

GOING PUBLIC

AN ORGANIZER'S GUIDE
TO CITIZEN ACTION

"If you want to know how ordinary Americans accomplish extraordinary things—build affordable homes, create effective schools, win living wages—then the story and the strategy reside in this remarkable book. *Going Public* is at once pragmatic and profound."

—Samuel G. Freedman

MICHAEL GECAN

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FOR SHEILA

CHAPTER 7

Ambiguity, Reciprocity, Victory

On 3 April 2000, another lovely morning in lower Manhattan, in the period that will always lie on the other side of the divide left by the destruction of the World Trade Center, a small team of veteran leaders slowly gathered. We brought our cups of coffee and tea to the twenty-first floor of 74 Trinity Place, one block south of the Trade Center, to the headquarters of the Trinity Grants Program. An elegant library occupied one end of the floor—about four hundred square feet of wood paneling, packed shelves, and stained glass. The view out the west windows included the Hudson River, sparkling this morning, and the Jersey City waterfront. The windows facing east provided glimpses of the crowded canyons of Wall Street. It was a normal business day in New York, but not at all a normal political day.

A round, wooden table dominated the center of the room. Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood settled into a chair, along with two of his talented associates, Reverend David Brawley and Ron Hudson. Reverend Getulio Cruz arrived, after dropping his son off at a lower Manhattan public school. Reverend Cruz—in his mid-

thirties, the father of two—led a Hispanic Pentecostal congregation on the lower East Side. Unlike many of his fellow Pentecostal ministers, he participated fully and enthusiastically in the public issues of his community and city. Reverend Heidi Neumark commuted by subway from the South Bronx. Another South Bronx leader, a tall, serious Episcopal priest named Bert Bennett, also settled in. Fr. Marty Curtin rushed in, just ahead of Msgr. John Powis. Msgr. Powis, in his mid-sixties, was the senior member of this very experienced leadership team. He now served a dynamic and demanding parish in Bushwick after a twenty-five-year stint in Oceanhill-Brownsville. He had experienced his baptism by fire in the bitter and racially charged Oceanhill-Brownsville school controversy in the late sixties—which pitted local supporters of community control against the leaders and allies of the United Federation of Teachers.

Another controversy threatened to consume the city, and we were meeting to finalize plans for a discussion with one of the main players in that controversy, Mayor Giuliani, later that morning. Undercover officers had shot and killed an unarmed security guard, Patrick Dorismond, during a scuffle in front of a midtown bar. The facts were confused and conflicting. Advocates rushed to link this shooting to the killing of Amadou Diallo, the unarmed African salesman shot in the vestibule of his building by four plainclothes officers just a year before, and the brutal assault on Abner Louima in a Brooklyn precinct house. The mayor reacted by asking the public to be patient, then by defending the police, and then by questioning the character of the dead man.

We knew we were moving on very dangerous ground. One rail that ran through this terrain was the primal need for safety. In most of our organizations, from the very first individual meeting, training session, or house meeting, people talked about how violence and street crime warped their lives—when and if they held

evening meetings, where they walked and shopped, what subway stations they used and avoided, what schools they sent their children to, the very survival of those children, especially their young men, and, most especially, young black men.

In one of the first EBC house meetings I attended in East New York, in 1981, I arrived on Bradford Street only to find the street blocked off by sawhorses and a resident standing guard. The resident recognized me, pulled one of the sawhorses back, and let me pass. I could see that the other end of the street was also blocked off and guarded. "What's up?" I asked. The unofficial guard told me that the only way to persuade everyone to come to the house meeting was to guarantee security. "Otherwise," the affable resident said, "we all go home to nothing, and we'll never meet again." In the packed meeting that took place that night, person after person described the lives of insecurity and terror they led.

The second rail was the ongoing concern about police performance and responsiveness. Often, in 1981 and throughout the eighties, the police just weren't there. And when they were present, it was sometimes worse. Police would hail a middle-aged African American walking home from work this way, "Hey, n_____, we want to talk to you." Thousands of harsh words, hard looks, stops and searches, illegal entries, corrupt practices by rogue cops like Michael Dowd (who admitted his guilt in testimony before the latest high-profile investigation of improper police behavior conducted by the Mollen Commission), and slow responses to domestic crises—the drip-drip-drip of disrespect and insensitivity and worse—had created a painful knot of distrust and distaste within the very people who needed the cops the most.

This real and psychic terrain was—and is—the American equivalent of the Balkans. It is a place of currents and undertows, of blood feuds and growing grudges, of real slights and innocent mistakes, of incidents decades old that feel as fresh and immediate as the evening news. It is a landscape crowded with demagogues

and apologists, tyrants and opportunists, romantics and double agents. It demands a writer capable of producing great literature, superb travel reporting, top-flight political science, sociology and psychology, a knowledge of religious and culture history, and the right mix of objective distance and personal empathy. America needs a new Rebecca West, who, right before World War II, poured all of her powers of intelligence and insight and wit into the more than eleven hundred pages of her monumental work, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. That graphic guide to Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, and beyond is as useful and relevant today as it was more than sixty years ago.

But there was no Rebecca West to guide us—just very high anxiety, activists accusing, cops reacting, a large cast of public players reprising roles from earlier crises, and a mayor who, to put it mildly, kept proving that he lacked a feel and an ear for the complex reactions of black and Hispanic New Yorkers. So we thought that we would try to detail those reactions, the expressions of pain and fury and despair our ministers and leaders heard every hour of every day, face to face, directly to the mayor, in depth. We knew him well enough to understand that we would be jeopardizing our public relationship with him. This relationship had developed fitfully over a period of fifteen years. It had become, strangely and unexpectedly, a very productive relationship. The production could be seen, felt, and measured—in the number of homes built, streets paved, police response sharpened, parks improved, and public housing projects cleaned and secured—in communities that had long been ignored. And it would all be at risk in an hour or so, when we walked up the steps of City Hall, for our meeting with him.

The Rudy Giuliani we first met in 1986 was a machine-busting, mob-busting United States attorney who had captured the attention of the entire media establishment—from right to left. He

looked, sounded, and acted unlike any public figure in the region at the time. He made the undictated machine hacks and graying Village progressives look like wax figures in a museum of political types—bloodless, colorless, and motionless.

We sought him out because we found ourselves in a situation that demanded the attention of Giuliani the law enforcement officer, not Giuliani the emerging politician. Our East Brooklyn organization was building hundreds of homes a year in Brownsville at the time. A major trade union began to pressure our builder to make contributions to the union's health and pension funds. The union representative handed our builder a list of thirty ghost workers and told him to make the payments in their names. The union fellow politely explained that he would then spread the money around to the other unions involved. In return, we would have "peace" on our construction site. We already had "peace" on our site, so we told the fellow, also politely, that we did not plan to make any payments.

A few weeks later, more than a dozen guys from the local came to our office and trooped up the narrow stairs of our model home. I. D. Robbins, our peppery and savvy builder, and I sat across the table from the union crew. They hadn't made themselves clear, they said. They needed to make us understand how things worked around New York. They were even giving us a better deal because we were with "the churches." In fact, the president of their union had just been named man of the year by Catholic Charities, so we were really all on the same team.

Robbins listened and then told them that we couldn't afford to pay anything, not for one ghost worker, much less thirty, not a penny. He told them we wanted a break, a pass, and that we wouldn't tell a soul if they gave us one. The key union rep got exercised. We didn't seem to get it. They had *already* given us a break. And they were offering us a discount. And there was no way they

could let someone get by without paying. How would that look to everyone else in Brooklyn? And, besides, who the hell did we think we were going to tell, anyway? These often-bizarre negotiations continued, over several meetings, for many hours, with members of their team sometimes whining about how we were making them look bad, sometimes threatening us with tales about what the unfortunate accidents could occur if we didn't resolve what they called a "labor dispute."

Robbins didn't give an inch. So the local started to picket us. This was the first time we had been picketed at all, much less for not agreeing to respond to a shakedown. A drowsy union rep sat in a folding chair near our office and held up a sign if anyone happened to look his way. No other union worker stopped working. The homes kept rising on block after block. The only people upset by this action were a few progressives and liberals who visited us and couldn't understand why we weren't more mortified by this labor crisis.

Then the phone calls started. At first, the callers were just gruff and abusive—not much worse than a normal New York phone conversation. Then, they promised to kill someone connected with our efforts. Then, the calls began to come to our homes. That's when we went to the U.S. attorney and described what was going on.

All the qualities Giuliani has demonstrated throughout his public life—a feel and an ear for a crisis involving corruption or crime or terrorism, an appetite for the details of a situation, a quick commitment of resources to respond to the crisis, and a determination to follow up and follow through—were evident almost immediately. In fact, his office had already launched an investigation of the union threatening us, based on complaints from other builders and groups.

This was encouraging—but only up to a point. The pressure

kept increasing. The president of the union called for a final negotiation. Our team met and decided that two Roman Catholic priests were best suited for this session in Manhattan. Our thinking was fairly shallow at this stage: the union president was a major Roman Catholic figure; the mob seemed reluctant to harm Roman Catholic clergy; and the U.S. attorney's team was closing in. This analysis made sense to everyone but the two priests picked for the mission. "What," one of them asked, "if we were *wrong*?"

On the morning of meeting, the priests went dutifully off on their assignment. I hadn't read the *Times* that morning, and neither had they. As they later described it, they arrived at the local's plush headquarters and were warmly greeted by another top union officer. The president and secretary-treasurer were unexpectedly tied up, they were told, and he would be happy to speak with them. He offered coffee and Danish. He asked how things were going in the parishes. He talked in a loud and clear voice—very loud and very clear—about how much he loved the Nehemiah effort, loved the churches, and loved to think that his men were building such fine homes for the working poor. Our two priests began to relax. This went on for twenty minutes. No threats. No last offers. No pressure. Finally, one of the priests asked, "Isn't there anything else you would like to say?" The union official expressed dismay, "Why, no, I just wanted to tell you, on behalf of my local, how much we love the Nehemiah Plan." He addressed his comments directly toward the middle of their chests, where, he must have assumed, a wire was recording every word.

When they reached the street, the priests raced for the first pay phone. Their relief and surprise surged through the line. "It's a miracle!" they said. "You wouldn't believe it. There must have been some misunderstanding somewhere." I asked if they had seen a newspaper. They hadn't. A *Times* headline announced that the U.S. attorney's office had indicted two union officials for shaking down other construction sites in the city.

A year or so later, in the months leading up to the 1989 mayoral election, the leaders of our three organizations in New York City at the time—East Brooklyn Congregations, the Queens Citizens Organization, and South Bronx Churches—met with both Giuliani and David Dinkins. We asked each candidate to agree to meet individually with fifteen leaders—five in each borough—in the home, apartment, or parish house of the leader. We believed that the candidates would get a better sense of us and that we would get a much better sense of them in these face-to-face, one-to-one sessions. And we asked each candidate to attend a public accountability assembly, of about one thousand leaders, near the end of the campaign.

During this period, other aspects of both men's characters emerged. Giuliani the candidate seemed less focused, more distracted and reactive, than Giuliani the prosecutor. One afternoon, we met him in a pizza parlor across the street from the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in Manhattan. Richard Green, the African-American chancellor of New York City Public Schools, had died suddenly of asthma. Giuliani agreed to meet after the funeral for thirty minutes to be briefed about the individual meetings he had agreed to do and the assembly coming up.

The candidate arrived, tailed by an aide who carried a cell phone so active it seemed to be smoking. The aide was short, breathless, and wired. Giuliani seemed intense as well. His knee kept pumping up and down under the table, as we talked. The aide whispered that the *Times* was on the line, pressing for the candidate's position on Northern Ireland. We were trying to get him to focus on more local issues, like crime, affordable housing, and poorly performing public schools. We would talk minute or two, then the phone would ring. The aide would answer, listen, whisper into Giuliani's ear. Giuliani asked about the assembly. The aide hissed, "The *Times*." Giuliani's knee would pump a little faster. He would simultaneously try to talk about the assembly and jot

notes on a napkin. The word "Ireland" stood out in the middle of his scrawl.

We asked why the hell he had to come up with "a position" on Northern Ireland when he didn't even have one on how to produce homes and apartments in New York. Giuliani turned to his aide and started to ask him, "Yeah, why?" The aide shot back, "Because there are lots of Irish in the city and because it's the *Times*." By then, the candidate was scribbling more notes. The notes were becoming a statement of some sort. And the statement was not about housing in New York.

In the most improbable of all outcomes, Giuliani followed through on his commitment to meet individually with fifteen leaders, and his opponent, Dinkins, did not. We would pick him up early in the morning, drive him out to Bushwick, the South Bronx, or Southeast Queens, and drop him off at his first appointment. He would be alone, without aides and cell phones, without press releases and media attention—a middle-aged white man in a suit walking into Hope Gardens Housing Project to meet for a half an hour with ebc leader Alberta Williams. There, he learned about life in public housing and on the treacherous streets of Bushwick. And Alberta Williams would learn about what made this man think he could be a more effective mayor than his opponent. To this day, he remains the only public official who took the time to do individual meetings with leaders like Reverend Youngblood and Reverend Haberer, Reverend Neumark and Pat Oettinger, Woody Head and Fr. Grange.

Then, just as improbably, he did not attend the accountability event that we sponsored. It was then that we noticed another trait in his public character—a tendency to fade completely and unpredictably out of a relationship for extended periods of time. We never imagined or assumed that we were close to either him or Dinkins. We weren't even interested in the kind of partisan, per-

sonal, friendly, first-name relationship that many others sought. He was never "Rudy" to our leaders, just as Dinkins was never called "David." We wanted a more public relationship, where there was mutual respect, mutual understanding, some agreement, some disagreement, and the right amounts of tension and formality, engagement and distance. For long stretches, we *had* that kind of relationship. And then we simply didn't.

While Giuliani disappeared in the weeks before the election, Dinkins, who refused to do the individual meetings, decided to attend the assembly. Our leaders packed the basement of St. Paul the Apostle Church, right across the street from Fordham's Manhattan campus. When Dinkins arrived, the assembly had already started and Reverend Youngblood was speaking. Dinkins, impatient and grouchy, paced in the sanctuary and told one of the organizers, "Tell that preacher to stop." No one told Reverend Youngblood any such thing. Youngblood concluded, and Dinkins, the first serious African American candidate for mayor, received an unexpected standing ovation when he appeared on the stage and approached the podium. Then he gave a long and dreadful speech, lecturing the audience on technical issues of housing policy, not seeming to know where he was or whom he was addressing. By the end of his remarks, many of the same people who stood and applauded sat on their hands, even quietly booed.

Dinkins won the 1989 election by forty thousand votes. He proceeded to govern the city in much the same way he behaved at our assembly—imperiously at times, distractedly at times, quickly squandering the deep racial and ethnic pride that he embodied, and talking technically in settings and at times that demanded a more political and relational touch. Four years later, he lost to Giuliani by about the same number of votes, in part because those who cheered him early in his first term had grown disgruntled and disappointed by election day in 1993. They simply stayed home.

For the first two years of Giuliani's initial term, we worked reasonably well together. He strongly supported the continuation of the Nehemiah effort. In fact, when his first housing commissioner, who did not value Nehemiah, secretly cut the budget appropriation designated for affordable home construction, we called for a meeting with the mayor. He agreed immediately, scheduled a meeting the day after our call, summoned the commissioner, and ordered her, in our presence, to reinstate the funding. We had an adequate, working, public relationship with the city administration—direct access to the mayor, direct access to all commissioners, and direct answers, sometimes satisfactory and sometimes not, to reasonable requests.

That relationship began to fray in 1995. We were meeting many people, through our congregations and elsewhere, who were doing city work as employees of private contractors. They were security guards, food service workers, clerical workers, janitors, and data entry people. The contractors paid them minimum wage, with no benefits, and pocketed large profits. Our sister organization in Baltimore had already authored and passed the nation's first living wage bill. We decided to see if the mayor would agree to negotiate a living wage standard into the contracts that the city was signing with various service providers.

We held three hourlong meetings with the mayor and his top aides on this matter. We went to great lengths to describe the real cost of low wages—in public assistance needed by these low-wage workers simply to survive, in higher turnover and reduced productivity, and in the necessity to work two or three jobs to feed and support a family. The workers themselves, decent, moderate, and hardworking, spoke for themselves in these sessions. The mayor and his staff listened, but disagreed. Each meeting became tighter and grimmer. By the end of the third session, it was clear that we were getting nowhere and that the mayor could not believe that we would take this issue on.

We found an unlikely ally in the City Council—maverick Bay Ridge councilman Sal Albanese, who had already begun to discuss a living wage bill. Albanese could not have been more isolated and more marginal in a council totally controlled by speaker Peter Vallone. Because Albanese refused to toe the Vallone line, he had no chairmanship, no perks, and no status in the council. He did have a relationship with Kevin McCabe, Vallone's no-nonsense chief of staff and the second most powerful person in the council universe. So we began to meet with McCabe and Albanese and designed a limited living wage bill that Vallone decided he could support.

When the bill was introduced, with hundreds of our leaders present, the mayor counterattacked. First, several deputies told the media that Metro IAF seemed to want to turn the clock back and rebuild the Berlin Wall—another not so subtle attempt to say that we were socialists. Then, a reporter asked the mayor why he was fighting with Reverend Youngblood and Metro IAF, "Wasn't Metro IAF a sacred cow?" Giuliani said, "Sacred cows make the best hamburger meat."

It was a wonderful, all-out, New York political brouhaha. In July of 1996, the City Council overwhelmingly passed a modified bill by a vote of forty-one to seven. The mayor promptly and loudly vetoed it. We organized more support, derided the mayor's veto, and kept pushing. The council then overrode his veto by an even greater margin. It took the city comptroller six months to work out the prevailing wage figures for each of the categories covered. But eventually the contract workers received raises of anywhere from three to five dollars an hour. The mayor remained unconciled. The lines to City Hall went dead in 1996. No mayoral aide answered or returned a single phone call. Most of the formerly responsive commissioners stopped responding. Some went on the offensive against us: the housing commissioner at the time cut all future funding to a seven-hundred-house Nehemiah phase planned for an area called Spring Creek, citing "environmental

concerns." A few commissioners sent back-channel messages: they would meet with us only if we agreed to meet off-site, without media, and with absolutely no leaking of this to the mayor and his minions.

We had known, when we decided to champion the living wage bill, that one casualty of the campaign could be our relationship with the mayor. Clearly, the concept of a government-determined wage standard clashed with the mayor's free-market views. The merits, which we had painstakingly detailed, did not matter here as well. We decided the passage of the bill, the potential impact on the lives of the workers involved, and the signal that successful legislation in New York would send to other municipalities made the risk worth taking. We didn't know that the freeze-out would deepen and last several years. And we had no idea how, or if, the freeze-out would end. But we believed we would find a way to force the mayor back into the relationship, or there would come a day when he would see the need to renew his relationship with us.

That day came—suddenly, unexpectedly, violently, terribly—when four police officers shot Amadou Diallo in the vestibule of his apartment building in the Bronx.

The killing polarized the city. Reverend Al Sharpton quickly established himself as the focal point for the large number of New Yorkers who sought to respond to the shooting. Religious and civic leaders who rarely or grudgingly associated with Sharpton took part in the daily protests and expressions of civil disobedience. Others sided with the mayor, called for patience and prayer, or remained silent. Our own leaders and members were outraged by the incident, but felt trapped. If we participated institutionally, as Metro IAF, in the growing protests we would be throwing our support behind a strategy—ritual protests, ritual gatherings, a ten-point plan that had no chance of being implemented, and demonization of the mayor and all police—that we knew would fail and

that ran counter to our best instincts of how to create lasting and meaningful change in the city.

On the other hand, if we did not act, we would be ignoring the deep pain and anger of the vast majority of the members of our congregations and associations. The followers of Reverend Youngblood and Fr. Grange, of Irving Domenech and Maria Nieves, of Marty Curtin and Bert Bennett, wanted their leaders, and Metro IAF, to do *something*.

But what? We had long discussions and arguments, through two evening meetings, involving twenty top leaders, until we came to two conclusions. Any individual or institution that wanted to participate in the ongoing protests should feel totally free to do so. But Metro IAF, collectively, would seek to carve out a third position in the city—not supportive of the mayor and not supportive of Sharpton's response—but rooted in our own sense of what needed to be done to improve the recruitment of more minority officers and the response of the NYPD to legitimate local complaints about police behavior, attitude, and response. And we would seek a meeting with the mayor to see where he now stood.

In mid-February of 1999, with the intensity level rising, the demonstrations growing, and the mayor increasingly isolated, we called the one figure in the city who knew the mayor well, knew us well, and spoke to both—Herman Badillo. Seven minutes after we called Badillo, asking him if he thought the mayor would want to meet, Badillo called back. He had spoken to the mayor. The mayor did want to meet. The sooner the better.

On 22 February, a top team of Metro IAF leaders, New York citizens—Reverend Youngblood and Alberta Williams, Msgr. Peyton and Fr. Curtin, Reverend Neumark and Reverend Cruz, Ann Scott and Betty Turner, Reverend Patrick O'Connor and Reverend John Vaughn—trooped into City Hall for a meeting with the mayor. In the distance, two blocks away, demonstrators

were chanting in front of police headquarters. Security at City Hall was even tighter than usual. And we were tight, tense, worried that either someone in the mayor's camp or someone in the anti-mayor camp might have tipped off the media about this delicate meeting.

Reverend Youngblood opened the meeting by recognizing Herman Badillo, who had served as an honest broker for this session. Then Reverend Youngblood addressed the mayor, who was on time, focused, and a little tense himself. A simple written agenda had been placed in front of the mayor. It read:

1. Rounds and Introductions
2. Metro IAF Expectations of a Renewed Working Relationship with City Hall and City Agencies
3. Mayor Giuliani's Expectations of a Renewed Working Relationship with Metro IAF
4. Specific Issues—Housing, Police, Education, Regular Working Meetings and Access to Commissioners
5. Next Meeting Date

Reverend Youngblood explained that, throughout our twenty-five-year history in the city, beginning with Ed Koch, we had always had tension with mayors, as well as many moments of common agreement. We were not looking for anything special or different—renewed access to the mayor, regular meetings with commissioners, a professional pattern of responses to our requests, public recognition when things went well, public criticism when they did not, and no ambushes by either side. Reverend Youngblood presented this quietly, matter-of-factly, and directly. Giuliani looked up from the agenda and said, "That sounds all right to me." Then Reverend Youngblood asked the mayor what his expectations were. And the mayor said, "The same." The room was

quiet. We had not asked him to explain his reasons for trying to relegate us to political Siberia—much less ask him for an apology we knew he would never give. He did not ask us why we had launched a living wage campaign that led to an embarrassing public defeat for him and his administration. Nor did he ask us for an apology he knew we would never offer.

The mayor just said, "The same." And we then began to do public business on a wide range of complex and thorny issues—including how to recruit more minority officers for the NYPD. The mayor never tried to use the fact that we were meeting as a weapon in his ongoing public battle with Reverend Sharpton. Reverend Sharpton never tried to criticize Reverend Youngblood and the other Metro IAF leaders for meeting with Mayor Giuliani. In one of the most polarized and complex moments in recent New York political history, our leaders had managed to stake out a third position in the city and to renew a productive relationship with a mayor and an administration whose actions and decisions had impact on the daily lives of many poor and working poor New Yorkers.

That renewed relationship translated into tangible gains. We kept building hundreds of the most affordable homes in the city in East Brooklyn and the South Bronx (for the record, Giuliani never tried to stop our ongoing efforts; his commissioner had pulled the plug on any future work). The "environmental issues" proved to be minor, and the funding for the seven hundred homes we planned to build at Spring Creek was restored. We persuaded the administration to invest in the upgrade of the forgotten park areas along the East River in lower Manhattan. Teams of leaders from public housing projects in the South Bronx and upper and lower Manhattan pressed for improved response from the housing authority on a wide range of concerns, and began to receive it. The mayor asked our groups to help recruit thousands of children for an expanded

health care program called HealthStat, and we enthusiastically agreed. On Sundays, poor families lined up outside rectories and church basements in Washington Heights, Bushwick, and the lower East Side to sign up for health coverage. We worked with the NYPD to recruit more minority officers and kept the pressure on the department to continue to crack down on rampant drug activity in many of our areas. Working with the mayor, we attacked the bloated and corrupt bilingual education establishment in the Board of Education and forced a reluctant chancellor to agree to an aggressive reform package. On issue after issue, in agency after agency, affecting scores of communities, our organized teams of leaders learned what it was like when a focused government actually *wanted* to respond to focused citizens.

Now, a little more than a year later, in March of 2000, there's another incident, another police shooting. There's another young, black man, Patrick Dorismond, lying dead in the street. There's another outcry. There's another time of intense racial strife.

When it's a quarter of nine on a Monday morning, and the city is inflamed, and you are preparing to meet with a mayor who has made some terrible errors in judgment . . .

When you realize that most people can't get a meeting with this mayor, and it is a risk in itself just to *have* the meeting, because those in the hate-the-mayor-camp may decide to turn on you . . .

When you know that the mayor has recommitted to a whole series of practical strategies that have already benefited scores of thousands of people and could benefit many more for decades to come . . .

When all that, and more, is in the political mix, *that's* when you realize that you are going to earn your money that day.

Over the weekend, I have spoken with almost every person gathering in the library this morning, testing some ideas on them,

getting their thoughts, trying to sense how much risk we all are up for. By the time we sit down, we have the outline of an approach, and I lay it out for discussion and revision.

We start by trying to pinpoint *why* we are doing this and who we are—collectively, not individually—when we walk through the doors of City Hall in little more than an hour. We're not reacting to the mayor. We're not reacting to the media—or seeking the media's attention this time. We're not there to support or undercut the anti-Giuliani crowd in the city. We have absolutely no interest in how this all “plays” in the senatorial race between the mayor and Hillary Rodham Clinton.

No, we're preparing for this meeting because so many members of our congregations have approached pastors and fellow leaders and said, in so many words, “Do something. Try something. Make some sense of all of this.” We're there for ourselves—because we have had a significant role in the recent history of police performance, crime reduction, and revitalizing neighborhoods. We consider ourselves active players in the great, complex drama of the city. And we are here because we sense, today, that months or years from now, people will have a right to ask what is it that we did in this time and place. But what can we *do* an hour from now, a mile away, across the table from this mayor?

After planning our strategy, we debate whether or not to raise with him the threat to the future of police work in the city that this latest incident has contributed to and how best to preserve the real achievements of his administration, of his two very different police chiefs, and of the men and women of the NYPD. We are among the few groups that value the work of the police, appreciate the improvements in public safety and police response in the Giuliani years, and yet deplore his handling of the Dorismond matter. If the department reverts to its pre-Giuliani state, then more of our people get killed and hurt; our homeowners and tenants stop taking

evening walks; and the drug dealers reassert their hold on more blocks and buildings. If the mayor doesn't demonstrate that he understands the concerns of the vast majority of moderate New Yorkers and doesn't move to correct the imbalances that lead to tragic incidents, he will expose his most important achievement to dismanling.

This situation requires laser surgery. On all sides, we see antagonists armed with mallets.

More or less ready, more nervous than usual, we walk the six long blocks to City Hall. It's a quarter of ten now. The markets have opened, but the streets are still packed with people—and memories. So much of New York's early history, as described in the wonderful tome, *Gotham*, occurred in these blocks south of Canal. The wild, old mix of Dutch and English and Indians and slaves, of traders and farmers, servants and trappers, is long gone. We walk past some of their graves, in the cemeteries of Trinity Church.

Three centuries later, there's a new mix of stock traders and bankers, janitors and secretaries, e-commerce entrepreneurs and sidewalk salesmen, professional pols and citizen leaders, all pounding the same pavement, in a city that manufactures excess and tragedy on an operatic scale.

We hustle across Broadway and cut through City Hall Park, now beautifully restored, where seventeenth-century transgressors were often tortured and hanged. I mention this to our team. Gallows humor. No one laughs for very long. Reverend Youngblood asks me for the third time to review the remarks he has composed for the start of the meeting. He is usually more at ease before a session with a powerful opponent or ally. We rehearse it as we climb the steps of City Hall and head for the door.

Thirty years, ago, a college classmate named Andy Miceli said that he always felt a rush of excitement—a thrill—when he entered City Hall. It was a funny thing to say at the time—in 1970,

at Yale, when the symbols of the establishment were either literally under siege or the easy targets of our unearned cynicism. Andy was an old-fashioned kid—an Italian, a New Yorker, an enthusiast. I never forgot the *way* he said what he said. His voice seemed charged—with wonder, with respect, with something close to love for this place.

I'm not sure we feel the same thrill. But I can say that this City Hall—nestled in a park, near Hart Crane's bridge ("thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still . . ."), surrounded by congested streets, but safe and stolid and tranquil on its base of block and steps—stirs us. The city halls of Chicago, Philadelphia, and Baltimore simply don't compare—in the same way that no other lakefront compares to Chicago's, no other harbor matches Baltimore's, and few other historic areas compete with Philly's Society Hill.

When you enter New York's City Hall, you enter a special place—no matter who sits in the mayor's quarters to the left, or who occupies the speaker's offices to the right, or who trudges up the central staircase to the City Council chambers on the second floor. The place feels bigger and grander than anyone who ever inhabited it—although La Guardia came close to filling it, as did Giuliani in the weeks after 11 September. Like the White House, this City Hall seems to loom over those who work there and those who come there to do what we believe to be the most exciting business of all—the public's business.

That's the business we're here to do today—four African Americans, one Hispanic, four whites; eight men and one woman; seven religious professionals and two laypeople; eight volunteers and one paid organizer; two native New Yorkers and seven born and raised in other parts of the nation or the state.

As soon as we file through the metal detector, we are ushered upstairs to the conference room on the second floor where we have met the mayor many times before. A huge, round table—perhaps

twelve feet in diameter—dominates the center of the room. Wide, high windows in the south and west walls admit as much light as the morning has to offer. Photos of the mayor and his family crowd the mantel above the fire escape. You have the sense that a child might roller-skate into the room at any moment.

We take our seats—nine of the dozen leather chairs arrayed around the table, with Reverend Youngblood in the center and four of us on either side of him—and wait. The mayor arrives almost as soon as we settle in, followed by Deputy Mayor Tony Coles, who helped coordinate this meeting and who is the person at City Hall we have had the most productive relationship with.

The game plan, which Reverend Youngblood and I reviewed just a few minutes before, was for him to thank the mayor for his time and outline the three larger pieces of the meeting, as we saw it, before starting the rounds. Reverend Youngblood skipped from the thank-you to the rounds, with nothing in between. Luckily, the first person to introduce himself—Fr. Curtin—took a deep breath and told his story about the youth group very well. Then Heidi Neumark spoke. Then Reverend David Brawley. Then Reverend Getulio Cruz. By the time the rounds worked their way back to Reverend Youngblood, he was clear, focused, and took charge of the first part of the meeting, as we had planned.

Each leader told a powerful story—and told it well. Each story was short, specific, not overstated or overdrawn, and crisply concluded. Each person spoke 60, 90, or 120 seconds and then stopped. Ending a story or vignette is like nailing a dive. There's no splash, no smack of skin on water. The body seems to evaporate as it enters the pool. All that remains is the memory of the diver. When a story ends well, there's nothing left but the picture of women praying in a small Lutheran church, crying as they pray, because they fear their sons could be shot by cops.

After the rounds, which take nearly fifteen minutes, Reverend

Youngblood talks about the two profound contexts of the current crisis—the reality of death and the inescapable reality of another young black man lifeless in the street. The mayor sits forward, makes only a comment or two, grimly listens to our grim tales.

When Reverend Youngblood finishes his short remarks, he asks the mayor to give us his view of what has happened in the city and why.

Giuliani begins to speak quietly, clearly, directly. There is no ferocity, no contempt, no ridicule, none of the Roman Catholic high school smart aleck quality sometimes present when he feels under siege or when he hears criticism from those he doesn't respect. He's listened to our stories. He's not overreacting. He's taking his time to lay out his case—starting slowly and carefully.

He talks about the context as he sees it—a series of three, very different incidents. The first is the Louima incident. "This was a crime, a depraved act, committed by at least one police officer." He points out that the blue wall of silence collapsed here. "Commissioner Saifi transferred the entire precinct. And officers began to talk."

The second incident was the Diallo shooting—"clearly a mistake, a terrible mistake, either an innocent mistake, or a negligent mistake, or a criminal mistake." The word "mistake" is repeated again and again, as if he wants us to understand that he believes that the Diallo incident should never have happened, would never have happened, if the police involved had performed professionally.

The third incident is the Dorismond shooting. He tells us that he cannot discuss several facts relating to this case. But he believes that, in this instance, the police responded professionally and properly. Additional facts, new witnesses, future revelations will lead many in the city to the same conclusion, he predicts. In the middle of this discussion, he searches his inside suit coat pocket for

a piece of paper. Not finding it, he asks Tony Coles to get it from his office downstairs.

He has laid out the framework for his argument, and he is warming to it now. For a total of twenty minutes, with Coles now back and the chart in front of him, he reviews all of the facts that he has tried to present in recent weeks—the reduction in police shootings overall, the dramatic difference in use of force in his administration versus the Dinkins administration, and the relative restraint of the NYPD in comparison to most other big city departments.

As he speaks, I recall a meeting with Police Commissioner Robert McGuire, in 1983 or so. He was very weary the day we met him—having come from a long meeting on internal affairs investigations. We asked him how things were going, before we went into our agenda. He sighed and said, “Oh, all right, I suppose, except for the five hundred cops who have made threats against me.” Then, he caught himself, shifted gears—a decent, tired, worn man working hard to manage a mixed and sometimes-renegade force.

And I think about how the cops I grew up with in Chicago—in what used to be called a “cop” neighborhood—viewed their jobs. They resented the blacks and Hispanics (the “mutts,” they sometimes called them) they had to deal with. They hated the cops they had to rescue from bar fights, domestic disputes, and whorehouses in the middle of the night, so that not a hint of scandal appeared. They sneered at the good government types who were always squealing for reform. And they despised the community activists who demanded that they patrol the streets, for Chrissake, instead of working their second or third jobs or drinking in the loading bay of a local warehouse.

And I remember the cops a mild-mannered woman religious and I tried to “train” in better community relations in Jersey City. The training took place in a bleak and isolated barracks, just a few

hundred yards from the harbor shore, perhaps a mile from the Statue of Liberty. One red-headed sergeant stood up right in the middle of my attempt to instruct disgruntled cadets in the value of public relationships. He marched down the aisle of the classroom toward me. He stopped, too close to me, right in my face, and glared. He said, “I’ve been trying to think what you are.” In the background, the forty or so white officers growled, hooted, and cheered. The only three black cadets, sitting side by side, kept their eyes straight down, as if reading the notes they hadn’t taken. The sergeant shared his revelation: “I know you. I know what you are. You’re a lion-tamer. You’re came here to try to tame the lions. And to force us to work with dysfunctionals.” The whites went wild. “But—it—ain’t—gonna—work.” The crowd roared. The blacks didn’t move a muscle. I soldiered on for a few minutes more, gathered up my notes, and made sure the sister and I got the hell out of there.

So, as we listen to the mayor, we don’t take for granted what it means to make cops behave in a more restrained way. In fact, we don’t take anything for granted. And we don’t doubt many of the mayor’s facts. He’s done his research. This is as big to him as the Donald Manes corruption trial several years ago, as the biggest mob case he prosecuted, maybe bigger, certainly more explosive.

When he finishes, Reverend Youngblood thanks him and then says, “Mr. Mayor . . .” He describes the contexts we and most people see—the context of death itself, the context of the death of a young black man, the fact that the mayor did not attend the wake or funeral, and the mayor’s reaction to the few who will always be hostile, not the vast majority looking for common sense and common decency. “Mr. Mayor . . .” Reverend Youngblood is softly preaching now. This death, like almost every death, demands restraint, silence, and respect particularly for the family of the dead. “Mr. Mayor . . .” It doesn’t matter how bad or good a person the

dead man may have been. Ministers bury tough and damaged people every day. And they don't read the rap sheet at the funeral. "Mr. Mayor . . ." Reverend Youngblood is quiet and steady now, teaching now. The focus should be on the family of the dead—and on the community. That's the audience. That should have been the mayor's audience, *regardless of the facts of this incident*.

On medieval maps, where the known world ended, monks would inscribe the words "Here be dragons." That's where we are now, in a place without paths, signs, or horizons, where you can't see around the next turn.

One of our team mistakenly mentions that the mayor did not attend the Diallo funeral as well.

Giuliani corrects us. "No," he says, "Howard Safr and I did attend, in the mosque in Harlem. And it was a terrible experience. We were spat on . . . and we tried to reach out to the Louima family several times."

Back and forth the conversation goes, not loud, not hostile, just quiet, direct, and tense. At one point, we ask if the mayor had read a short piece we had given him right after the Dorismond incident. Giuliani laughs. "Not only did I read it. It got me into trouble. I read it carefully and drew on some of it for a letter I wrote to Council Speaker Vallone. Unfortunately, you misspelled the Dorismond name, so I did as well. And all the papers reported that I didn't even know how to spell the name right and never commented on the content of that letter."

A little later, after the mayor mentions the incendiary statements his opponents have made, Reverend Heidi Neumark, three feet away from him, looks him in the eye and says, "You make incendiary statements too."

The temperature rises. He stares at her. "But I don't lie and I don't break federal laws and . . ." The mayor hesitates, stops himself, steers himself back to his main points.

About an hour into the discussion, Giuliani pauses, gets reflective, tells the story of this uncle's last day with the EMS. A call has come in about someone on top of the Brooklyn Bridge. For the first time in his career, his uncle doesn't want to respond, wants someone else to climb the bridge and talk the person down. But no one else takes the call, and his uncle does his job. "Maybe," says the mayor, more to himself than to us, "maybe I am the mayor of the police force, the EMS, the people I know . . ." After one more exchange, the meeting ends. He shakes hands and rushes to leave, pressed by aides at the door to move on to his next appointment.

We remain in the meeting room and sit down to evaluate. We're tired. We have had a seventy-five-minute meeting, of an extremely sensitive nature, with a tough and determined political leader, about a topic that threatens to ignite at any moment. We feel that we have represented our people—have relayed their painful stories—as well as we possibly could. We have told him unpleasant truths. And we have listened to an intelligent, limited, flawed, ambitious power figure, not some devil, not some saint. In doing all this, we have risked all of the present and future benefits of a productive working relationship with him over this literally life-and-death matter.

These leaders, who like and respect one another, begin to savor the tension of this long and challenging morning. I tell them what they already know and feel: that they have run an unusual and extraordinary action this morning. It was an action that could not have taken place with media in the room or even outside the door, with trust in doubt or in question. It was an action that depended on the existence of an intricate and long-term public relationship—the periods of cooperation and the period of confrontation and mutual antagonism. It was an action that tested the boundaries of that relationship. And its "success" didn't depend on getting the mayor to agree to the policy points that we brought along

and handed to Deputy Mayor Coles at the end. It was an action that didn't generate an immediate reaction.

What were the mayor's eventual reactions? In the days and weeks that followed, he seemed to moderate his tone and to try to identify more with the entire community. Some months later, he let it be known that two topflight public safety officials, Corrections Commissioner Bernard Kerik and First Deputy Police Commissioner Joe Dunne, were in the running to replace current NYPD head Howard Safir. Many people were surprised. We were not. The mayor chose Kerik, who went right to work to repair relations with New York's African-American and Hispanic communities and to preserve the remarkable improvements in police performance that had led to record reductions in crime. All across the board, from parks to sanitation, from housing to transportation, mayoral agencies continued to work closely and creatively with our organizations on a wide range of major initiatives.

PART III

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