO INDEPENDENCE

NINE PAGES OF NEWS ON SECESSION

- News on the secession — Page A 1
- What happens next — Page A 8
- Analyzing the historic vote — Page A 9
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ELECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- Representatives, City Council members, were elected Nov. 2. They'll take office Jan. 1, 1994. The election was held on a Tuesday, marking the beginning of the 1993-94 term.
- Voters passed a ballot measure to send the state of New York to the polls.

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77,694 vote to leave New York City
40,968 vote to stay

by FRANK W. O'ROURKE and CAROL L. CAMERON

Staten Island's secession vote was a stunning victory to break away from New York City and join the rest of the state.

With 77,694 people voting, the state's largest secession vote since 1892 was passed — at 65% — in a surprise vote.

In voting to create an independent state, Staten Island voters have set the stage for a new chapter in the state's history.

The state's largest secession vote was held in the first New York State election since 1990. Staten Island voters would be the first to vote on the issue.

With 77,694 votes, Staten Island voters have set the stage for a new chapter in the state's history.

Staten Island voters from the 1993 election to the 1994 election on the issue of secession.

Full secession coverage begins Page A 5.

The thrill of victory is clear as Election Longevity, Dan Singletary, state Sen. John Marchi and Assemblyman Robert Driscoll celebrate secession at the Island Center, Greenvale.

7.) “65% Say YES to Independence.” *Staten Island Advance*, November 3, 1993.

The movement towards secession never came to fruition. Then-Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver determined in 1994 that the state legislature would need a “home rules message” from the city in order to even consider the bill; essentially, the City of New York would have to grant permission to Staten Island to secede.³³ By then in office and with a strong backing on Staten Island, Giuliani let the fervor die down. The overwhelming clamor for secession on Staten Island, however, which reached its height during the 1993 election, was credited with increased

³³ Kramer and Flanagan, *Staten Island*, 132.

voter turnout on Staten Island, the large majority of who cast ballots for Giuliani over Dinkins, galvanizing the Republican's base and contributing to his narrow victory over the incumbent.

As Giuliani campaigned for mayor on a platform of tough-on-crime and law and order (a case he was able to make through his past work as a federal prosecutor), crime in New York had been falling for three consecutive years. Peaking in 1990 during the height of the crack epidemic, the murder rate in the city had dropped under David Dinkins' administration, as he instructed his commissioner of police, Raymond Kelly, to focus on high-level felonies, community policing, and relations with neighborhood residents.

Not all of New York reaped the benefits of reduced disorder. As crime rates dropped in many areas, other neighborhoods bore the brunt stubbornly high rates of violence. 12 of the city's 75 police precincts in 1993 accounted for 43.6% of the city's total murders, compared with just over 39% in 1990.³⁴ It was those neighborhoods, mostly impoverished and of color, that voted overwhelmingly for Dinkins in 1993. In the neighborhoods where crime had dropped, mirroring the national trend, change was obviously not quick enough- those precincts mostly turned out for Giuliani.

The 1991 Crown Heights riots added to this growing sense of disorder. Culminating after two black children, both of Guyanese descent, were struck, one named Gavin Cato fatally, by the motorcade of Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, leader of the Hasidic Lubavitcher sect in Orthodox Judaism, the civil unrest highlighted the ethnic and racial tensions that had been building in New York for years. The chaos included three days and nights of rioting and violence between members of the Jewish and black communities, with 152 policemen and 38 civilians injured, 27

³⁴ Purdy, "1993 Homicides Fewer but More Clustered in New York City."

vehicles destroyed, and 129 arrests made, including 122 blacks and seven whites.³⁵ A 29-year-old Australian Jew named Yankel Rosenbaum was fatally stabbed during the first night of rioting. Total property damage was estimated at one million dollars. The incident was seen as the final fracture between what was once a powerful coalition of New York's traditionally liberal Jewish and black residents.³⁶ These feelings were echoed by a sign, handwritten on cardboard and placed at a makeshift memorial outside of Gavin Cato's home:

Where, where, where, where, where, where is the "white," Jewish man who was taken away in the "special" ambulance- unhandcuffed and escorted by the New York Police Department's Finest? Wile the baby was lying dead UNDER HIS CAR?- with his bicycle- and his cousin was pinned to the wall at Eastern Parkway and Kingston???? Lubavitcher!

Dinkins' attempts to restore order in the neighborhood were quickly met with apprehension from both sides of the conflict. Black residents demanded the arrest of Rabbi Schneerson's driver, 22-year-old Yosef Lifsh, and railed against a private ambulance service run by the Lubavitcher sect that supposedly acted with negligence towards Gavin Cato. Dinkins, somewhat impatiently, urged the community to let the case work its way through the courts, arguing that Lifsh was subject to a grand jury hearing and that even the Mayor himself could not decide whether or not to arrest and charge him with a crime. One woman, forecasting the dip in black support that would help Giuliani oust Dinkins from office in 1993, decried the mayor's supposed inaction and condescension, saying that Dinkins "came to his constituents and got mad." Community

³⁵ Shapiro, "Interpretations of the Crown Heights Riot," 94.

³⁶ Shapiro, *Crown Heights*, xiii.

members demanded action, as Alton Maddox offered a chilling ultimatum. “The City of New York has 72 hours to have Yosef Lifsh behind bars. If he is not behind bars in 72 hours, we are going to organize a patrol to go into Crown Heights, or wherever he is, and bring him out!” As Dinkins attempted to pacify a rally during the crisis with chants of “silence the violence, increase the peace,” he was met with boos and jeers.³⁷

Members of the Jewish community, for their part, invoked other instances of community persecution, equating the charged atmosphere in Brooklyn to Nazi Germany. Regarding Yosef Rosenbaum, one man alluded to one of the darkest chapters in human history. “He was the son of Holocaust survivors and...he came to his own Holocaust, here in Brooklyn.” The incendiary language used by both sides in the conflict illuminates the seeming intractability of New York’s problems with race relations in the early 1990s. Dinkins, who had been elected as a unifier, had failed miserably in the eyes of many New Yorkers, and the unrest and violence in Crown Heights simply corroborated this notion.

Dinkins bore the brunt of the riot’s fallout from two fronts. On one, citizens and media blamed him for an ineffective response, and on another, the New York Police Department felt that he was unsupportive and unfriendly to his cops. Misinformation tinged with racism spread throughout the city. “Word went out that I had given directions to police to not hold back the blacks but permit them to attack the Jews,” recalled Dinkins. “It was inaccurate, it was unfair to suggest that I had given any such direction.”³⁸ The reactionary sentiment by the NYPD was seized upon by the Giuliani campaign, which characterized the days of unrest as a “pogrom,” hyperbolically linking unrest in Brooklyn in 1991 to violent attacks on Jewish communities in Czarist Russia. The fissure between City Hall and Dinkins on one side, and the NYPD, with

³⁷ Hays, “Crown Heights Riot 1991.”

³⁸ *One on 1*, “David Dinkins.”

Giuliani acting as their surrogate, culminated in a police demonstration against the mayor in 1992 that became chaotic and violent.



8.) Overturned NYPD vehicle on Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, 1991.



9.) A scene from the chaos in Crown Heights, 1991.

On September 16, 1992, following a year of tension with the mayor's office, an estimated ten thousand off-duty police officers convened on City Hall to demonstrate. The objects of their gripes included the mayor's proposal to create an independent civilian agency to look into police misconduct, the mayor's refusal to give police automatic weapons, and his appointment of an independent council to investigate police corruption. The protest eventually devolved into several hours of pandemonium. Police officers trampled barricades, stomped on the hoods of cars, and blocked the entrance to City Hall. For over an hour, demonstrators halted traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge. The 300 uniformed officers that were there to purportedly keep the crowd in line instead did little to nothing to stop the ensuing mania, and in some cases egged on the protestors. Speaking at the rally was Republican mayoral candidate, Rudolph Giuliani, who offered pointed words for the mayor as demonstrators held up provocative and sometimes offensive banners reading things like, "The Mayor is on Crack!" and "Dear Mayor Dinkins: Have You Hugged a Drug Dealer Today?"³⁹

Mayor Dinkins denounced the protest, and attributed it to the Police Benevolent Association's then-president, Phil Caruso, and his push for new contract negotiations with the union. In Dinkins' recollection, "What they did do was to overturn a vehicle, they called a black member of the City Council a nigger. They behaved in a disgraceful fashion."⁴⁰ A groundswell of support for the rank-and-file of the NYPD, and by extension Rudolph Giuliani, began to grow in the wake of the event, again galvanizing a mostly-white conservative base.

³⁹ McKinley, James C. "Officers Rally."

⁴⁰ *One on 1*, "David Dinkins."



10.) Then-candidate Rudolph Giuliani delivers fiery statements to NYPD protestors during a raucous police demonstration against Mayor Dinkins, 1992.

RHETORIC OF REACTION, THE 1993 CAMPAIGN, AND DINKINS' OUSTER

Giuliani ran a contentious campaign, appealing to a shrinking white middle class through allusions to a lost, formerly great city. In one campaign advertisement, the narrator speaks in thick *Brooklynese*, reminiscing, "I remember when I was a kid, Avenue N used to be lined with people sitting out in front of their houses or in front of their apartments at night to cool off, and you don't see that in New York because everybody's afraid to come out at night." Despite Dinkins' record on decreasing crime in a time of economic uncertainty, Giuliani's campaign manager, David Garth, encapsulated the adage that in politics, appearance is reality: "Do you feel safer? Do you really believe that crime is down? Are you going to have to have a searchlight to walk in the streets and to step over the bodies of the homeless who need help?"⁴¹ The narrative of reclamation remained a consistent theme in Giuliani's campaign.

⁴¹ Mitchell, "Giuliani Zeroing In on Crime Issue."

While Dinkins refused to take part in a one-on-one debate, again insisting on the inclusion of the decidedly not-favored Right to Life candidate, George J. Marlin, Giuliani went on the offensive. His campaign sought to paint Dinkins as “absolutely” soft on crime, as Giuliani proclaimed that Dinkins “refuses to agree with an ending of release of violent criminals to the street early in New York, under the parole system that we have.” Insinuating that the mayor was complicit in the persistence of the city’s drug problems, he argued that he “would reinstitute the policy of allowing police officers to arrest street level drug dealers, which longer happens. Entire neighborhoods have been turned over to drug gangs now.”⁴²

The lingering effects of an economic recession in the early 1990s offered Giuliani a unique platform on which he was able to argue for privatization and reduced government. Labor issues, and specifically municipal labor unions, became a main focus of his campaign. New York’s unionized public sector had long been a key vehicle to the middle class for many in the city, particularly people of color, who were able to gain the economic security of unionized employment during at a time when major industry and its highly organized workforces were moving from the New York and other cities.⁴³ Attributing a bloated municipal budget chiefly to a government workforce that was “larger than almost every state” and “the third of fourth largest state in terms of spending,” Giuliani assailed not only the current Dinkins administration, though, he conceded, it was “blamed for making it worse.” Including former Mayor Ed Koch, who had recently endorsed him, he chastised “the entire leadership of the city, for some time,” and urged increased privatization, citing examples in Chicago and Philadelphia. “David Dinkins has done just the opposite,” he concluded, “so we’re a city that isn’t fighting back, and that has made

⁴² TVNewStand, “NEWSFLASH.”

⁴³ Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 270.

things much worse under David Dinkins.” Fight back- against public workers, criminals, and the homeless- Giuliani pledged to do.

Cultural figures in New York did their part in illuminating to the venomous nature of the 1993 election. Leading up to the campaign, comedian Jackie Mason referred to Dinkins as a “fancy *shvartze*,” a derogatory Yiddish word for a Black person.⁴⁴ Shock jock Howard Stern created a recurring caricature of the Mayor who spoke with an Amos ‘n’ Andy-style, stereotypical dialect, and pandered to Jewish voters despite fervently held feelings of anti-Semitism.⁴⁵ The nature of the election remained hyperbolic until Giuliani captured City Hall by nearly the exact same slim majority that Dinkins had roused him with just four years earlier. Rudolph Giuliani, a throwback to New York of yesteryear, the grandson of Italian immigrants in a city where Italian last names were beginning to disappear, would take the reigns of the city as his supporters grasped for a Frank Sinatra city in what was by then a hip-hop town. With little deference to his small margin of victory, Mayor Giuliani’s administration ushered in an era of seemingly mandated fundamental and sweeping change with regards to the city and its relationship to its citizens.

⁴⁴ Roberts, “Dinkins, in Books, Blames Racism for Re-election Loss.”

⁴⁵ DNulrammah, “Howard_Stern-Jews_&_Dinkins.wmv.”



11.) A victorious Rudolph Giuliani extends his hand to outgoing Mayor Dinkins as he waves goodbye.

“QUALITY OF LIFE”

Those three examples of how a conservative social movement emerged in New York in the early 1990s must be understood in conjunction with the 1993 election’s focus on “quality of life” and the issues surrounding that phrase. What made “quality of life” such a salient political catchall was its subjectivity. Its vagueness was indeed its strength, as it could mean just about anything to anyone. In 1993, leading up to the mayoral election, the *New York Times* ran a series of articles entitled “What Makes Us Angry,” illustrating the political shift underway in New York, not only within the content of the articles, but with the historically liberal newspaper’s very decision to publish those articles in the first place. Releasing a column for each of New York’s five boroughs, the series was indicative of the sort of middle-class resentment and anger that had been building in the city for decades.

In Queens, residents listed airplane noise and more general noise as their first and second sources of anger. Fifth on the list were homeless encampments. Livery cabs and graffiti also topped the list, with general “crime” appearing further down.⁴⁶ Surveys of other boroughs revealed similar trends- in Brooklyn, residents listed slow mail delivery, panhandling, and traffic congestion as major concerns.⁴⁷

None of these so-called “quality of life” offenses had much inherent potential for violence. They were mostly annoyances at worst, and part in parcel to living in a major metropolitan area. Building on James Q. Wilson and George Killing’s popular “Broken Windows” theory, which argued in a 1982 issue of *The Atlantic* that minor crimes and public disorder encouraged and eventually led to more major instances of serious and violent crime⁴⁸, Giuliani was able to argue to voters that these annoyances were representative of larger issues facing the city. As most New Yorkers had never experienced violent crime immediately, these visible signs of disorder were the closest and most relatable instances that residents had to crime in actuality.

The campaign against “quality of life” issues, cloaked as a means to address violent crime, was then not one based in reality, but in the public perception of reality. Giuliani would go after the most visible signs of what his constituency found to be reprehensible elements of the city. First and foremost on his list were the “squeegee men”- a group known for standing at heavily trafficked intersections, wiping windshields with mop buckets and squeegees, sometimes at the invitation of the driver, most of the time not, and for tips. Before even in office, Giuliani

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, “Neighborhood Report: Queens Up Close: What Makes Us Angry?”

⁴⁷ *New York Times*, “Brooklyn Up Close: What Makes Brooklyn Angry: ‘Quality of Life’ West of Flatbush.”

⁴⁸ Kelling and Wilson, “Broken Windows.”

and his new police commissioner, Bill Bratton, formerly of Boston, made it known that squeegee-men in the city had numbered days.⁴⁹

Because the squeegee men were clustered around major intersections and transportation hubs and interacted with drivers of private vehicles, they represented an easily understood dichotomy between the city's undesirables (the homeless; the unemployed and underemployed; those suffering from mental problems and issues with addiction; people of color) and the city's desirables (those who could afford private automobiles; those driving cars into and out of Manhattan from homes in the outer boroughs and suburbs to jobs in the central city.) As a result of this high visibility, squeegee men were made to be a more widespread problem than reality would infer.

Estimates of how many squeegee men were in the city were small, ranging from as few as 75 to at most few hundred.⁵⁰ In a city of over 8 million, this population was barely a blip on the radar, but remained a focal point of both Giuliani's mayoralty and his ire. "There are plenty of jobs available," he told an interviewer on WBAI radio. "A person who's a squeegee operator could work in a restaurant. Maybe the hours are a little longer and then you've got to pay taxes and there are a whole bunch of other things that are involved, but you really shouldn't fuel the impression that the people who are doing squeegees just really don't have a job."⁵¹ This was, at best, an oversimplification, and, at worst, counterintuitive with regards to actual crime control.

An eight-week NYPD study on squeegee-men from late 1993 and early 1994 concluded that many squeegee men who were forced out of business turned to more serious crimes like robbery after their squeegeeing income had been curtailed. The study, called "Managing

⁴⁹ Kaufman, "Their End? Squeegee Guys Say No."

⁵⁰ Barrett, "Giuliani's Legacy."

⁵¹ Mitchell, "An Apron for a Squeegee."

'Squeegeeing': A Problem-Solving Exercise," was financed by a \$20,000 grant by the Police Foundation, a private policy group, and was based on arrests made by police officers from eight precincts around the city. The report concluded that squeegee men were:

A population that [was] largely beset with alcohol and drug abuse, economic marginality, unemployment (and, sadly, many appear[ed] to be unemployable save some heroic efforts that go beyond any rehabilitation technologies with which we [were] familiar), and finally, for about half of the population, arrests for serious criminality.

Of the 41 men surveyed, 31 had homes, 5 lived in shelters and 5 indicated they were homeless. Twenty-one had been arrested for one or more counts of assault, burglary, larceny or gun possession. Several others had been arrested on drug charges.⁵² Despite the report's findings, the NYPD still continued to aggressively prosecute this small group of highly visible men.

Unlike squeegee men, homelessness in New York was actually a widespread issue in the early 1990s, with estimates of up to 100,000 homeless people on the street at any time during 1993. The Dinkins administration had set up piecemeal emergency relief efforts, including expanding shelters in converted armories and providing vouchers for Single Room Occupancies, or SROs (essentially hotels for the homeless.)⁵³ Yet the sheer magnitude of the crisis did not allow for Dinkins to make any real policy changes. Beginning in the 1980s, the trend of deinstitutionalization led to the closure of countless mental facilities in the country, and a series of court decisions fought for by the ACLU would bar the city from forcibly institutionalizing

⁵² Krauss, "Study Suggests It Is Easy To Banish Squeegee Men."

⁵³ Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 110.

anyone suffering from mental illness. Actual help was elusive; the federal government, state, and city all colluded to essentially banish the mentally ill to the streets.⁵⁴ By the early 1990s, even in liberal New York, where sympathies had usually been with the homeless, the public had become fed up with the dirty and destitute clogging their sidewalks. Simultaneously, front-page headline after front-page headline appeared with stories of mentally ill street people committing violent crime.⁵⁵ Empathy turned into fear and anger, and Giuliani was able to capitalize on this with a get-tough approach to homelessness.



12.) Homeless New Yorkers in Times Square, 1990.

His attack was multifaceted, but each facet managed to criminalize some aspect of living on the streets. Giuliani argued that he was misunderstood and that only those homeless people engaged in “aggressive and criminal” behavior should fear the brunt of the law. This vague description suited the city’s new approach to dealing with the homeless, as unavoidable aspects of homelessness became criminalized. Panhandling near an ATM became an offense that could

⁵⁴ Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 96.

⁵⁵ Krauss, “Study Suggests It Is Easy To Banish Squeegee Men.”

wind up in arrest, as did panhandling on the subway, or panhandling in any “aggressive” manner, “aggressive” being a completely subjective term.

Police who had once turned a blind eye to the homeless began to roust this population from its haunts, moving them from one quarter of the city to another. Drinking or urinating in public became a focus for the police. Public spaces became less and less inviting to anyone needing rest; benches were affixed with knobs and bars to discourage people from lying down.⁵⁶ Eventually, Giuliani limited stays in city shelters to a mere 90 days for most homeless New Yorkers, claiming that the status of homelessness was often exploited, diverting money and services from the more worthy working-poor, and suggested farming out homeless services to private and not-for profit companies. In 1993, polls showed that 63% of New Yorkers wanted a “tough on homelessness” approach from a mayor, up from 55% in 1989.⁵⁷

Giuliani’s mayoralty also ushered in an era of diminishing social and cultural tolerance and understanding in New York, which had long had a reputation as a progressive liberal bastion. Giuliani’s campaign used heated rhetoric with regards to graffiti, drug use, prostitution, and the sex industry more generally, urging relative conformity in a city that had prided itself on nonconformity just a generation earlier. Graffiti became a focal point of Giuliani’s “get tough” policies.

What had long been considered youthful vandalism and a victimless crime, graffiti became an act that many argued should be vigorously criminalized and prosecuted. During the 1970s and 80s, graffiti was ubiquitous in New York, but was especially visible on New York’s subway trains. Due to policies like the Clean-Car Campaign, which fully cleaned the exterior of any train with any graffiti on it before it could be put back out on the tracks, subway graffiti had

⁵⁶ Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 112-113.

⁵⁷ Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 83.

nearly disappeared by the early 1990s. On the street, though, the city's storefront gates, doors, and walls remained covered with markers and spray paint.⁵⁸ Arrests for graffiti artists were uncommon before Giuliani came into office- police would confiscate materials, harass artists, and even brutalize them (Michael Stewart was assaulted in 1983 by police after writing graffiti in the L train station at 1st Avenue, and subsequently, he died from his injuries.)⁵⁹ Still, serious fines and jail time were uncommon.

In 1994, during his first year in office, Giuliani curtailed the Dinkins-initiated Safe City youth program, which offered artistic outlets for teenage graffiti writers, and formed a 25-member NYPD squad dedicated explicitly to cracking down on the act.⁶⁰ Within 17 days they had made 21 arrests, and began to catalogue artists' tags, or signatures, raid homes in the middle of the night, and altogether treat what was once considered a victimless crime instead as an affront to the city as a whole.⁶¹ Robert Morrissey, a 19-year-old from East New York, Brooklyn who tagged DESA, was charged with criminal mischief in the 3rd degree, blamed for \$1 million worth of damage, and ultimately reached a plea agreement to serve 1-3 years in jail. At his trial, a cabal of 30 Queens residents sat in the stands hoping to see a guilty verdict.⁶²

⁵⁸Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 91.

⁵⁹ Editorial Board, "The Death of Michael Stewart."

⁶⁰ Myers, "Administration Plans to Cut 'Safe City' Youth Programs."

⁶¹ Hicks, "Mayor Announces New Assault on Graffiti."

⁶² Onishi, "Glendale; Finally, That's All He Wrote."



13.) “Million Dollar Vandal.” *New York Daily News* cover, August 18, 1994.

The Giuliani administration also began an all-out campaign against the sex trade. Prostitution was the focal point of this assault. In an example of how opinions had shifted in the decades that led up to Giuliani’s election, State Senator Manfred Ohrenstein of the Upper West Side, who had once supported the full legalization of prostitution, reversed positions entirely and supported efforts to “clean up” areas known for heavy traffic. Demands for harsher policies grew louder as the street trade expanded from red light districts around Times Square to residential neighborhoods on the Upper West Side, in Boerum Hill, Brooklyn, and in Long Island City, Queens.⁶³ Acting on this increased anger, the Giuliani administration ramped up penalties for

⁶³ Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 87.

prostitutes, seized vehicles used in solicitation, and took other punitive measures to address the issue.⁶⁴

With the same vigor, Giuliani attacked the sex industry as a whole, including the pornographic theaters, bathhouses, massage parlors, and video stores that supported it. After court decisions in the 1960s and 70s based on the First Amendment allowed for sex-related shops to open anywhere in the city, X-rated establishments proliferated, growing especially numerous in Times Square, which went from having nine such businesses in 1965 to 151 in 1976.⁶⁵ Giuliani proposed and enacted zoning restrictions that would reverse those court decisions, limiting the presence of sex-related stores to nonresidential areas on the fringes of the city.

Interviews with city residents at the time illuminated the disapproval that these establishments were met with in neighborhoods like Woodside, Queens. A *New York Times* article stated that, “In the neighborhood, many residents were only barely aware of the *EcsXXXtasy* shop, although they all agreed that an adult store had no place there.” “It shouldn't be there,” began an interviewee, Sandra Lyanne of Queens Village, after being informed of the shop’s existence. “This is a residential neighborhood, not 42nd Street.” “It starts here and brings the whole neighborhood down,” said another previously unaware neighbor, Marc Volel.⁶⁶

In Times Square, which had for several decades functioned as the hub for the city’s sex industry, new investments, like the Walt Disney Corporation’s purchase of the New Amsterdam

⁶⁴ Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 88.

⁶⁵ Myers, “A Switch in a Bastion of Liberalism.”

⁶⁶ Myers, “A Switch in a Bastion of Liberalism.”

Theater in 1992, spurred the Giuliani administration to banish sex shops from 42nd Street.⁶⁷ What had been an area of neon “XXX” signs was desexualized in a matter of only a few years, beginning with a moratorium on opening new sex-related stores and culminating in zoning regulation restricting sex-related shops to nonresidential areas.⁶⁸ In the words of then-Councilman Charles Millen of the East Side of Manhattan, in the 1970s, “It would have been considered prudish to try to control the pornography business.” By 1993, he continued, that was “no longer true.”⁶⁹



14.) Times Square in 1983.

⁶⁷ Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 105-106.

⁶⁸ Hicks, “City Council Supports Mayor On a Sex-Store Moratorium.”

⁶⁹ Redburn, “Putting Sex In Its Place.”

CONCLUSION

Giuliani's victory in 1993 supported the vindication of a growing conservative social movement in New York through an electoral victory to the city's highest office. This movement had gained salience as governmental policy, including Mayor Abe Beame's decimation of the city's social safety net and progressive welfare system in the wake of the 1975 fiscal crisis, Ed Koch's catering to the financial industry, and Dinkins' own leasing of a Times Square theater to the Walt Disney Corporation, all indicated a slant rightward in New York City politics.⁷⁰ Even so, these policies were presented within a framework of post-World War II urban liberalism that was forced to be practical in a time of economic constraint, unlike Giuliani's all-out assault on the at least rhetorical left-wing tolerance of his predecessors.

As the new administration sought to reclaim New York for its core constituency, rhetoric that amounted to revenge; revenge on the poor, revenge on the homeless, and revenge on the signs of disorder that supposedly indicated a dangerous and out of control city; came to dominate the city's political language, laying the groundwork for policies that mirrored that vengeful discourse. In his inauguration speech on January 2, 1994, Giuliani proclaimed that, "The era of fear has had a long enough reign." In keeping within the themes of his campaign, he vowed to "place a much greater emphasis on stricter enforcement of the law to reverse the growing trend of ever-increasing tolerance for lawless behavior," pledging that while society was "defining deviancy down," his administration would "instead raise standards and have greater expectations for the behavior of or people."⁷¹

Within a few months of entering office, Giuliani made good on his pledges without regard for potentially adverse effects. He reopened a once defunct Brooklyn jail, clogged the

⁷⁰Vitale, *City of Disorder*, 108-113.

⁷¹*New York Times*, "The New Mayor: Transcript of Inaugural Address."

courts so severely that Legal-Aid Society lawyers threatened to strike, and defunded social services that helped ease the burdens of life in the city for New York's most vulnerable citizens.⁷² Now mimicked in urban areas nationally, and even internationally, irrespective of historically low rates of crime in the United States, these "tough-on-crime" policies were given credence in the early 1990s in New York City, as voters embraced draconian policing in a city once considered a citadel of liberalism.

The election of Rudolph Giuliani in 1993 represented the manifestation of the social and electoral polarization that defined New York City during the 1980s and 1990s. Though the 1993 mayoral election and myriad instances of violence and conflict leading up to it dispelled the long-held myth that New York was a city unto itself, insulated from the sort of right-wing and reactionary politics embraced by the rest of the country, the ethnic and racial underpinnings of this trend were truly unique to New York's cultural character. The closely contested 1993 election itself, a repeat of 1989's race for the mayor, fought between the city's first Black mayor, himself a former activist and advocate for civil rights, and an Italian-American, tough-talking former federal prosecutor, perfectly illuminates the complicated intersection of identity politics, social representation and reality, and constantly shifting economic and demographic patterns in the United States' largest and most diverse city.

⁷² Faison, "Crackdown On Crime Strains Jails."

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