

MILANO **THE NEW SCHOOL**  
FOR MANAGEMENT AND URBAN POLICY

CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY AFFAIRS  
**THE NEW SCHOOL**



**THE RACE FOR MAYOR**  
**Campaign Roundtable 2005**  
**Tuesday, November 29, 2005**

**THE RACE FOR MAYOR:  
CAMPAIGN ROUNDTABLE 2005**

**was made possible thanks to the generous support of:**

**BERNARD L. SCHWARTZ  
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Milano The New School for Management and Urban Policy extends our sincere thanks to all the participants who lent their voices, experiences and perspectives to The Race for Mayor and made the day's discussions so insightful and provocative. We would especially like to thank Mark Halperin and David Chalian of ABC News, without whose political expertise, moderating skills and leadership the roundtable would not have been possible. In addition, we would like to thank Mia Lipsit of the Center for New York City Affairs for her work in planning and producing the event, along with her Milano colleagues Louis Dorff, David Howe, Daliz Pérez-Cabezas, Josh Wachs and Andrew White for their contributions of time, expertise and effort. Extra thanks also to Andrew White and Barbara Solow of the Center for New York City Affairs for their expert assistance in editing the transcript.

**This publication is available on the web at:  
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# **THE RACE FOR MAYOR: CAMPAIGN ROUNDTABLE 2005**

Edited Transcript

Edited by Mia Lipsit



# THE RACE FOR MAYOR: CAMPAIGN ROUNDTABLE 2005

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# **THE RACE FOR MAYOR: CAMPAIGN ROUNDTABLE 2005**

**TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2005  
8:00 am to 3:00 pm**

**Theresa Lang Community and Student Center  
Arnhold Hall  
The New School  
55 West 13th Street, Second Floor  
New York City**

**MILANO THE NEW SCHOOL  
FOR MANAGEMENT AND URBAN POLICY**  

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# FORWARD

*Don't write what you can say.*

*Don't say what you can nod.*

*Don't nod what you can wink.*

POLITICAL PROVERB

During the heat of a political race, thousands of decisions are made by each candidate and each campaign. While many of these get played out in public, most are private. In private there are often moments of fear and anxiety. It is not, therefore, usually a period of great candor. And so it is often only with the benefit of hindsight and distance that we can learn more about what really happened.

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On Tuesday, November 29, 2005, Milano The New School for Management and Urban Policy hosted the inaugural event in its new campaign roundtable series—an in-depth discussion of the 2005 mayoral race, with top strategists and staff from each of the campaigns, as well as prominent journalists, civic leaders, academics, political observers and others, to dissect, learn about and better understand what took place during the race for City Hall.

The series, made possible by the generous support of Bernard L. Schwartz and The Dyson Foundation, aims to leave an historical record of what happened in these races and why. The next roundtable in the series will take place in late November 2006 and examine the New York State gubernatorial election.

These roundtable discussions are a chance to learn what campaign insiders were thinking when they made strategic choices (both good and bad), as well as to learn more generally about the state of electoral politics in New York City and State. For the campaign representatives, the discussions provide a chance to learn what their opponents were thinking and, of course, to set records straight.

At Milano, we feel it is essential to learn from every election, as each provides a renewed opportunity to deepen our understanding of the political process and our society. The discussion and debate during the course of a campaign indicate what we can expect in terms of public policy over the next four years. How issues are framed, which issues take prominence, what policies are endorsed or rejected all get a hearing. Elections are therefore an opportunity for us to have an impact on policy and leadership. This is central to what we do every day at Milano. We look at the convergence of politics and policy, and explore ways of harnessing both to achieve our goal of a better society.

Elections, however, are often determined less by policy than by politics. This became quite clear as the 2005 campaign roundtable unfolded, as we found that policy differences between the candidates in this election were not, in fact, very pronounced.

With the goal of gaining a greater understanding of the 2005 election, some key questions we examined were:

- What were the ultimate factors in deciding each of the races?
- How did race, ethnicity and other factors play out?
- What was the role of money? Of incumbency?
- Why did major Democratic players flock to a Republican mayor?
- How did the candidates play to their strengths and attempt to outflank their opponents?
- What did each campaign do well and perhaps wish it had done better?
- What are the lessons of this year's race?

The day was divided into two sessions. The first was devoted to the primary campaign in which four Democrats competed for both the public's attention and the nomination. In the second session, we examined the general election between Republican Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Democratic challenger Fernando Ferrer.

I want to thank Mark Halperin of ABC-TV News for moderating both conversations and providing the structure for the discussions that followed. What follows is a brief summary of those conversations.

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The day's conversation began with a question: What were the most challenging moments in each of the Democratic primary candidates' campaigns?

Top staffers from Gifford Miller's and C. Virginia Fields' campaigns each described missteps that might best be labeled "Flyergate." Miller's City Council office mailed a brochure on the speaker's educational initiatives citywide within days of a ban on such material. The mailing was paid for out of the City Council budget and was criticized as being campaign literature, not constituent communications. Miller's campaign staff said they had had no knowledge of the Council staff's plans for the mailing, and if they had they would have handled it differently. The Fields campaign was criticized for doctoring a photograph in a piece of campaign literature to make it look like the candidate was surrounded by a group of people more racially mixed than in the original photograph. Joe Mercurio, a campaign adviser, was fired for the incident, and during the discussion sparred with Campaign Manager Chung Seto on their differing version of the facts.

Anthony Weiner's campaign representatives explained their candidate's decision not to challenge Fernando Ferrer in a post-primary runoff when the initial results showed the race closer than it would ultimately end up to be. They assured us that, despite much press speculation, there was no "deal" cut between Weiner and Ferrer, and that Weiner had not spoken to anyone—including his political mentor, Senator Charles Schumer—for advice that night. As proof, they said they had all spent the entire evening in the basement of a restaurant in which there was no cell phone reception. (Where is that wonderful restaurant?) Mark Mellman of the Miller campaign called Weiner's decision to pull out of the race "the single most brilliant action by a campaign," saying, "very rarely can you take a 12-point, landslide loss—especially when everybody thought you were running even and maybe even going to win—and then turn that into a moral victory. It's brilliant." Indeed, he may have been right, as the Congressman is now the early leader in polling for the 2009 mayoral contest.



The campaign of the Democratic nominee Fernando Ferrer was the focus of much of the day's conversation. Chief Political Adviser Roberto Ramirez spoke emotionally and at length about his candidate's defeat. He railed against the national Democratic Party for not supporting Ferrer, the party's first Latino candidate for mayor of New York. He also spoke angrily about what he saw as bias in the press coverage of his candidate, even going so far as to tell the journalists assembled for the lunch discussion (which was not recorded and is therefore not transcribed here) that they had "dehumanize(d)" Ferrer and made him into a "caricature."

Another major topic of conversation was Ferrer's controversial public statement during the campaign that he believed the 1999 shooting of unarmed African immigrant Amadou Diallo by NYC police officers was not a crime. Ferrer's staffers admitted this incident had been mishandled and had hurt the campaign. Of particular interest to those in the room was how the Bloomberg campaign viewed the early demise of one of the mayor's pet issues—the construction of a football stadium for the New York Jets on the far West Side of Manhattan—which proved to be a boon to the campaign. Bloomberg's advisers confided that the politically unpopular project, had it gone ahead, may well have been the biggest obstacle to his re-election. Communications Director Bill Cunningham quipped that the campaign had "sent flowers to Shelly Silver" after the state Assembly speaker killed the stadium plan.

All commended the Bloomberg campaign for its impressive work, but most participants also agreed that it is extremely rare for an incumbent in his position (60 percent approval ratings, no major scandals, a strong city economy) to lose. The Ferrer representatives were also quick to point out the overwhelming disadvantage their candidate (who, they said, harbors an intense dislike of fundraising) had in competing with a billionaire mayor with no spending limit. In fact, Bill Cunningham said the Bloomberg campaign spent "about as much money as we spent last time," putting the total at about \$75 million—though Cunningham also said that adjusted for inflation "we might actually have spent less." His remarks made it clear that the campaign was sensitive to the money issue. Ferrer's representatives conceded there were moments when Ferrer was ascendant, yet did not take advantage and raise sufficient campaign dollars. In the end, Ferrer spent \$9.1 million to Bloomberg's \$84.6 million. The final vote count was 753,089 for Bloomberg and 503,219 for Ferrer, or 59 percent versus 39 percent—the widest margin ever for a Republican mayor of New York. On January 1, 2006, Mayor Michael Bloomberg was sworn in for his second term as the 108th mayor of New York City.

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On November 3, 2009, the citizens of New York City will elect a new mayor. Because of the city's term limits law, the 2009 race will be for an open seat. Events, personalities, economics and much more will frame the contest to come. Between now and then, Milano is committed to increasing our students' and the public's understanding of New York City and State politics and elections; what those elections tell us about our society, economy and institutions; and how to make an impact on public policy and the electoral process.

What follows is a transcript of the 2005 mayoral campaign roundtable conversations, edited lightly for comprehension. We hope that you find the dialogue as informative, useful and thought-provoking as did those of us around the table and in the room.

**Fred P. Hochberg**  
**Dean**  
**Milano The New School for Management and Urban Policy**

# PROGRAM

8:00 am to 8:30 am  
Continental breakfast

8:30 am to 10:30 am  
Session I: The Democratic Primary

10:30 am to 11:00 am  
Break

11:00 am to 1:00 pm  
Session II: Ferrer vs. Bloomberg

1:00 pm to 3:00 pm  
Lunch

## ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

### MODERATOR

Mark Halperin, ABC-TV News

### CAMPAIGN REPRESENTATIVES

#### *Mike Bloomberg for NYC*

Jordan Barowitz • Bill Cunningham • Josh Isay • Stu Loeser • Terence Tolbert

#### *New Yorkers for Ferrer*

Nick Baldick • Jen Bluestein • Luis Miranda • Jef Pollock • Roberto Ramirez

#### *New Yorkers for Fields*

Chung Seto

#### *Miller for New York*

Brian Hardwick • Mark Mellman • Steve Sigmund

#### *Anthony Weiner for New York*

Joel Benenson • Tom Freedman • Jim Margolis

### JOURNALISTS AND COMMENTATORS

Wayne Barrett, *The Village Voice* • Gregg Birnbaum, *New York Post*

Maggie Haberman, *New York Daily News* • Robert Hardt, NY1 News

Patrick Healy, *The New York Times* • Evelyn Hernández, *El Diario* • Heather Hsieh, *World Journal*

Andrew Kirtzman, WCBS-TV • Errol Louis, *New York Daily News* • Veena Merchant, *News India-Times*

Joe Mercurio, National Political Services • Lee Miringoff, Marist Institute for Public Opinion

Jim Rutenberg, *The New York Times* • Dorothy Samuels, *The New York Times*

Ben Smith, *The New York Observer* • Chris Smith, *New York* • Howard Wolfson, Glover Park Group

# SESSION I: THE DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY

## WHO'S WHO

### Moderator

Mark Halperin, Political Director, ABC-TV News

### Mike Bloomberg for NYC

Bill Cunningham, Communications Director

### New Yorkers for Ferrer

Nick Baldick, Campaign Manager

Jen Bluestein, Communications Director

Luis Miranda, Senior Political Adviser

Jef Pollock, Polling Consultant

Roberto Ramirez, Chief Political Adviser

### New Yorkers for Fields

Chung Seto, Campaign Manager

### Miller for New York

Brian Hardwick, Campaign Manager

Mark Mellman, Polling Consultant

Steve Sigmund, Communications Director

### Anthony Weiner for New York

Joel Benenson, Polling Consultant

Tom Freedman, Chief Strategist

Jim Margolis, Media Consultant

It's clear with each election: we learn more about our city and more about the people who live in our city. Elections, without question, as we all know, are a true fundamental of democracy.

The Milano School at The New School is a school that is about training public leaders: leaders who are to have a better understanding of cities, and particularly New York City; leaders who understand the role of politics and the press in our daily life. So I'm very happy to convene today's program.

We are also going to do this again next year for the governor's race in 2006. And then we are going to take a break for a couple of years. But one of the things we hope to learn today—we want to learn about policy and its role in this campaign. We will learn about money. We will learn about race, incumbency, the role of the media and, as I mentioned, how this will impact our governor's race in 2006 and, yes, the mayor's race in 2009.

It was clear that the 2001 mayor's race had a direct impact on the governor's race that followed a year later. And as further proof, I wanted to just leave you with one thought: every mayor in this city, in part, is elected on the flaws of his predecessor. The Lindsay administration made Abe Beame a reality for mayor. The Beame administration in some ways spawned the Koch administration, which then was followed by Dinkins, and in some ways the Giuliani administration was a reaction against some of the concerns raised in the Dinkins administration. And we had the same with Bloomberg.

**Fred Hochberg:** Good morning. My name is Fred Hochberg and I'm the dean of the Milano School at The New School. I want to welcome you to our review of the mayor's race of 2005. I'm looking forward to today. I think it should be a lot of fun, and I think we should learn a lot. And I am hoping today may also demystify the process and demystify the election a little bit.

And when I talk about that I think about a term many of us in this room use. We've used the term "GOTV" all the time and I'm convinced much of the public, when they read that, hasn't a clue what we are talking about. They are not sure if it's "GOP-TV" or "Gotta Get a TV" or "TiVo." So hopefully by the end of today, the people here and those who read the transcript will have a better understanding of the entire process.

We are joined today by veteran campaign managers and the press to reflect, learn about and better understand the mayor's race of 2005. I have a feeling it may not be a coincidence, but on today's front page of the *Times* Metro Section, there's an article: "Ferrer Expounds on Blame for Failure of Mayoral Bid." So I think today's will be a very highly significant and timely discussion, and we are pleased you could join us so we can better understand the election of 2005.

*Milano Dean Fred P. Hochberg opens up the day's program.*





*Mark Halperin, ABC News political director, moderates the day's discussions.*

And now I'm going to turn this over to Mark and we are going to run straight through to 10:30. There will be a half-hour break, which should be sufficient time for BlackBerries and telephones, restroom and so forth, and then we will pick up back at 11:00. So, with that, let me turn this over to Mark Halperin.

**Mark Halperin:** Thank you, Fred. I'm very happy to be here, very impressed with the talent in the room. To paraphrase my second favorite John F. Kennedy line, "There is more knowledge about New York City politics at this table and in this room, with the possible exception of when Hank Morris dines alone." So I'm happy that everybody is here and I appreciate the expertise in this room. Almost everybody in this room, I'd say, knows more about New York City politics than I do. I cover national politics mostly. But I live here....  
*[break in recording]*

The moderator decides the capacity to interrupt people. Having worked as a moderator and a panelist at seminars that are premised just as this one is, at Harvard University, about the presidential race, I think I've learned some things about that—about what works and what doesn't.

I want to talk a little bit about what we are trying to do today and then very quickly get to talking to you all about the primary, which is what we will talk about in the first session. And then in the second session we will talk about the general election. And then at lunch we are going to talk about press coverage of this campaign.

In advance of this session, I've received calls primarily from the Ferrer campaign, suggesting that we need to talk a lot about the press coverage. And as the *Times* story makes clear and other stories in the last few days make clear, there is some suggestion that the reason that Freddy Ferrer lost had to do with: a) the mayor's money and b) the press coverage and the actions of some Democratic elites. Clearly, part of the campaign. Clearly, part of what we will discuss.

So, what happened just a few weeks ago and what will happen in this term will have a direct effect on politics in 2006 and 2009.

I am probably going to do this twice but it bears repeating twice: I really want to thank Mark Halperin and David Chalian at ABC News for moderating and really organizing this. So let's give them a round of applause. *[applause]*

And I also want to acknowledge in the back of the room, Josh Wachs, our associate dean; Andrew White, the director of the Center for New York City Affairs; Mia Lipsit and Louis Dorff. So I want to thank them from the Milano School for all their work to make today possible as well. *[applause]*

Now, I want to say just one other thing. We are recording this, so I need you to speak into the mics. And I also believe this room may have the highest per capita concentration of BlackBerries and cell phones, so try to keep them away from the mics so people can hear each other. And if you need to take a call, you can just go out in the back row.

## NEW YORK CITY MAYORAL CAMPAIGN TIMELINE

### November 10, 2004

A Quinnipiac poll shows Mayor Michael Bloomberg's approval ratings rebounding (49–39% approval to disapproval) after a dip during the Republican convention (44–42%). Former Bronx Borough President Fernando

Ferrer is noted as the only candidate to top Bloomberg in a head-to-head match, at 45 to 40 percent. Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields is the only other candidate to score double digits (14%) among Democratic voters. In a

hypothetical Democratic primary, Ferrer (28%) and "undecided" (27%) are the top vote-getters, followed by Fields, City Comptroller William Thompson, City Council Speaker Gifford Miller, US Representative Anthony Weiner and City

Council Member Chalmers Barron, in that order.

### December 15, 2004

Marist Poll: Ferrer 51%, Bloomberg 39%. Bloomberg is found to be closely matched with Fields and Miller.



I do want to say, and I will say throughout the day, money obviously was a big deal in this race and we should talk about that in specifics. But simply to say money was all that mattered, I think, is going to keep us from having a good discussion.

Mark Mellman always tells me I put too much stock in campaigns, as opposed to the conditions of the campaigns. And the consultants and the strategy and the tactics are not as determinative as I think. Well, we are here to talk about what transpired in the campaign. Clearly, with the exception of Bill Cunningham and his colleagues, as I said last night, almost everybody in this room wished we'd had a closer race. It would have been more fun, more exciting. We probably would have learned some more things and different things, at least, about what happened and what is the state of the Democratic and Republican parties in this city.

But it was not a close race. And to talk about the reasons for that, I think, are important. I do think that there are some stories that people will tell, and I encourage people to tell interesting stories. I'm not asking you to trash your candidate, trash your campaign colleagues, to be gossipy. If you would like to do those things, we won't object. But we are not asking you to do that.

What we are asking you to do is to lay down an historical record. Although there was a story in the *Times* today, although there is some coverage, I don't think there will be a lot more discussion in this level of detail about the campaign. I don't think anyone else will convene this group of people who are intimately involved in the nomination, fight and in the general election. And that gives us an opportunity to talk about how someone got elected to the second biggest job in American politics, as it is often described in government. And I think that is important.

We will talk about the press coverage. I would like to limit discussion of the press coverage in the main, though, to lunch, except as it relates to the politics of the race. At lunch I would like to really drill down and talk about, "Is there an opportunity to do better, from the press' point of view, in coverage of politics in this city?" It was a big factor in the race. I don't think anyone would deny.... Any reporter who

would deny this, I think, is silly. But the coverage of the general election was framed, overwhelmingly, by the polls, and the Democratic candidate's ability to convey messages to the public was restricted intensely by the way the press covered the race. And we do need to talk about that. But it's not the only thing that we are going to talk about.

The goals for today, again, are to leave an historical record. To let people know what happened in this race and why. It's also a chance for people to clear things up. If you thought the coverage wasn't right, if you thought there were mistakes made of how people perceived the race, we need to talk about that. And again, it's a chance to learn about the state of the city, the state of politics in the city, the state of the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

Now, I'm almost done, but I have a few more things I want to say to try to frame how people think about their comments. There is a tendency, a temptation at these events, in talking about any campaign, to take the losing side and to say that the rapid response skills have the sensibilities of Michael

*"Mr. Ferrer did not convince Democratic elites or the media that he could win. The Ferrer campaign agrees with that. The question is: Why not? Could that have been done?"*

*—Mark Halperin*

#### **January 19, 2005**

Quinnipiac Poll: Bloomberg ties Ferrer, 43 to 43 percent in a hypothetical match-up.

#### **January 20, 2005**

Quinnipiac Poll: New Yorkers oppose 58 to 34 percent a proposal to build a stadium on Manhattan's West Side for the New York Jets and the 2012 Olympics. Voters also say they support the city's bid to host the 2012 Olympics by a 63 to 32 margin.

#### **February 4, 2005**

Miller announces his candidacy for mayor. He criticizes the mayor as overly committed to an expensive stadium and inadequately focused on education reform, and highlights his own plan to reduce class size, themes he will carry through the spring.

#### **February 11, 2005**

Village Independent Democrats endorse Ferrer.

#### **February 23, 2005**

Attorney General Eliot Spitzer announces he will endorse Ferrer.



*Communications Director Steve Sigmund explains that Gifford Miller's campaign was not involved in a controversial City Council flyer mailing.*

Finally, I just want to put some things on the table. You may not agree with these. They may not even be right. But there are some things I think should be on the table. Could a Democrat have won this race or at least made it closer? Could a strong Democratic campaign have made this race closer in the general election?

What did the Bloomberg campaign do that was right? What did they do that was done well, that has not been discussed or covered? Mr. Ferrer did not convince Democratic elites or the media that he could win. The Ferrer campaign agrees with that. The question is: Why not? Could that have been done? Could it have been done differently?

Finally, I think security and quality of life are obviously issues now in this city, more than they have been. And Republicans have been able to do well on those. Why? What are Democrats doing now? What did they do in this race to make security and quality of life issues that were associated with the Democratic Party? What lessons can we learn from this race about what Democrats need to do better on those issues in this city?

Again, throughout, please focus your comments on things that you were thinking behind the scenes. The things that have not been discussed. I would like, at times, for you to ask colleagues from the other campaigns what they were thinking. What was their rationale behind decisions and things that you didn't do? Things you expected the other side to do that they didn't do. Bring those up. Say, "At that point, why didn't you do this? We expected you to do this."

The focus in this first panel, again, will be on the Democratic campaign. The Bloomberg people are not at the table but we will be calling on them. If you are not a campaign operative who worked on one of the campaigns, if you worked for an interest group, if you're a reporter and you have a question or correction or comment, please, on the cards you should have at your chairs—if you don't have any and you want some, raise your hand and someone will bring you one—write your

Dukakis, that the message discipline was that of Ruth Messenger.

She's not here, is she? She's my neighbor. *[laughter]*

There is also a temptation to take the winners and to say that they rolled into one Karl Rove, James Carville and Josh Isay in one brilliant body of political genius. Now, the Bloomberg campaign, I think, did a good job. And I think that's been insufficiently discussed and we will talk about that today. But the people to my left here, the Ferrer campaign, again, I'm not asking you to trash your candidate but we are asking you to talk about what went wrong. What could have been done better by your colleagues, by each other and also by the candidate—which in the last few days have not been very much discussed. It is difficult to do.

#### **March 2, 2005**

Quinnipiac Poll: Ferrer leads Bloomberg 47 to 39 percent. Voters also say 52 to 41 percent that Bloomberg does not care about their needs and problems. Voters say 62 to 16 percent that Ferrer does care.

#### **March 15, 2005**

Ferrer speaks before the Sergeants Benevolent Association and ignites a furor over comments regarding the Amadou Diallo case. He says the shooting was not a crime and there were attempts to "over-indict." The story immediately dominates local coverage, and Ferrer faces withering criticism from

fellow Democrats and black leaders.

#### **March 18, 2005**

Former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani endorses Bloomberg.

#### **March 19, 2005**

Ferrer, Miller, Weiner, Fields and Republican primary candidate Thomas Ognibene appear at a teacher's forum, each echoing the others in attacking what they consider Bloomberg's mismanagement of school reform.

comments, hold them up when you've got something. We will collect them and at the end we will organize those into a discussion of the campaigns. Again, first the primary and then the general.

Obviously, our focus is going to be on the Ferrer campaign, the Bloomberg campaign, the general election candidates, but in our initial discussion, obviously, we are focused on the nominating process. And again, I would urge anyone at the table who has a question, a comment, to raise your hand and speak up; and anyone not at the table, please pass forward a card.

So, with that, I appreciate your listening. I will interrupt as I see fit but I would rather you all just talk.

## FLYERGATE I: THE MILLER MAILING

**Mark Halperin:** I would like to start with the Miller campaign and ask you about those mailings.

So, Steve Sigmund, I would like you to just lay through a narrative of when you learned that this would be a problem, the initial decision to do the mailings and how you think the campaign handled the roll-out of increasing information about the cost and the accountability.

**Steve Sigmund:** Well, that's a great opening question, Mark. I expected, as the candidate that finished fourth in this race, to be able to sit back and listen for a while. *[laughter]*

Thanks so much for this.

The campaign, of course, had nothing to do with those mailings, so I have almost nothing to say about them. I'm just kidding.

The question is *when* the mailings would become an issue. I think that, as it was clear in the initial coverage of those mailings and in the Fields campaign pushing us on them, that the initial numbers that we gave out and that I gave out were off, we knew it would become an issue that we would have to manage. Truthfully, not knowing the full extent of the mailings until some weeks later, it didn't become clear

to us that it would be the first kind of real challenge of the campaign until the full numbers came to light.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me stop you there and ask: why didn't the campaign know the full extent? Why wasn't the...why didn't someone step forward and say, "This could be a big problem; we need to research this"?

**Brian Hardwick:** I will answer that, Steve. The mailings that you are referring to were post-budget mailings that were mailed out on behalf of the speaker and the members of the Council. It wouldn't have been appropriate for the campaign to have been involved in the strategy behind that or the actual execution of the mailings. So the campaign itself—frankly, the mailings for us were a distraction. They were something that from our strategy standpoint on the campaign is something we would wish hadn't happened, because we had a plan that we were executing. And these mailings, frankly, took us off our message in the campaign...and were not helpful in any way.

**Mark Halperin:** Are you positing that there was a wall between the campaign and the Speaker's Office, such that you couldn't even or didn't even have a discussion once it first became an issue about what the extent of it was?

**Brian Hardwick:** Right. There's a pretty large bureaucratic staff and the decision.... I can't speak to the decisions over there, but the decision was made by the Council to send out the mailings, and the campaign, to the extent we were involved, it was only in the aftermath and the effect it had on getting us off our message.

**Mark Halperin:** What about asking for the facts and saying you need to know just how much was sent?

**Brian Hardwick:** Oh yeah, once it became public, then, of course, we said, "How big are these? What is the deal? How did this get approved? What is happening over there?" Obviously, we wanted to know all the facts once it became public.

**Mark Halperin:** So you got all that and what did you do about it?

### March 30, 2005

A new Quinnipiac poll shows Ferrer losing ground (down to 36%) while Fields gains (up to 21%) among the Democratic candidates. Of the 46 percent of New York City voters who say they have heard or read about Ferrer's comments concerning the death of Amadou Diallo, 41 percent say Ferrer's comments make

them think less favorably of him. Among black voters who know of the Diallo remarks, 57 percent think less favorably of Ferrer. The poll still shows Ferrer leading Bloomberg, 46 to 40 percent.

### April 1, 2005

US Representative Charles Rangel endorses Fields.

### April 5, 2005

Marist Poll: 68 percent of New Yorkers do not think their community is prepared to respond to a future terror attack.

### April 15, 2005

Bloomberg denounces anti-Semitic remarks made by Lenora Fulani, a prominent member of the Independence Party. Bloomberg will take heat in the coming months for remaining on the party's ticket and for not returning a donation made the previous year.

**Steve Sigmund:** I can actually speak to that since we were still handling it from the Council side and I was still on the Council side at that moment. So we obviously made a decision that there was nothing we could do besides put everything out there and lay everything out on the table and get through it as quickly as possible. So we made sure we had every single number together—that was right—at that point. And put it all out in very easy ways to digest for the press, and put all the backup together for those who wanted to go over to the Council offices and see every single piece of paper and every mailing and every invoice. And we laid it all out there as quickly as we possibly could. And I remember having each of the reporters who had covered the story come into my office one at a time on a Thursday and walking them through all the numbers and getting a series of stories the next day that we knew would certainly inspire at least a couple of days of very significant scrutiny on the process of how these mailings came to light and how it would...what impact it would have on Gifford's candidacy.

You should remember, though, that there was a period after we had gotten through that week, week and a half or so of

*"I've never been on a race where there was a complete wall between incumbents and campaigns.... If there was, in fact, a wall, that could be an impediment to being as effective as you can."*

*—Joel Benenson*

very intense scrutiny of the mailings, in the middle of July... that significant bump was considered behind the speaker.

I remember sitting in the NY1 forum in City Hall—I think it was as late as August 30th or August 31st—and they played a tape of each of the candidates before they would have this town hall forum on them. And Gifford's tape was about his candidacy and then it got to the mailings as the bump in his candidacy and it ended by saying, "This seems to be behind him and now he's ticked up in the polls and in position to make a run towards the end." So you have to remember that the mailings were a significant challenge to the campaign—but a challenge that was largely behind the campaign before the Campaign Finance Board, at the end of the campaign, decided to make some changes in its rules that were not entirely clear to us.

**Mark Halperin:** Mark Mellman, did this issue of the mailings and the publicity of that play a disproportionate role in defining your candidate in a negative way?

**Mark Mellman:** I don't think so, at all. In fact, it obviously generated a lot of press attention. But the truth is, as Steve rightly said, in the aftermath of this we began our advertising campaign, favorables for Miller went up in our polling and one or two other public polls...had moved into second place after the mailing issue had died down. So I think it defined the issues for the press and some of it defined the candidate for the press in certain ways, but I don't think there was much residue with the public until we got to the campaign finance issue, as Steve rightly said.

**Mark Halperin:** Before I turn to other campaigns, again, I want to remind anyone in the room—including and especially the journalists who are here who covered the race—if you have questions, get one of those index cards, on this or anything we discuss, and send it forward to David Chalian, who will funnel them here.

Jim Margolis, let me ask you, since I think I saw at least one eyebrow go up, how do you respond to your colleague's description of what happened? Do you take issue with it? Did you all see this as an opportunity/possibility?

#### April 21, 2005

Rev. Al Sharpton declares that he will not endorse a candidate in the Democratic primary, explaining that no candidate had presented a clear message or winning strategy. This is the first time in 20 years he has decided to sit out the primary. Pundits point to Ferrer's Diallo comments as a reason. In

September he will provide Ferrer with a belated endorsement.

#### April 27, 2005

Marist Poll for the Democratic primary: Ferrer 34%, Fields 30%, Miller 12%, Weiner 11%, undecided 13%. It also shows Bloomberg rebounding in a

major turnabout, leading top contender Ferrer 51 to 38 percent.

#### April 29, 2005

Ferrer's chief media consultant, David Axelrod, and his director of communications, Chad Clanton, resign from the campaign. The *New York Post*

reports the split may have been over the candidate's failure to apologize for his Diallo comments. The campaign cites "strategic differences."

#### May 4, 2005

Former City Council Speaker Peter Vallone endorses Miller.



*Joel Benenson, polling consultant for Anthony Weiner, weighs in on the Miller campaign's handling of 'flyergate.'*

**Jim Margolis:** I'm going to defer. His eyebrow's going up.

**Joel Benenson:** Jim's right, it was mine. With all respect, I've never been on a race where there was a complete wall between incumbents and campaigns and there wasn't some discussion about whether this would be valuable or not. If there was, in fact, a wall, that could be an impediment to being as effective as you can. The thing that struck us, from the campaign point of view—and we may have a slightly different view of what was happening around the dynamic—we kind of felt they spent 1.5 million dollars on an essentially political mailing and didn't get much bang for the buck and now had a headache in the press. And that's the kind of thing where that kind of communication with some of the strategists like Brian and Mark may be weighing in on whether there would be even value to something like that, and having some level of communication, might have helped.

Were your gut reactions that this was incredibly wrong-headed? This wasn't what we needed to have happen? Notwithstanding that you had a lot of press attention about it.

**Jim Margolis:** Or to say, just to add one point, which is, it was the diversion as much as anything else. There was an awful lot of time and attention that you ended up having to spend talking about that, bringing reporters in talking about that, rather than being back on message. And so I guess that was sort of our reaction.

**Brian Hardwick:** Yeah, I'd say that's a pretty fair and good analysis of it. Yeah, we would have preferred.... First of all, had we...we would have done the mailings differently, frankly, if we would have done them at all. But no, obviously, it was obviously a distraction for the campaign.

**Mark Halperin:** What role did the candidate play in approving the initial mailings and in dealing with and talking about them after it came out?



**Steve Sigmund:** They wouldn't know the answer to that. I understand that the right thing to do from a strategic standpoint would have been to have discussions with Mark Mellman and Brian and Mandy about what the extent of the mailings and how much and how many and whether to do them. But that would have been utterly wrong and frankly illegal for us to have done. *[laughs]*

These were Council mailings and yes, they were aware that these mailings had been done. But the role of the candidate was to approve doing Council-wide mailings in a way that the Council had done many times before in the past. And he didn't know the extent of the mailings and he said over and over again that he should have known the extent of the mailings and should have had a closer management process for these mailings.

#### May 10, 2005

Two unions, the Civil Services Employees Association and the Organization of Staff Analysts, endorse Ferrer.

#### May 11, 2005

A Quinnipiac poll shows Bloomberg pulling ahead of Ferrer for the first time, leading 47 to 38 percent.

The City Council, led by Miller, votes down Bloomberg's plan to use \$300 million in public funds for the planned West Side stadium.

#### May 17, 2005

The *Times* reports that the mayor's campaign spending has dwarfed that of his rivals. As of this date, he had spent

\$5.6 million in the previous two months. In contrast, Miller had spent \$296,000, Ferrer \$245,000 and Weiner \$199,000. The Democratic candidates are limited to spending \$5.7 million each on the primary race if they want to benefit from the city's campaign finance public matching funds program.

#### May 24, 2005

The Queens Democratic Party endorses Miller.

#### June 1, 2005

Former US Representative Geraldine Ferraro endorses Ferrer.

**Joel Benenson:** Well, one point about all that, Steve, is that, whether they were done that way in the past or not, he was running for mayor this time and he wasn't running for mayor before. It became a political problem to keep that division and treat it as a City Council problem, when clearly the only reason it was in the newspaper was because.... His mailings had never been in the newspaper before. It was because he was running for mayor.

**Mark Mellman:** I don't think anyone has to convince us that they were a bad idea. No problem there. *[laughter]*

But also, you are also going to have to go pretty far to convince us that we ought to break the law in order to further the campaign. Neither of those things are really up for debate. I don't think there's any debate about whether the mailings were a good idea. I don't think there's any debate from our point of view about whether we should be breaking the law or not to further the campaign. At least from my point of view.

**Joel Benenson:** I'm talking about managing the problem, once you've got a problem in the paper, rather than have it

*"I don't think anyone has to convince us [the mailings] were a bad idea.... But you are also going to have to go pretty far to convince us that we ought to break the law in order to further the campaign."*

*—Mark Mellman*

percolate for ten days. Was there a more effective way? Did you consider any options on how you could manage it and shut the story down sooner?

**Steve Sigmund:** The truth was we didn't have any other options. We did...of course we talked about it once it was in the paper, as Brian said. Of course we talked about the best way to manage it, but the truth was, at that point, we had to get all the numbers in, find out what they all were and release them all.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, let me just go quickly to Chung and then we are going to move off this topic.

**Chung Seto:** If the Fields campaign had not submitted a letter to the Campaign Finance Board, would the Weiner campaign have pushed the issue forward?

**Tom Freedman:** You mean at the end of the campaign?

**Chung Seto:** No, on the mailing.

**Tom Freedman:** I don't think so. Our basic thought for us was...it was we had an unknown candidate. The hardest part for us was to get him known and known substantively, and it was sort of a Scylla and Charybdis. We had to get some coverage but if it was off on these kind of tertiary issues that had nothing to do with what voters cared about for who the mayor was going to be, that was going to be way off, and we had to be interesting enough on substantive things, so I think that would have taken us pretty far off.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me switch now...

**Jim Margolis:** Can I say one other thing?

**Mark Halperin:** Sure, go ahead.

**Jim Margolis:** And, in fact, that was even a guiding principle to the very end, when the Campaign Finance Board was going through some of the broader set of issues. We had a number of conversations just regarding how much do you keep going on that topic versus we have such a little amount of coverage that is going to be coming our way, that to the extent that we

#### June 6, 2005

The controversial West Side stadium proposal is defeated by the Public Authorities Control Board when State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and State Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno withhold their support. While a new Queens stadium is touted in a revised plan, this setback deals a mighty blow

to Bloomberg's quest to bring the 2012 Olympics to NYC.

#### June 8, 2005

A *Newsday*/NY1 poll shows Ferrer with a commanding lead over Bloomberg among New York Latino voters, 66 to 26 percent.

#### June 9, 2005

Weiner wins the endorsement of the Lambda Independent Democrats, Brooklyn's gay Democratic organization.

Bloomberg's ambitious 20-year plan to ship the city's garbage away by barge instead of trucks is defeated by the City Council. Miller is the chief architect of

the defeat, rejecting one of the administration's key initiatives.

#### June 10, 2005

A new Marist poll shows Bloomberg virtually tied with Ferrer, at 45 percent to 46 percent and in a similar statistical dead heat with rivals Fields and Miller. The

*Mark Mellman, Gifford Miller's polling consultant, discusses how the campaign dealt with its biggest controversy: 'flyergate.'*

are off over here, with the little amount of attention that we are going to get, we are probably in the wrong space. And so most of the time, our reaction was we needed to use the little coverage that we were going to get and use that time focused on what we thought was core message.

## **POLICY & POLITICS: THE FERRER CAMPAIGN STRATEGY**

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. I want to move now to the Ferrer campaign and to talk about some of the bigger issues for you during the primary process. And I think the best person to ask this first question to would either be Mr. Pollock or Roberto Ramirez. You all can choose who answers. Talk about what the candidate did and what you all did with him, in terms of policy development, from the time he lost the last mayor's race until the time that he geared up this time. What did he do to develop ideas, policy proposals and a message for this race?

**Roberto Ramirez:** Actually, that question should be answered by Mr. Miranda.

**Luis Miranda:** You all remember that, actually, Freddy did not decide to run until very late in the game. It was not a ploy; it was a reality. He was beginning to enjoy what he was doing at the Drum Major Institute and beginning to deal with policy in a much more abstract way than he had ever done before since he had been an elected official. And his focus there was really the middle class. So that he was beginning to understand himself and deal with the issues of the middle class in New York—different from what he had done in politics in the Bronx, which was to deal with the issues of the poor. So all of a sudden, internally and for him, he was shifting understanding what was the role of the middle class in a city like New York City. And what is the role that government plays in aiding the middle class, since it was clear what he had done in politics: what was the role that government does in helping the poor?



So we knew that when he finally decided to run—several of us were in his home having discussions with him—if he was going to make the race or not, that we needed to reintroduce Freddy. That a couple of years had passed by. He had been out of the public eye doing his own thing and we needed to do that—to reintroduce him to the general electorate.

**Mark Halperin:** Before you get to the question of how to package him or introduce him, talk again policy development. What had he done to think about problem solving for the city? A set of proposals that would be part of his agenda for this campaign.

**Luis Miranda:** I think most of what he had done at the Drum Major Institute included New York. It was a larger question of the middle class in urban centers throughout the nation. As for New York, it was a subset of a much larger question that he was raising. His board was a national board. His chair

poll was taken directly after Albany lawmakers nixed plans for the West Side stadium. The poll also found Ferrer leading over his Democratic rivals.

### **June 15, 2005**

Dominican Assembly  
Members Adriano Espaillat

and Jose Peralta endorse Ferrer.

### **June 22, 2005**

Quinnipiac Poll: Bloomberg tops Ferrer, 50–37%, Fields 49–34% and Miller 49–33%. Bloomberg's approval rating is 55 to 36 percent, his highest in three years.

### **July 6, 2005**

The International Olympic Committee awards London the 2012 Olympics, defeating Bloomberg's hopes of bringing the Olympics to NYC.

Fields faces public scrutiny when it is revealed that a doctored photo appeared on one of her campaign flyers.

Photos of individuals of varying races were cut and pasted over those actually at the pictured event. Fields later blamed her advertising consultant and fired strategist Joe Mercurio. Mercurio shot back, saying Fields was fully aware that the photograph was altered.

was not from New York City. So in fact, some of the thinking was about New York but not exclusively or primarily about New York.

**Mark Halperin:** So what ideas did he then talk about in the campaign did that translate into? None?

**Jef Pollock:** It really didn't. There have been some pundits who have hypothesized about the campaign starting early, and that's fantasyland because that never could have happened because Freddy hadn't decided to run. He really had not decided to run. So the notion that there's stuff that the Drum Major Institute was doing that was going to translate into policy, it wasn't going to translate one to one, in any way. So in fact, we were starting in one of the weakest positions that I can remember, which is a non-incumbent, running as a frontrunner, with no government staff to help, no infrastructure to help, nobody around him to help and no money raised over a couple of years. So far from an ideal situation to begin with—which is why people don't believe it

*“We were starting in one of the weakest positions that I can remember ... a non-incumbent, running as a frontrunner, with no government staff to help, no infrastructure to help, nobody around him to help and no money raised.”*

*—Jef Pollock*

when we say it—but when we were at Freddy's house talking to him we really didn't know if he was running. And that was October of 2004. September 2003, I mean.

**Mark Halperin:** Having decided late to get into the race, what did he do to reach out to policy thinkers to develop ideas in a hurry?

**Jen Bluestein:** I came to the campaign a little bit late as most people know. But I think that most of the journalists in the room would agree that Freddy...to suggest that Freddy only started talking or thinking about policy ideas for New York City when he had decided to run, whenever that might have been, is the wrong way to look at it. I think one of the things that all the journalists in this room know about Freddy is that if you ask him a personal question it can be very hard to get him to give you an answer. But if you ask him a question about policy, he can talk to you for an hour.

**Mark Halperin:** I want you to focus on what I'm saying. He lost the race four years ago and what did he do in the interim?

**Jen Bluestein:** What I'm suggesting to you is that in my experience he is a person who is consistently thinking about the issues that face this city.

**Luis Miranda:** Also, probably the New York City thing that he did the most was Campaign for Fiscal Equity. He joined the board and was pretty active in following up on something that he had done when he was borough president—in following the Campaign for Fiscal Equity—and was pretty active in following up the case from a board perspective.

**Mark Halperin:** Do any one of you want to say or ask anything about the frontrunner's work to develop policy ideas during the period between this mayoral and the last?

*[pause]* No?

Let me ask the same question—this won't take as long, I think—about developing a fundraising capacity. Again, you say he came late. Obviously, there must have been discussions about, “How are we going to raise the money?” What did he do from the time he decided to run, or was he leaving his

#### July 7, 2005

Fields experiences a second embarrassing advertisement-related setback when the *Times* reports she has violated city rules against using unauthorized photos of firefighters in political literature.

#### July 13, 2005

The city's largest municipal workers' union, DC 37 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, announces its endorsement of Mayor Bloomberg. The previous day, union leaders announced a one percent pay increase through a worker productivity deal with City Hall.

#### July 19, 2005

Quinnipiac Poll: Bloomberg's approval rating hits 60 percent, and he tops all Democratic challengers by 15 percentage points or more.

#### July 20, 2005

Despite placing second in most Democratic primary polls, the Fields campaign

continues to struggle financially. At \$1.7 million, her reported fundraising total thus far is less than all of the other candidates.

#### July 21, 2005

NARAL Pro-Choice New York endorses Bloomberg.



options open to build a fundraising base nationally and in New York City?

**Luis Miranda:** I will start with saying he hated it. He hated it. From the very beginning. It's one of the things that Freddy doesn't enjoy to do. So fundraising for a candidate who doesn't have means, it's sort of key, but it's something that we have to work very hard with Freddy to do. To re-establish some relationships that he had lost over a couple of years. To sort of bring together friends of his that have been with him for a very long time and helped him understand the importance of fundraising. So with Freddy it was not only getting people to fundraise, it was working with him for him to do it.

**Roberto Ramirez:** This is a 12-month campaign. He filed his committee in November of 2004 and through to November 2005. And the first question of the policy issue, did he not think he needed any new ideas? This is a man who had been in office for over 20 years, and if you ask the question and think about it, he spent the last three years of his life dealing with issues of policies at the Drum Major Institute. And I remember going to a number of forums—which you may not have attended—where he presented on the issue of demographics in this country. When he presented on the issues of poverty. I remember issues of criminal justice, and what really speaks about the middle class. So the issue of policy for Fernando Ferrer, I think throughout his career, has been sort of embedded in who he is and what he believes in.

As to the fundraising, always an uphill fight. And if you remember, not even through the primary did the Ferrer campaign ever reach the maximum ability to raise the money. And I think Jef Pollock mentioned it rather appropriately: issue number one is somebody who had been out of office for three years who, in fact, did not spend the last three years running for mayor. I would challenge anyone in this room and in this city to say that they got a call from Fernando Ferrer saying, "I'm running for mayor;" that they gave a quote in which he criticized the mayor; that Fernando Ferrer was in fact behind the scenes, trying to position himself to run for mayor. Fernando Ferrer, in fact, did not know and had not made a decision as to whether he was going to run for mayor

*"After 20-some-odd years in public office, I think all of us ... hoped that he would once again engage in a mayoralty race. Unfortunately, that decision was made rather late."*

*—Roberto Ramirez*

until 2004. Everything else that flowed from the campaign flowed from those two facts.

**Mark Halperin:** If you could turn the clock back and position him for fundraising differently, to do better, to not have it be such an issue, what would you have done differently?

**Roberto Ramirez:** *[laughs]* On January 1, 2002, he would be clear and running for mayor. "I'm not going to give Mayor Bloomberg an opportunity to run this city. I'm going to challenge him on education and all these other issues. I'm going to start raising money and I'm going to run. I am going to present these views." But that's not reality, because that's not what was. What was, was Mr. Ferrer, in January of 2002, decided that he was going to go run the Drum Major Institute and spend private time with his family. After 20-some-odd years in public office, I think all of us respected that and hoped that he would once again engage in a mayoralty race. Unfortunately, that decision was made rather late.

**Mark Halperin:** Do any of you have anything to add? Mark?

#### July 22, 2005

Marist Poll: Bloomberg achieves a 58 percent approval rating, his highest ever. He would also beat his Democratic rivals in a hypothetical contest: Ferrer 52 to 36 percent, Fields 53 to 32 percent, Miller 53 to 31 percent and Weiner 53 to 29 percent.

#### July 26, 2005

The *Times* reports that several prominent Democratic fundraisers are supporting Mayor Bloomberg's re-election, instead of raising money for his opponents.

#### August 1, 2005

City Comptroller William Thompson endorses Ferrer.

#### August 3, 2005

Weiner announces his candidacy.

The *Daily News* reports that Local 32BJ of the Service Employees International Union, representing building workers, will endorse Bloomberg. The local has 75,000 members, about 40 percent of them Latino.

#### August 9, 2005

State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver endorses Ferrer.

Armed with a fundraising advantage over the other Democratic candidates, Miller spends close to \$1 million on the costliest set of Democratic TV commercials so far.

**Mark Mellman:** Can I come back to your earlier invitation on the policy side? One of the new policies that the campaign did put forward was this tax on Wall Street profits and so on. I'm sure there are some people here who are interested in the policy of that. I'm not. But I'm just interested in the political point that you thought...the political perspective that you brought to that particular—

**Luis Miranda:** Clearly, we knew that anything that we said would be scrutinized very carefully, so we had made a policy decision within the campaign. And Freddy said, as we did in 2001, "There's no policy that we are going to put out there that costs money, that we are not going to say how are we going to pay for it."

Freddy had sat in the board of CFE for two years while all of you spent the CFE money that, year after year, didn't come. So we realized that we were going to be pragmatic about it. We needed to put the policy, say how we were spending the money, understand that the city... Everybody says that the governor is not going to give the city 20-something billion dollars, and to think that is going to happen is la-la-land.

*"The voters were fine with [the stock transfer tax].... You people in this room are the only people who didn't like it, which, by the way, goes for a lot of things in this race. But ... the elites didn't like this idea."*

*—Nick Baldick*

So we knew that we needed to put forward a proposal that makes sense, that hurt the least, and that put on the table the percentage of dollars that we believed the city was going to have to pay for CFE.

**Mark Halperin:** What did you think the positive politics of introducing the stock transfer tax would be? And what did you miscalculate, since it obviously did not play particularly well?

**Luis Miranda:** We knew that it had existed before. When you looked at it, the fact is that it didn't damage the city. It was also a particular proposal that dealt with a segment of the population. It was less politically damaging because it was a more esoteric tax than the more regressive tax that Freddy talks about. And that sort of...the analysis that we went with.... Freddy, you need to understand, was involved in every sentence of any policy proposal.

**Mark Halperin:** Sounds like you really appreciated that.

**Luis Miranda:** Oh yeah. *[laughter]*

**Jef Pollock:** But you also need to remember the context. There's a couple of things about it. It's convenient to talk about the stock transfer tax and not remind people it happened to have happened in week—depending on how NY1 was covering it—in week 17 of the Diallo incident, I believe. So there's a sort of context of when it happened as well and sort of a strategic need of going out there with something bold. And we had full discussions about it, internally, and there were lots of battles internally about it. We had battles about the pluses and minuses of it and at the end of the day it was actually Freddy who said, "You know, we got to try to get this money from the state."

**Mark Halperin:** Before we move to Diallo, just say, what did you underestimate? You said there were battles about the pros and cons. What did you underestimate? That the press wouldn't like it? That Spitzer wouldn't like it?

**Nick Baldick:** Just for the record, for someone who came in later, you people are the ones who didn't like it. The voters were fine with it.

#### August 11, 2005

*The New York Times* reports that Miller was featured on \$1.8 million worth of taxpayer-financed mail to City Council constituents in the 2005 fiscal year. Miller's aides first said a series of mailings they sent in June had cost \$37,000. Criticism escalated when they revised that figure to \$1.6 million.

#### August 12, 2005

Weiner begins a series of sharply worded critiques of Ferrer's proposed stock transfer tax increase, which would fund education reforms.

#### August 16, 2005

The Democratic candidates participate in their first debate. *The New York Post* describes Miller as the winner.

#### August 21, 2005

The Democratic candidates participate in their second debate.

#### August 25, 2005

A federal judge refuses Ognibene's bid to appear on the Republican ballot, citing a shortage of petition signatures. He will appear on the Conservative Party ticket.

#### August 31, 2005

*The Jewish Press* endorses Miller.

*Luis Miranda, senior political adviser to Ferrer, discusses how policy decisions were made by the candidate and the campaign.*

**Jef Pollock:** The voters loved it.

**Nick Baldick:** Yeah. You people in this room are the only people who didn't like it, which, by the way, goes for a lot of things in this race. But, you know, the elites didn't like this idea. The voters and the—

**Mark Halperin:** How could you have done a better job selling it, pre-selling it to elites?

**Roberto Ramirez:** I want to answer simply by saying you're not interested in the policy and the politics?

**Mark Halperin:** I was kidding.

**Roberto Ramirez:** I understand. The problem is that this is the kind of proposal that, the basis of it is policy that plays out in the politics of it. And it's...a semi-miscalculation is the following: Fernando Ferrer's statement of saying, "I wish to introduce a stock transfer tax," had an underbelly to it and it was intended to put front and center the issue that we knew was one of the overriding issues of the campaign—education. That's the first one. Second one, that it went to the core of the race that Fernando Ferrer had run in 2001 and would be running in 2005: that there is an atrocious imbalance in the funding of our educational system. So when Mr. Ferrer said, "Not only am I going to impose a stock transfer tax..." but what was more, I think, repugnant to everybody—most people in this room and certainly most of the political pundits—was that he would dare to say that he, as a candidate for mayor, understood that this city had a basic, fundamental responsibility to pay its share so that it could withdraw the state dollars.

**Mark Halperin:** I'm going to stop you, because this is about campaigns and managing campaigns. So policy matters and big ideas matter but we have common ground here, which is we—I think everybody in this room agrees—the elites, the press in particular, did not like this idea. You all think it was a good idea and you think with the people it was good politics. Maybe not all of you think it was a good idea. But you think



it was good politics with the people. So again, I asked for learning about campaigns—could you have done more to sell it to the press? Could you have done more to sell it to elites that it would have gotten better coverage and the people would have gotten a great policy proposal you could have used to win the nomination and the general?

**Nick Baldick:** I wasn't around for the selling part or the creation part. But there has to be admitted one mistake made here. In the history of American politics, I know of no other time where a campaign took the medicine and didn't take the benefit. I mean, I don't know of any other time in American politics where a campaign rolled out, "Here is how we are going to pay for it, and take the pain. And oh, by the way, I'm not going to tell you how I'm going to spend the money."

Now later, we rolled out a dropout plan—that I thought was really good—and spent it. I think in hindsight, doing the

**September 1, 2005**

ACORN endorses Ferrer.

**September 2, 2005**

*El Diario* endorses Ferrer.

**September 3, 2005**

*The New York Times* endorses Ferrer in the Democratic primary. *The Daily News* describes the *Times*

endorsement as "tepid."

**September 7, 2005**

*The New York Observer* endorses Miller.

*Carib News* endorses Ferrer.

The 32,500-member Communication Workers of America union endorses Ferrer.

The Democratic candidates participate in their third debate.

**September 8, 2005**

The Democratic candidates participate in their fourth debate.

**September 9, 2005**

100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care endorses Ferrer.

In a WNBC/Marist Poll for the Democratic primary, Weiner surges into second, ahead of Fields and Miller. Ferrer gets 34 percent, Weiner 27, Miller 14 and Fields 13, with 12 percent undecided.

two together might have been helpful because what we did was take a lot of the pain, which I think was probably Freddy saying, “Hey, I want to pay for this.” But we should have combined the two.

I don’t know if Joel or anyone else...does anyone know of another time where a campaign said four months earlier, “Here’s how we’re going to pay for it,” and then four months later, “Here’s the good news”? That was a little screwed up.

**Brian Hardwick:** I was just going to say that I also thought—I think it was the day after the policy was rolled out—that Anthony Weiner really effectively used this as a political tool. So immediately, in the *Crain’s* debate, he put Ferrer on the defensive on this policy. So, while it is true that the press and the elites didn’t like it, the press and the elites were in that room that day for the *Crain’s* debate and saw how effectively Weiner had used it against Ferrer and, frankly, that Ferrer seemed unprepared for the attack, and that sort of set the tone for the policy, politically, at that point.

*“Mostly, we thought voters were not looking to see who is going to beat the crap out of each other. They were looking for who’s going to be saying something a little bit different.”*

*—Tom Freedman*

## PACKAGING ANTHONY: THE WEINER CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

**Mark Halperin:** This is obviously a good time to discuss the more general issue of how you approached what we’ll call, for the sake of shorthand, attacks on the frontrunner. We do need to go to Diallo eventually, but let’s do this now and talk about your attitude.... That’s an opening? I know you are anxious to get to this...

**Joel Benenson:** Why does Jim pass the mic to me when we talk about attacks? Did you mean t-a-x or a-t-t-a-c-k?

**Mark Halperin:** Both.

**Joel Benenson:** Well, we actually.... I think Brian’s right, what happened was we saw it—and Nick’s right as well. The way it was framed, we saw it as a huge opportunity. Our strategy was we wanted to draw a contrast on ideas with the other candidates. We wanted to establish Anthony as basically a serious candidate coming up with proposals, which was how we spent the six months between January through June. But this, in particular, gave us a contrast on a couple of issues. Education, which we all agree, was a major issue. But what we were hearing from voters and what Anthony believes, his mother being a school teacher, was that what voters cared about and what those benefits were, was being able to pay teachers more money. Getting back to basics—teaching basics in the classroom and imposing school discipline.

Parents felt that kids who wanted to learn couldn’t learn because there were disruptive kids in the classroom. And these were the pressing concerns of the parents. So that when the tax came out, it gave us an opportunity to contrast on taxes, because Anthony had talked about a middle class tax cut. But more importantly, it gave us a larger framework of new ideas versus old ideas. And his line on it was, “We can’t attack 2005 problems with 1970 solutions.” So in a political context, it gave us the contrast we wanted with Ferrer of new versus old. And I think we were able to do that because, to Nick’s point, the benefit wasn’t there for people. So we were both able to go after the frontrunner on substance and it became a very legitimate, I think, line of contrast.

### September 11, 2005

Despite lingering disagreement over Ferrer’s comments on the Diallo case, Al Sharpton endorses Ferrer. He also criticizes Fields as not being a “black empowerment candidate,” according to the *Daily News*.

### September 12, 2005

WNBC/Marist Poll for the Democratic primary: Ferrer 35%, Weiner 29%, Fields 14%, Miller 14%, undecided 8%.

### September 13, 2005

Primary Day. The reported results fail to guarantee Ferrer a victory without a runoff against Weiner.

*The New York Times* reports that, for the first time, non-Hispanic whites are projected to constitute a minority of the voters in a mayoral general election.

### September 14, 2005

Weiner holds two campaign events, then reverses course and announces he will not

appear on the ballot for a runoff election if one is necessary. Officials say he may not have a choice. The *Post* reports the city may have to spend \$12 million on a runoff, regardless of Weiner’s participation.



*Chief Strategist Tom Freedman explains his campaign's plan for introducing candidate Anthony Weiner to the public.*

**Mark Halperin:** Why didn't you do more of that on other issues?

**Tom Freedman:** We had a pretty unknown candidate so we were really conscious of not making him look like he was just an attack dog the whole time. And we also had a million different issues that we were talking about affirmatively. We thought it was really important to have a pretty specific universe of contrasting issues. And this was a very good one. It came up right before the *Crain's* debate, which was a pretty high-profile—at least for this campaign—event. You could try and keep it not being personalized. You could keep it at different styles. And, I think also, you guys...that was the most obvious one to do. I'm not sure that you had those opportunities with the other issues they proposed.

**Mark Halperin:** Could you have driven it harder and kept talking about it? Or that wouldn't have had any effect?

**Tom Freedman:** I think he brought it up. I think you guys will say that he brought it up pretty repetitively. He tried to find different ways to bring it up. Mostly, we thought voters were not looking to see who is going to beat the crap out of each other. They were looking for who's going to be saying something a little bit different. So we kept trying to use it as an opportunity to talk about our stuff, to give it a little bit of color and get pick-up, but not...I don't think we saw it as the goal is to try to run up their negatives. We tended to think Freddy was pretty well known and, like most incumbents, people had an impression of who he was, sort of, and that we could try to describe the difference with him. But we didn't need to do a million different things to try and make that contrast apparent.

**Joel Benenson:** Tom said, rightly so, that we also didn't want Anthony, because he was unknown, to just look like an attack dog going after a frontrunner. And we also...Anthony had an image with the press and with elites for being very aggressive, and we were also stylistically trying to counter that by staying on substance, not just being overly aggressive all the time, to reinforce what we thought might not play particularly well



with the elites in that early stage between January through June. We wanted him to be aggressive, but we always wanted it to be very substantive, to counter any potential negative image of him that might be lurking there.

**Nick Baldick:** Mark, can I talk about one thing?

**Mark Halperin:** Yes.

**Nick Baldick:** We sort of skipped over the fundraising—and God knows I'm sure people won't spend a lot of time trying to do this—but I think someone has to give credit to the Bloomberg people on the money thing. When their numbers were bad I think Speaker Miller raised a lot of money because he was the only person really in the race at that point. And that was really smart of those guys. We weren't in the race. I

**September 15, 2005**

Rev. Calvin Butts of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem endorses Bloomberg. This influential minister will later appear in campaign ads as well.

**September 16, 2005**

New York Senators Charles Schumer and Hillary Clinton

and former President Bill Clinton endorse Ferrer.

**September 18, 2005**

US Representative Charles Rangel endorses Ferrer.

**September 19, 2005**

Ferrer is officially declared the winner of the Democratic mayoral primary. He barely

edged past 40 percent of the vote, and thereby avoided a runoff with Weiner.

**September 20, 2005**

New York's largest health care union, 1199 SEIU, endorses Ferrer. Its members include 200,000 active and retired workers in the city.

**September 22, 2005**

The 45,000-member Retail, Wholesale and Department Store union endorses Ferrer.

**September 23, 2005**

Former Mayor David Dinkins endorses Ferrer.



*Chief Political Adviser Roberto Ramirez discusses the damage that Ferrer's statement on the Diallo shooting did to the campaign.*

## FERRER'S DIALLO DEBACLE

**Mark Halperin:** We will get to that when we bring them in, but let me go to your favorite topic. March 15th: the candidate speaks out on Amadou Diallo and says that he believed that the shooting was not a crime and that there was an attempt to... *[laughter and side comments]*

There's obviously a lot we can say about this, and I want to try to—

**Nick Baldick:** Not me.

**Mark Halperin:** Nick, you can't...

**Jen Bluestein:** Thanks, Nick.

**Mark Halperin:** And I want to try to do this as cleanly as possible. So just say, for the three of you, let's go with rapid-round, one-word answers in the beginning. I'll go for each of you. Ready?

**Jen Bluestein:** Is this the lightning round?

**Mark Halperin:** Start out with the one-word answers, just yes or no. Did the candidate make any mistake in the initial statement or in dealing with this issue? Did the candidate himself make any mistakes, yes or no? Just a one-word answer.

**Luis Miranda:** Did the candidate...? In dealing with the Diallo...?

**Mark Halperin:** In saying the original remark and then dealing with the aftermath, did the candidate make any mistakes?

**Luis Miranda:** Yeah.

**Mark Halperin:** Yes.

**Luis Miranda:** Yes!

don't think Fields was in the race. I think you have two ways to raise money in American politics: you either have the power of incumbency, which most of us didn't really have, or you have the perception of the ability to win.

Well, by the time a lot of us got in the race and it heated up, they had taken away a lot of the perception to win. So the combination of those two factors should never be understated, and I think what the Bloomberg people did was about as strategic a decision I think that the Bloomberg people made...and I turn to Bill Cunningham. But it was very smart. They said, "Look, we've got some rough times. If we can get our numbers back up, we are going to pound away at inevitability. And if we pound away at that, we'll dry up all their money. And especially if they knew it was—"

### September 27, 2005

Howard Dean endorses Ferrer, joining other prominent national Democrats such as Tom Daschle, John Kerry and John Edwards.

WNBC/Marist Poll:  
Bloomberg 53%, Ferrer 38%.

### September 28, 2005

US Representatives Jerrold Nadler of Manhattan and Gregory Meeks of Queens release statements accusing Bloomberg supporter US Representative Vito Fossella of using "coded, fear-mongering language" by linking Ferrer with former Mayor Dinkins, and decry the use of race-baiting.

### September 30, 2005

Andrew Cuomo endorses Ferrer.

The dailies describe Ferrer as "reeling" from "self-inflicted wounds." He falsely stated he had been educated in public schools (and then blamed an aide) and broke city rules by visiting a public school to campaign.

Bloomberg announces he will not take part in the planned October 6th debate at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, announcing a plan for two debates with Ferrer to take place in the final weeks of the campaign. For several days he is strongly criticized by Democratic and black leaders for his plan to skip the Harlem debate.

**Jef Pollock:** Yes.

**Jen Bluestein:** Yes.

**Jef Pollock:** *That* you want to get in on.

**Jen Bluestein:** We've never actually agreed on anything before.

**Mark Halperin:** Well, you've never agreed and it's rare that you admit that the candidate made mistakes, so that's good. So, Mr. Miranda, what were the candidate's mistakes in the initial statement and then in subsequently dealing with it? What were *his* mistakes—not the campaign's, but his?

[*pause*]

**Roberto Ramirez:** I'd be more than happy...the setting, the setting where the statement was made. If that same statement had been made at a church or someplace else, I do not believe that it would have had the consequences and would have become the kind of issue that it became. But because he was at a Sergeant Benevolent Association, then he gave the basis for everybody to question not only Mr. Ferrer on the statement but on his entire political career. That's number one.

Number two, the fullness of his answer. It's like when you say "the lightning round." When you say lightning round, you say yes and no, and one makes a statement that...full in...the full breadth of what Mr. Ferrer had done during his life and what he believed about this. So those are two fundamental problems.

However, even though it may have been said by Mr. Ferrer, I think that at the end of the day it's the campaign's responsibility. And you say, "Oh good, he did make a mistake." And I want to make sure—the notion that somehow the Ferrer campaign never made any mistakes and therefore he lost because there was this whole other set of issues is not what I think a number of us are raising. But I am sure the time will come for me to speak about that.

**Jef Pollock:** Hear that?

**Mark Halperin:** So you have listed two mistakes.

**Jef Pollock:** He blamed other people than the press, right?

**Mark Halperin:** I heard that.

**Jef Pollock:** I just wanted to hear that.

**Mark Halperin:** I'm shuddering. There was some shudder. We'll get to your mistakes, I'm sure. [*laughter*]

But you have listed two now. You said he shouldn't have said what he said where he said it. And he shouldn't have given such an expansive answer. Right?

**Roberto Ramirez:** That was not what I said. The fullness of his answer was encapsulated in one basic sentence that did not fully explain his feelings and his position on this issue.

**Jef Pollock:** The sound byte didn't explain that.

**Mark Halperin:** So he shouldn't have left a sound byte out there that did not encompass his overall sense of the issue?

*"If that same statement  
[about the Diallo verdict]  
had been made at a  
church ... I do not believe  
that it would have had the  
consequences and would  
have become the kind of  
issue that it became."*

*—Roberto Ramirez*

#### October 4, 2005

After a long negotiation, Bloomberg reaches a tentative contract settlement with the teachers' union. The *Times* describes the move as "neutralizing" the union for the remainder of the campaign.

#### October 6, 2005

Bloomberg announces a subway terror alert just before rush hour, based on information received from Washington. The threat was abruptly dropped on October 11th, causing some to characterize it as an election ploy. Further investigation reveals that on October 3rd homeland security officials

privately tipped off friends and relatives in New York to a possible threat, prompting calls for an investigation by Governor George Pataki.

Mayor Bloomberg sits out the televised debate with Ferrer and Ognibene at the Apollo Theater.

#### October 9, 2005

Bloomberg demands Ferrer return \$36,000 in contributions from donors connected to tobacco companies. Ferrer uses the opportunity to point out the difficulty of running against a billionaire.

**Jef Pollock:** Correct.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Did he make any mistakes in the aftermath of the remark, as it began to be covered and as it began to be discussed and some people demanded an apology or clarification? Did the *candidate* make any mistakes in that respect?

**Roberto Ramirez:** I think that the campaign did.

**Mark Halperin:** The candidate blameless...?

**Roberto Ramirez:** I want to live in your world: yes or no. It doesn't work that way. There is an ongoing process and you hope that it is a one-day story. You hope that the answer satisfied. But then you have another number of factors because you're not living in a vacuum; you have a lot of stuff going on. And I think it was the responsibility of the campaign to make it a one-day story or a two-day story or a three-day story. And I believe that given the difficulty of the statement having been said in one sentence, it just did not allow for much room, given what the candidate believed. So it was very difficult and we did not deal with it. We, the campaign.

**Mark Halperin:** But just to put a point on *his* role. You won't characterize anything he did—internal deliberations or in public performance—as a mistake that made it worse?

**Jef Pollock:** In the immediate aftermath, in the *immediate* aftermath—again, we're dealing with the situation—the candidate firmly believes that what he had said.... There's nothing to apologize for what he had said, because what he had said was something that is fundamental to something he believes, which is that we have a rule of law and that we either have to either go with the rule of law or not. And if you don't like the process, you've got to change the process.

All of that didn't necessarily always get communicated well. That is the one thing. And as it dragged on I think Freddy, whose relationship with the press was... I don't know how some of you might say... tense, hostile.... Freddy was skeptical of the press and from the very, very beginning. And so as it dragged on, I think you're asking a question of performance. I

think the performance got angrier and that's not necessarily... that didn't necessarily help, in terms of dealing with it. I just think that sort of notion of.... And it's frustrating for anyone to have to be asked the same question for eight weeks that I'm still waiting for the mayor to be asked and answered. It's frustrating for anyone to have to deal with it. Trust me, I know.

**Mark Halperin:** I will bring the other campaigns in, but I want you to go back to the question of staff responsibility. What were the big moments when you tried to deal with it? Or did you not have big moments in trying to deal with it and you let it drift, which you'd say you'd be accountable for?

**Jef Pollock:** Couldn't have let it drift.

**Mark Halperin:** What were the big moments when people presented ideas or plans that you didn't try, that you did try, that you think failed?

**Roberto Ramirez:** There was a complete and total set of discussions. There were people that were brought into the room from different walks of life. There was a true and long—I remember—long hours of discussions on the nature of the statement, the backdrop to it, the history, his record and what did it mean, because he had said it in such a way that it did not leave much room for interpretation in people's minds. So there were many, many different times. Every single day, we dealt with this. Every day.

**Mark Halperin:** What were the range of things considered to deal with it that were rejected by the candidate or by the staff?

**Roberto Ramirez:** A) Stir up an apology that needs to be said and needs to be said immediately. That was the first one.

**Mark Halperin:** Did he reject that?

**Jef Pollock:** He and others rejected it.

**Mark Halperin:** And who were the advocates for apology?

**Roberto Ramirez:** I'm not going to tell you, right? *[laughter]*

**October 12, 2005**

WNBC/Marist Poll:  
Bloomberg 59%, Ferrer 32%.

Quinnipiac Poll: Bloomberg  
60%, Ferrer 32%, Ognibene  
1%.

**October 18, 2005**

City Council Member Eva  
Moskowitz, who had been

critical of the mayor's school  
reforms, endorses Bloomberg.

**October 19, 2005**

Rev. Jesse Jackson endorses  
Ferrer, calling Bloomberg  
the "biggest financier of the  
Republican Party."

**October 20, 2005**

Bill Clinton campaigns on  
behalf of Ferrer in the Bronx.  
A *New York Times* article  
refers to sources claiming the  
Clintons have done whatever  
the Ferrer campaign has asked  
of them but not much more,  
citing lukewarm support.  
The audio feed of the former  
president's statement fails.

**October 23, 2005**

*The New York Times*  
"enthusiastically" endorses  
Bloomberg.

*New York Newsday* endorses  
Bloomberg.

**October 24, 2005**

*Crain's New York Business*  
endorses Bloomberg.



*Miller Campaign Manager Brian Hardwick weighs in on how the Ferrer campaign handled the Diallo controversy.*

**Mark Halperin:** That's what we are here for. Who were the advocates for apology?

**Jef Pollock:** There really weren't at the time. I'm serious.

**Mark Halperin:** So what else was considered?

**Roberto Ramirez:** And actually, at the end of the day there is a discussion, there is a consensus and then there is a decision; so that's the decision of the campaign. There are no pieces that you pick up and say, "Well, so-and-so said or so-and-so said." I wouldn't do that.

**Mark Halperin:** Did you consider a big interview, a major speech?

**Jef Pollock:** Yes, all considered. All things considered.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask again, the three of you—you can give more than one-word answers—then bring in the other campaigns on this. Turn the clock back...

**Roberto Ramirez:** When you said the three of us, who of the four of us are you leaving out?

**Jen Bluestein:** Sorry. I was on the campaign then.

**Mark Halperin:** You were?

**Jen Bluestein:** Believe you me. Ask *me* about the night of March 15th.

**Mark Halperin:** It's the night of March 15th or the night of March 16th, after there's been some coverage. Turn the clock back: What would have been the right way to handle it, given the limitations you had about how he felt about what he said? What would have been the right way to handle it?

**Jef Pollock:** The political and convenient way would have been to apologize and to say it was a crime. So from a political campaign thing...



**Mark Halperin:** But with that off the table, since you say that was off the table, what was the right way? I give you the opportunity. The clock is turned back. How could you handle it better?

**Jef Pollock:** You know, I've never thought about it, Mark, because there was never an option other than—

**Roberto Ramirez:** You were there and answered the question over and over and over. Remember, this is also the beginning of all the forums. So we are going to three and four forums every single couple of days. So every day we have a new forum where the campaign will be asked, where the candidate will be asked by people, by reporters—every single day.

**Mark Halperin:** So nothing you could have done differently because the forums were coming up and he couldn't say anything differently than he said?

#### October 25, 2005

In a Quinnipiac poll, Bloomberg has a 31-point lead over Ferrer. By a 58 to 37 percent margin, voters agree with Ferrer's position that there are "two New Yorks," one for the rich and one for the poor.

#### October 27, 2005

*The Amsterdam News* endorses Ferrer. It had endorsed Bloomberg in 2001.

#### October 28, 2005

New York's major Spanish language dailies, *Hoy* and *El Diario*, split on their endorsements. *El Diario* endorses Ferrer, while *Hoy*

endorses Bloomberg.

The *New York Post* endorses Bloomberg.

The *Daily News* reports that Bloomberg has spent \$63 million on the race. \$17 million of which had been spent in the last three weeks, for an average of \$34,000 an hour. In contrast, Ferrer is

reported to have spent \$7.6 million total.

**Jen Bluestein:** Look, I think fundamentally you had a question; as Luis was saying, you had ample opportunity for him to be out there where he was going to get asked about this. So you really only had one choice: he could either stay home or go out there and keep answering the question. He wasn't going to stay home for obvious reasons; it would have made it worse. So he went out there and he answered the question again and again and again. And if we had had him stay home, you guys would have pilloried him.

**Roberto Ramirez:** And the answer was, accept responsibility for your words; in fact, acknowledge that they were very badly said. And just go on to state your record. There are very few other options outside of, in fact, saying, "No. I apologize. This is a crime." If the candidate does not believe that, I would not want...I would never ask a candidate to betray that which the candidate believes in. And this candidate, Mr. Ferrer, believed that the error of the statement was in his failure to have articulated the fullness of what he believed.

**Luis Miranda:** Other than apologizing, as we said was discussed, we had to explain, and unfortunately, explaining takes several sentences rather than "I'm sorry." So I will be interested in the other campaigns sort of—

## THE DIALLO DEBACLE: THE OTHER CANDIDATES RESPOND

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Chung, let me ask you. I know you're not perfectly positioned to answer this but, why didn't the Fields campaign make more of an issue of this?

**Luis Miranda:** What did you say?

**Jef Pollock:** They did.

**Chung Seto:** Well...

**Jef Pollock:** At first.

**Chung Seto:** This is certainly before my time at the Fields campaign, but I know the candidate made clear that it certainly was not an issue that she wanted to exploit. And

initially that was really...she felt it...it was insensitive to have exploited the situation. But she has said on the record and she, herself, said last night that the press kept...again, the questions were needling her every day. So while Freddy got asked to clarify his position, she was asked why she wasn't trouncing on Freddy. And to this day I don't know what Weiner's position on Diallo is. I don't know what Miller's position on Diallo is because—or Bloomberg's—because they weren't asked. So the black candidate—the black woman candidate—got asked over and over and over to the point where she was like, "Look..." You know, she felt—

**Jef Pollock:** Don't you give that "crime against humanity" bullshit answer...

**Nick Baldick:** We did have an answer: a crime against humanity.

**Brian Hardwick:** But Chung makes a good and relevant point, which is that we—and I presume the Weiner campaign made the same decision—we decided to try to stay out of it as much as possible. That's the rational thing to do, when they have to answer this question over and over again for days, and you just grilled them for ten minutes about it. These are tough questions to answer and Borough President Fields was seen as the natural next candidate to go to. So the strategic decision for us and presumably for the Weiner campaign was to try to stay out of it.

But I also wanted to make one other point about Diallo that ties into Nick's point earlier. I think that what Diallo did was further this air of inevitability that was already developing and the Bloomberg administration had done a good job in 2004 starting to develop, in that it brought Freddy back to the pack. That before that he had been ahead of Bloomberg in some of the head-to-head polls, and instead it became a horse race in the Democratic primary and it became...at almost the same time that Bloomberg started spending money and advertising. So it becomes this dynamic of Big Mike versus these four little Democrats. And it already emerged in the Inner Circle dinner, which I think was in April. The song about the Democrats was "The Drab Four." And that was the dynamic that had already emerged and to me it meant that this race was essentially decided by May.

### October 28, 2005 (cont'd)

At an event at the Waldorf-Astoria, former President Clinton shared a brief meeting with Bloomberg as they both showed up for an event. The resultant photo is released by City Hall, riling the Ferrer campaign, which Clinton had endorsed the week prior. It fueled rumors

that the endorsement was lukewarm.

A *New York Times* poll shows Bloomberg with a 67 percent approval rating and a comfortable lead over Ferrer (52 to 29%). Fifty-two percent of voters could not offer an opinion on Ferrer, despite his years in public service. Ferrer leads among

Bronx voters, Latinos (by 56%) and those earning under \$30,000. Bloomberg leads among Democratic voters by 49 percent and among black voters by 42 percent. The poll also shows that only 40 percent of voters consider Bloomberg to be a "typical Republican," showing that his efforts to distance himself from his party are paying off.

### October 30, 2005

Bloomberg and Ferrer participate in a debate. *The New York Times* calls it Ferrer's "best day" so far in the race, as he was able to position himself as "an alternative to the Bloomberg juggernaut."

The *Daily News* calls Ferrer's effort "too little, too late."

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. I want you all to comment on Diallo any way you wish, including maybe taking issue or agreeing with their suggestion that there was really nothing, if unless they were willing to apologize, that they could have done.

**Joel Benenson:** I don't know what would have worked. As I listened to the options you put on the table, they are probably all things that we all would have thought about. I guess I would probably lean towards doing a larger speech. If Roberto is right, that the difficulty here is the full set of beliefs that Freddy had about this issue, and I could immediately think that this isn't going to go away in one or two days, that a) the press will keep going at it or Virginia Fields might go at it. Not knowing what her sentiments are, I would anticipate either of those. I might try a more expansive way to get it off the table: give a full speech, give more rather than less, and try to remove it as the issue that was going to be asked every day for three weeks.

Whether it would have worked or not, I don't know; and it might have depended on how the other campaigns would have reacted. I think certainly from our points of view, we were only going to answer if asked. We weren't going to stoke it. So the only question was could you do it in a way that certainly got the Fields campaign to not ask or that when the reporters asked the question, say, "You know, gave a 25-minute speech on this, lets move on to the other issues of the day." I don't know if it would have worked and gotten it out of the press, but that's what I would have thought about.

**Roberto Ramirez:** Beyond the substantive issue—the issue of the politics of it—look what it did. It gave everybody an opportunity—certainly the Bloomberg campaign and just anybody running.... Ferrer's statement goes to the core of what was supposed to be this coalition that he had put so well together in 2001, of African Americans—had voted 72 percent—for him, Latinos and a smaller number of white voters. So you start with that basic premise. That one didn't go so well. If he pandered on this, then he...looks at everything else that he has done.

Once you get there, the statement of Diallo becomes the platform from which everything else evolves and then you might as well just face it, answer it, accept responsibility for

*"To this day I don't know what Weiner's position on Diallo is. I don't know ... Miller's ... or Bloomberg's. Because they weren't asked. So the black candidate—the black woman candidate—got asked over and over and over."*

*—Chung Seto*

it and hope that as you move on the other substantive issues that you bring in will allow you an opportunity to go on to win the primary.

**Joel Benenson:** Can I ask Roberto one question on that? Do you think if you had opted—and again, I don't know the answer to this—if you had opted for a larger speech, given what you said, that this creates a wedge in your own coalition, and you went for a fuller response, a more statesman-like response, that you could have brought that coalition back quicker?

**Roberto Ramirez:** Remember the backdrop of this. Freddy was going to the Action Network with Sharpton. You have Charles Barron out there. You had a lot of forums in which Mr. Ferrer was confronting and answering this statement. That kind of large...as he did at Lehman College in addressing the "other New York," is sort of the kind of example that I think would have fit, except that in the middle of this madness that kind of speech now lends itself for a

#### October 31, 2005

The *Daily News* endorses Bloomberg, calling him an "extraordinary mayor."

The *New York Observer* endorses Bloomberg.

#### November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005

A Quinnipiac poll shows Bloomberg leading Ferrer by 28 points (59–31%). In this latest survey, Bloomberg leads Ferrer 72 to 18 percent among white likely voters and 51 to 42 percent among black likely voters, while Hispanic likely voters back Ferrer 51 to 40 percent. By a 59 to 16 percent margin,

New York City likely voters have a favorable opinion of Bloomberg, with 20 percent mixed. Ferrer gets a 30 to 27 percent favorability, with 30 percent mixed and 10 percent who say they haven't heard enough to form an opinion. "Maybe it's Bloomberg's ubiquitous presence—and Ferrer's near absence—on paid TV, but voters have

a favorable impression of Mayor Mike while Ferrer earns only a stand-off," said Quinnipiac Director Maurice Carroll.

WNBC/Marist Poll:  
Bloomberg 62%, Ferrer 31%.

number of other potential problems. And now you have three or four people that will, for whatever reason...because they believe it is the right thing to do and they have to answer these questions...so then you put the candidate in a much worse position. So the only possible option: accept responsibility for your words, explain them, talk about your record and move on. And that's what we all thought we did.

**Jen Bluestein:** I just also think it would have been a self-fulfilling prophecy to do a big speech. It might have felt good to us. It might have interested people who were really interested in the subtleties of Ferrer's comments and whether a crime is a crime because a jury says it is or because of the actor who does the crime. But I believe with every bone in my body that if he had given a fabulous, subtle speech about his record and his beliefs and why he said what he said, the first question from the press corps would have been, "When will you apologize?"

*"I believe with every bone in my body that if he had given a fabulous, subtle speech about his record and his beliefs and why he said what he said, the first question from the press corps would have been, 'When will you apologize?'"*

*—Jen Bluestein*

**Mark Halperin:** We've got to move off of this because we've got two very big topics—

**Roberto Ramirez:** But before you do, I want to say one last thing, which goes to what Chung said. Because it's the first, I think, the first building block. One particular issue involving an African American that was shot—one Latino running, one black woman running—and the press would only go and insist, *insist*, never move away from the black woman and the Hispanic man, talking about this issue, while allowing and literally never putting the same questions to the other candidates.

And to me that's the first building block and I think there are other building blocks.

**Mark Halperin:** We will talk about that at lunch. I need to clarify, as David Chalian reminded me, that your candidate did ask for an apology at one time.

**Jef Pollock:** Yes.

**Chung Seto:** Yes.

**Mark Halperin:** So how does that fit in, briefly?

**Chung Seto:** Weeks later. Weeks later. It was not an immediate...

**Mark Halperin:** How did that fit in with the...was that planned or she just blurted it out?

**Chung Seto:** No, it was not—

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask one more question, because I think there is an elephant in the room that will come up in the general as well. And again, I don't mean any disrespect to the candidate, but candidates are a big part of the campaign. Was his inability to effectively communicate, as a candidate, with reporters on television, in speeches, was that a hindrance in trying to deal with this issue, once the problem had been created?

**Jen Bluestein:** Yes.

#### November 2, 2005

*USA Today* reports that Bloomberg has spent nearly \$67 million of his own fortune on the campaign so far, noting that he's nearing the \$75 million record he set in 2001. Ferrer has spent \$7.6 million.

#### November 3, 2005

*The New York Times* reports that national Democratic leadership does not consider ousting Bloomberg a high priority as compared to ousting Republican officials in more conservative locales.

#### November 4, 2005

The city's largest civil service weekly, *The Chief*, endorses Bloomberg.

WNBC/Marist Poll: Bloomberg 64%, Ferrer 30%.

Bloomberg announces he's received the endorsement of Mayor Jorge Santini-Padilla of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

#### November 7, 2005

In a Quinnipiac poll one day before the election, Bloomberg has a 38-point lead, beating Ferrer, 68 to 30 percent. Quinnipiac Director Carroll says Bloomberg is "poised for a win of historic proportions."



**Jef Pollock:** Yes.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. And what is the lesson there about how to deal with candidates who are challenged in terms of communication?

**Jef Pollock:** Look at Anthony Weiner. We can't all...I mean, it's not...

**Nick Baldick:** Look, I mean...

**Mark Halperin:** Did you coach him? Did you...

**Nick Baldick:** *[laughs]* Look, people don't change, Mark.

**Male in audience:** Oh, that's baloney. *[laughter]*

**Jen Bluestein:** Sent him out every day...

**Mark Halperin:** This was one of the biggest problems you faced. Tell us about how you would work with him to try to coach him to be able to explain this more clearly. Did you have him in front of the mirror? Did you videotape him? What did you do?

**Nick Baldick:** We did a lot of prep. After I joined the campaign.... Look, at a certain point people don't change. And in politics, candidates should understand that the press is neither your friend nor your enemy. They are somewhere in between and sometimes candidates think too much one end or too much the other. Freddy obviously thought too much one end. And I don't think you can change that. You can keep repeating it. You can keep talking to him about it. And I think he had a good relationship with some members of the press. I think—

**Mark Halperin:** Submit that list for the record.

**Nick Baldick:** It's a short list.

**Roberto Ramirez:** I just want to sort of correct the record. Because it now gets boiled down to "the candidate was challenged with communication." It was not—

**Nick Baldick:** No, no. I—

**Roberto Ramirez:** I'm speaking for the way that you framed it. Not necessarily Nick, but the way you framed it.

**Mark Halperin:** Yes, as the only—

**Roberto Ramirez:** Now, all of a sudden what happened is that Fernando Ferrer can't handle the press. Well, Fernando Ferrer had been handling the press for 20 years and on any number of issues, so I want to make sure that the record is clear that in this instance, it was a very difficult, tough issue to deal with. And could Fernando Ferrer have handled it better with the press? Absolutely. But to narrow it down to, "Now you have a Fernando Ferrer who is challenged with the press," is not something that I will allow.

**Jef Pollock:** No, we did not handle it, we did not handle the whole...the campaign did not handle it.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Let me stop you. We have two big topics to deal with. In a moment, we need to turn to the Bloomberg campaign and ask Bill Cunningham to come join us at the table, as a senior representative here, to go through what they were doing during this period. A very big topic, which I hope will involve him answering some questions from me and you all asking him questions as follows.

We also need to deal with, obviously, the primary itself and Anthony Weiner's decision to get out. That leaves us a lot of things that we won't cover necessarily, including—*[to Chung Seto]* you will be disappointed to know—perhaps we won't get to the flyer and how that affected your campaign. We would like to get to it but we may not. Are you disappointed?

**Chung Seto:** Slightly. *[laughter]*

**Roberto Ramirez:** If you can, I would hope you would get to it, by the way.

**Chung Seto:** Yes. I would too.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me call on, for one final Diallo question, Mr. Andrew Kirtzman. Did you submit this question?

**Andrew Kirtzman:** Yes. Here's the question: I understand that Ferrer went out after his comments, day after day, forum

#### November 8th, 2005

Election Day. Bloomberg is easily re-elected, beating Ferrer by 20 percentage points, the largest percentage margin of victory for a Republican in the city's history. He drew roughly half of black voters and about three in 10 Latino voters, according to *The New York Times*.

Ferrer carried only his home borough, the Bronx.

*New York Newsday* reports voter turnout "takes a nosedive."

In all, Bloomberg spent \$84.6 million on his campaign versus Ferrer's \$9.1 million.

#### November 17th, 2005

A Quinnipiac poll reports Bloomberg scoring his highest approval rating ever, 75 percent.

after forum, repeating the answer that you had crafted. But you're kind of positing it as though he were going out and kind of articulating his strong beliefs and defending his comments, when what you really did was you crafted this incredibly lawyerly, vague answer which neither defended it nor apologized but kind of glossed over it by saying, "I take responsibility for careless comments."

So, if what you are saying today is he couldn't apologize because he really believed in his comments, wouldn't it have answered the question the first day by saying, "I still believe it wasn't a crime"? Instead, according to my humble opinion, *you* guys kept it alive by evading the central question—in our mind, in the public's mind—which is basically, does he or doesn't he think it's a crime? Does he regret the sentiments? Or the way he said it? It just seemed that he kept it alive by never getting to the heart of the matter.

Was he right? Was he wrong? Does he still believe it was a crime? And wouldn't people respect him more if he had just said that?

**Luis Miranda:** I don't agree with that.

**Mark Halperin:** What don't you agree with?

**Luis Miranda:** Freddy was giving his response and his response was, "We have a system of law and regardless of what I think, a jury found them not guilty." So that's what it is. And you guys...this is sort of probably not what Freddy said but



some of what I was thinking and I'm sure Freddy, too. You keep asking me, "Is it a crime or not?" like this is a yes or no question. And the fact is that it's not. "It already ran its course, it went through the legal process. It was found not to be crime. So it was a horrible thing that happened. It made us look at policies that we change. And it goes to the heart of what I have done all of my life." That was his response.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, we're going to have to move—

**Mark Mellman:** Can I say one—

**Mark Halperin:** Real quick.

**Mark Mellman:** On their behalf, perhaps, but...the reality is it's easy to say in retrospect this answer would have ended the controversy or that answer would have ended the controversy. The reality is that answer might have also ended the campaign for a guy who went on to win the primary in a landslide fashion. So it may have ended the controversy very quickly and very clearly, but it might also have brought the campaign to a screeching halt. And so that has to be balanced.

**Roberto Ramirez:** But it would have satisfied Andrew Kirtzman. *[laughter]*

**Mark Mellman:** It may have been.

**Mark Halperin:** Not an insignificant consideration. *[laughter]*

Maggie Haberman points out, I'm sure correctly, that the mayor was asked about Diallo, as were your candidates, maybe not repeatedly. And she raises some other points, which I want to talk about at lunch, regarding, again, press coverage of Diallo, which we've touched on.

## FLYERGATE II: THE FIELDS PHOTO

**Mark Halperin:** Here's what I want to do. I want to move to the flyer. Do that for five minutes and that will leave us time, I think, to get to our last two big topics. So what I would like to do, Chung, is before we take questions from anyone in the audience who might be interested in this issue, is ask you to explain.... Almost everybody in this room is familiar with the fact, but I would like you to explain your version, highlighting what you think the misconceptions are about what happened and who was responsible.

**Chung Seto:** Well, here are the facts. The fact is that prior to my coming onto the campaign in late March, the consultants on the campaign worked on flyers. The Fields campaign had a major breakfast, sort of their coming-out, first fundraiser at the end of March and they were preparing for a flyer. And it

*WCBS-TV's Andrew Kirtzman asks Ferrer's campaign staff to explain the candidate's stand on the Diallo shooting.*

*Campaign Manager Chung Seto discusses the media coverage of  
C. Virginia Fields' controversial campaign flyer photo.*

was approved at that time to be used. A flyer that we all now know included individuals not known to the campaign.

In early July, on a Wednesday, reporters called regarding the photo that was used. As we all now know, it became sort of the front-page, “photogate” story. It was explained to the candidate—and I want to say on record that all the senior staff were in a room and we all looked around and asked the question, “What’s the problem? Why was this photo...what is it?”—and it was explained to the candidate at that time there was no big deal. That it was a collage.

**Mark Halperin:** Explained by?

**Chung Seto:** Explained by Joe Mercurio, senior consultant to the campaign. There was a collage. We even got the consultants, Winning Directions, our graphics folks, on the line, who also explained that it’s really not a big deal. And so what hyped up during that conversation was—well, then they are, the reporters, certainly...the *Daily News* and *New York Post*—was questioning the credibility of the candidate. And we must do something about it because obviously it was a collage, it was no big deal.

And that’s what was said to the candidate. And it was decided that it was sufficient for her to call a press conference at the steps of City Hall to explain herself, that she accepted the apology of the designers and wanted this issue to move on but she felt that the attacks on her integrity and credibility was on the line and she needed to say some words in defense of herself.

That being said, came back and really wanted to dig in deep further, as to why decisions were made prior to my coming on. And then the candidate found out that they were stock photos. People she didn’t know were used. And she was really hurt and disappointed and felt betrayed and the trust broken between her senior consultants. And so she made a decision at that time—and some of us in the campaign asked if that was what she wanted to do, because it was a late-evening decision—and she decided to proceed with the firing of Joe Mercurio, who she felt misrepresented the truth. And she fired him for...her statement was “strategic differences.” And it was not just based on this flyer.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask you again to try to be short and then just a series of questions. Do you accept what seems to be the conventional wisdom that the controversy involving the flyer and the inability to deal with it hurt her political standing, hurt her fundraising and maybe, you could say even, effectively kept her from winning the nomination?

**Chung Seto:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I just felt that three and a half weeks of coverage of a photo was just obscene. And it was just way over the top.



**Mark Halperin:** So, from a campaign management point of view...again, turn the clock back. It happened, the photo is out there, the tabloids are interested in it as a story. What could you have done differently?

**Chung Seto:** Well, if people told the truth, it wouldn’t have happened.

**Mark Halperin:** Well, but in the world you were operating in, as you again see with hindsight, and from your point of view, people weren’t telling the truth.

**Chung Seto:** Correct.

**Mark Halperin:** What could have been done differently to keep this from effectively ending her candidacy? Turn the clock back. You see what’s going to happen. You see the tabloid interest. You see the interplay between people that would occur. What could have been done differently? Anything?

**Chung Seto:** No.

**Mark Halperin:** A question from Mr. [Henry] Stern [former commissioner, New York City Department of Parks & Recreation], which is an excellent one: “Don’t you think the fuss about the flyer was a substitute for people who had low regard for Ms. Fields’ abilities but didn’t want to say that directly and used this as an opportunity to try to criticize her?”

**Chung Seto:** Interesting question. I think that if you look back at the timing of the photo, there were already stories late May that questioned her ability to stand on issues, her substantive style, lack of policy initiatives and so forth. And so I would

say that post-story, it intensified. And it went right to, again, the heart of her...she got questions about her integrity—not just her management style, but credibility and integrity over a photo.

**Mark Halperin:** Now, again, this is a big topic; we have other big topics. There's a great scene in *Annie Hall* where Woody Allen says, "I happen to have Marshall McLuhan right here," and he brings on Marshall McLuhan.

We happen to have Joe Mercurio here. *[laughter]*

So I would love to give him the mic and ask him...if you would just talk.... Again, we could have a great Beckett play here—or Mamet play, rather. From your point of view, to leave the historical record, what is different, as you think the conventional wisdom stands today, from your sense of the reality of what happened?

**Joe Mercurio:** Considering I don't do graphic work or Photoshop work, the candidate made the initial request in the early flyer. Winning Directions had done the initial flyer, quickly, for a fundraising event early in the campaign. And the candidate specifically requested that in the website, which was being done at that time, and all the printed material, that we include Asians in the material. They had made a change that she had requested. She approved it. It was signed for. There are tapes and memos, conference calls early on that included the conversations about it.



Later on in the campaign...and it was originally a bigger collage with more segments of photos, and I didn't know it was not part of a...in-house photos at that time. Later in the campaign we were going to print a more expensive piece and instead, for the gay rights parade, another version, an expanded version of the original piece, was printed over our objections, because we wanted the other piece.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask you again to jump forward because we do have to get these other two big topics. If you could go back and do it over again, what would you do differently?

**Joe Mercurio:** Well, I didn't want to do anything beyond the initial stories. The campaign press person at the time and the campaign manager, who was new to the campaign, felt, as the candidate did and some others, that a press conference was needed. I think that was a mistake. It didn't need to go beyond that day. It could have been a one-day story. I mean, London was bombed by terrorists that day and they *still* managed to continue the story, which is unbelievable, and I think it was bad handling on the part of the personnel on the campaign.

**Mark Halperin:** What do you think is the main factual dispute between you and the candidate, regarding what happened?

**Joe Mercurio:** I think she probably really believes that she didn't make the initial request, but it is pretty clear, to me, from the documents. I didn't even remember that Wednesday, when it came out, that we had printed an original one. But when we looked back at the material, there was plenty of documentation.

**Mark Halperin:** So for you the factual difference is: did she approve it or not? Did she know about it or not?

**Joe Mercurio:** One of the people whose face was covered was one of the consultants in the campaign, who had mentioned it to her early on—I think perhaps as early as the breakfast it was first used at.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, hold on. Go ahead.

**Chung Seto:** I have to correct the record, because as Mr. Mercurio knows well since he is the one who released the emails, there was no.... It was him who pushed for the fast approval of the first initial flyer.

**Mark Halperin:** Stop. True or not true? Did you push for the—

**Joe Mercurio:** Not true. The emails clearly state, the previous version of the flyer—

**Chung Seto:** Well then you can reissue the same emails that he sent to all the reporters that indicated that. But look, I don't want to go tit for tat. And this is the reason why I want to

*Joe Mercurio, former consultant to the Fields campaign, tells his side of the 'Fields flyergate' story.*



say, for the candidate's perspective, she did not want to go tit for tat for someone who she has said from the beginning was fired and provided untruths to her and therefore she was not going to go tit for tat in releasing any other—

**Mark Halperin:** What were the untruths that were provided?

**Chung Seto:** Well, first, you asked about the press conference. Mr. Mercurio thinks that she shouldn't have done that. But it was under his guidance in the room, who said to her there was just no big thing, it was a collage; and so your credibility is now being attacked, which is why therefore she felt the need to publicly stand in front of everyone to defend herself.

So, we can sit back and say.... But that's why she did what she did.

**Jen Bluestein:** Mark, can I add a—

**Mark Halperin:** Hold on. What I want to do, because I know we are not going to settle all of this. I want each of the other three campaigns to say what you wanted to say, but in your answer I would like you to say again, from a campaign management point of view. Running elections in this city involves the tabloid press and an intense local television culture that is different than most other cities. So if you had been on that campaign, what could have been done differently to try to keep it from being...a relatively small thing from destroying any chances she had of being the nominee?

Jim?

**Jim Margolis:** I don't want to answer your question, Mark. *[laughter]*

**Mark Halperin:** Say it, then someone else will.

**Jim Margolis:** There you go. And I don't want to get too far away from being a sort of crass political ad guy, because that's kind of the function here. But politically, certainly, we let it go. And obviously, this continued to be a story precisely because it was the kind of environment New York is, that is special and different from any other place that I work with, with a couple of other exceptions in big cities.

And so, that was strategically just, "Don't get in the way; stand back." Which was essentially the same approach that we had on the topic discussed earlier.

I do want to say as someone who—not in New York, not this year; every single frame of every single ad that we did was New Yorkers here—but you often, in every ad that you people will go home and watch today, will see stock footage of kids in classrooms. You will see stock footage of health care being delivered that has no relationship to the city in which that takes place. And the idea that this kind of a story would continue to get the kind of currency that it did, when you've got 1.8 millions kids—or, not kids, but people without health care—when you've got one in five living in poverty, that this

*"It could have been a one-day story. I mean, London was bombed by terrorists that day and they still managed to continue the story ... I think it was bad handling on the part of the personnel on the campaign."*

*—Joe Mercurio*

is the environment and we have to deal with the reality of that environment. But the fact that this thing continued to roll out for this period of time is something that I think everybody ought to take a look at. And again, from strictly how do we want to exploit it, what do we want to do? We're going to stand out of the way. We're number four, we're an asterisk, at this point. Our whole strategy is to move into a different position. But it's something that people ought to talk about. And I got to say, I don't think this is the kind of big-deal question of candidates' credibility that it turned out to be in the discussion.

**Jen Bluestein:** I largely agree with Jim. I think that we stayed out of it for the same reasons that you guys stayed out of it when we were twisting in the wind. But also because I think at that point we thought we could face Ms. Fields in a runoff and it was not worth it to engage with her over this.

I want to say from a communications standpoint, that at that point I thought they made some mistakes in how they handled it but I respected particularly the sort of firm graciousness of their statement when Mr. Mercurio was let go. And I felt for them in the aftermath of that because they had done what I considered was the politically right thing to do, which was to put out this firm, gracious statement and then end it. And they had.... Wait. Let me say one thing, Mark. And then they had a little satellite out there, Joe Mercurio, who didn't end it...

**Mark Halperin:** I want to ask a question about that and then we're going to have to leave the topic.

**Jen Bluestein:** ...and it's very difficult.

**Mark Halperin:** One of the issues that this raises is, a consultant has a disagreement with the candidate. You saw, in the case of your campaign, David Axelrod leaving the campaign, both sides with that normal oath of silence. I think maybe he wanted to spend more time with his family, move on with other projects—something like that. *[laughter]*

I don't remember exactly.

In this case, there was a little bit of a different scenario. You openly were putting out things—I wouldn't necessarily call it leaking per se, because you weren't doing it anonymously. *[laughter]*

You were giving accounts and handing out what were what some could call proprietary internal emails of the campaign.

So the question is, as a consultant who had been paid a salary, who had been an adviser, was that an appropriate thing? Is that an appropriate thing for a consultant who leaves on controversial terms to do?

**Joe Mercurio:** Well, before the statement that Jen was talking about was put out, I know Pat Healy in the *Times* that morning, before the statement was put out, had run a story that he got from internal people in the campaign the day before that wasn't quite as pleasant. And the following week, when I put out the memos, the candidate had gone on the air and said something quite different than what was reality.

**Mark Halperin:** So you felt you had to defend yourself, correct the record? What was your motivation?

**Joe Mercurio:** I thought the record needed to be corrected and there are...there's plenty of additional material.

*“You often, in every ad that you people will go home and watch today, will see stock footage of kids in classrooms. You will see stock footage of health care being delivered that has no relationship to the city in which that takes place.”*

*—Jim Margolis*

There is one thing I would like to mention on the Diallo... *[laughter]*

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. It's got to be two sentences.

**Female in audience:** A form of payback.

**Joe Mercurio:** No, no, no...

**Jen Bluestein:** I never should have said anything. I'm sorry.

**Mark Halperin:** Two sentences, because then I've got to move.

**Joe Mercurio:** It's not payback. That day when NY1 called me to have Virginia make a comment on Diallo—the day they made the initial taping of the event—she reacted herself to it and framed in her own mind how she would go on the air. She went on the air that night and reacted and called it a crime and so on.

**Mark Halperin:** What is your point?

**Joe Mercurio:** And Nick Charles, who had been her press secretary.... And then she organized—

**Mark Halperin:** I need you to say what your point is about it.

**Joe Mercurio:** The entire next day she organized press coverage all day for comment.

**Mark Halperin:** Right. What's your point? Just that she spoke out early?

**Joe Mercurio:** Yeah, she spoke out immediately.

**Mark Halperin:** Bill Cunningham, can you come join us at the table right there?

**Nick Baldick:** Mark, can I...? Just one second. Jim Margolis—again, as someone not from New York who witnessed this mess—Jim made a really good point. Let's think about what we have been talking about this whole time. We put out a serious policy on dropouts. Congressman Weiner suggested tax cuts. There were some serious policy discussions made in this campaign. Actually, I thought in August and September it became a pretty serious primary discussion. But all of this discussion has been about gotchas and process crap. And with all due respect, I think this press corps needs to look at itself and say—

**Mark Halperin:** Good topic for lunch. Save it for lunch. I need to stop now.

**Roberto Ramirez:** I have a question for Jim.

**Mark Halperin:** About?

**Roberto Ramirez:** About what he just said.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, go.

**Roberto Ramirez:** I could not agree with you more. Let me tell you what the problem is. We all say what you said. We need to talk about that. Tell me, why do you think that that coverage continued on and on when you just said that's crap?

**Mark Halperin:** Great topic for lunch.

**Roberto Ramirez:** Well, thank you!

**Mark Halperin:** That's what we are talking about for lunch.

**Jen Bluestein:** Can we just have lunch now, since...?

**Chung Seto:** I know. That is the big...

*[everyone talks at once]*

**Mark Halperin:** That's for lunch.

## THE WEST SIDE STADIUM: BLOOMBERG'S CURSE TURNS BLESSING

**Mark Halperin:** Someone sent up a question saying, "Why are the Bloomberg people not at the table, as if they weren't involved during this phase?" And the answer is, they were supposed to be and we just got a little either short of space or confused. But I want to take you through what the Bloomberg campaign was doing during this period, because obviously you were very active. And I want to again, in about ten or fifteen minutes, run through a lot of things. And again, I would like the Democrats sitting here to ask questions and comment. And again, express surprise at things.

Let's start out with the stadium. How did you see that issue? Was there tension between the mayor's substantive policy desires and what the political team would have liked, in his desire to build a stadium on the West Side with public financing?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, the mayor is quite clear. He makes decisions regarding policy for the city without regard to polls and without regard to any advice from his political consultants. Our job in the campaign, our job at City Hall... kind of distinct in that regard, and not unlike what Steve was describing: the difference between inside the City Council and inside the campaign.

The mayor had been promoting the stadium for years. He had been promoting the Olympics for years. He believed they were good for the city. He believed they were economic development. He believed they brought benefits to all five boroughs. And he fought as hard as he could for what he believed in. And I think ultimately, although he did not get what he set out to get in terms of the stadium or the Olympics, I think people give him credit for fighting hard

for what he believes in. They can disagree with him, but they know where he stands and they know what he fights for.

**Mark Halperin:** On the political side, as you all had to sit there and think about the implications and you saw the glee that was in the eyes of the Democrats saying, "This is our way to attack him. There's great thematic here. There's great substantive issues here," what did you do to try to minimize the prospect of political damage from the stadium?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, before it was ultimately resolved, remember, to a large degree the stadium is what generated support for us among the building trade unions throughout the city. So we were picking up union support, labor support from carpenters, electricians, laborers, all of those workers who you would normally expect to support a Democratic candidate. In fact, four years ago the mayor had only one union supporting him. So the stadium had a benefit to us politically in that regard.

And outside of Manhattan, in different communities, there were different views about the stadium. In some places they saw it as possibly a good thing. They saw it as jobs. They saw it as bringing the Jets to New York.

In Manhattan it was viewed very differently, obviously, in terms of traffic, congestion and the size of the project on the West Side. But if we had to deal with the stadium going forward, we would have been making the best case in the outer boroughs on the job creation front.



*Bloomberg Communications Director Bill Cunningham discusses the role the West Side stadium played in the mayor's re-election.*

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask you one more question and then I'd like the Democrats sitting here to ask you questions or make comments. When the stadium was killed, were you happy?

**Bill Cunningham:** We sent flowers to Shelly Silver. *[laughter]*

**Mark Halperin:** What...

**Nick Baldick:** What color were the flowers? *[laughter]*

**Bill Cunningham:** Big red roses.

**Mark Halperin:** Would it have been...how big a problem would it have been in the general election, had it still been alive?

**Bill Cunningham:** Oh, well, I think.... Look, we understood in the polling that people disagreed. They thought the money could be used differently. There was some confusion foisted on the public, I believe, by some of the folks at this table and people in our line of work, that capital money could be used for operational expenses. It's against the law to do that. But the public...that's a little too esoteric for the public, in terms of how money is spent. Money is money when it comes to government.

But it would have been a problem. It would have been a particular problem for us in one of the goals we had in the campaign which was to better our numbers in Manhattan, especially in the Upper West Side. And that would have been really problematic with the stadium.

**Mark Halperin:** Gentlemen, what would you like to say or ask about the stadium, as you thought about it?

*“The best thing that could have happened to the mayor was the stadium going down. We all had polling that shows it would have been brutal for him. Not that I think he would have lost with the other factors.”*

*—Nick Baldick*

**Brian Hardwick:** From our perspective, we saw the stadium as the seminal issue in the spring, both to have Gifford take a leadership role on through the Council to try to do something about it. And so we looked at a bunch of different options about stuff you could actually get done, as it was set off against the mayor's cuts in the capital budget for schools, which the mayor quickly took off the table when he reversed course. So yeah, we felt like it was a good issue for us and we talked a lot about it.

**Mark Halperin:** Anything you considered to do—you did plenty, but anything you considered doing on the stadium that you didn't do?

**Jef Pollock:** The campaign and the speaker's office never spoke to one another.

**Mark Halperin:** Guys, anything you want to say about this?

**Nick Baldick:** Just one thing. Mr. Cunningham's point is so accurate. The best thing that could have happened to the mayor was the stadium going down. We all had polling that shows it would have been brutal for him. Not that I think he would have lost with the other factors. But it would have been brutal for him. He got the best of both worlds. As Mr. Cunningham points out, he got the political bonus because there were some unions that he was seen as fighting for them. And then he didn't get the pain. It was a twofer.

## **BLOOMBERG: THE INDEPENDENCE PARTY ENDORSEMENT**

**Mark Halperin:** Mr. Cunningham, let me ask you about another issue that was around during most of this period as well as the general...is Lenora Fulani. What was the political strategy to deal with her? And what were the hardest moments for you in making judgments about how the mayor should act and how the campaign should act?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, we accepted the endorsement of the Independence Party in the last election and again in this election. She is the albatross that comes with that endorsement. But that party had also endorsed Senator Schumer; it had endorsed Elliot Spitzer; it had endorsed 16 or 18 members of the state legislature.

**Mark Halperin:** What did your research say about how she was an albatross? What does that mean? What voters on what issues?

**Bill Cunningham:** We never actually tested her, as far as I can recall, in any of our polling.

**Mark Halperin:** Not enough money? *[laughter]*

Not enough polling?

**Bill Cunningham:** We were trying to run within budget, so—



**Mark Halperin:** Why wouldn't you have tested her?

**Bill Cunningham:** We don't need a poll to know that she's a lightning rod, that she's controversial and that she's one of the problems you get when you take an endorsement from that party.

**Mark Halperin:** Lightning rod, albatross, controversial: what were the issues with what voters that you felt made you vulnerable and made it an albatross?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, she particularly annoys Jewish voters because of comments she has made over the years and still makes. The mayor did criticize her again and blasted the remarks she made on NY1. And because she is in the New York County Independence Party hierarchy or whatever they call it, she gets a lot of exposure here in the city. And meanwhile there is an entire party of about 70,000 members in this city, and probably double that number around the state, that aren't named Lenora Fulani. And that's the party that we ran with.

**Mark Halperin:** Did you think it would be a bigger problem for you than it ended up being?

**Bill Cunningham:** No. You know, we had gone through this four years ago and I believe the public is willing to give the mayor the benefit of the doubt. I think in every poll the mayor was given credit for honesty and integrity and when he made a statement about his feelings or his beliefs, as opposed to hers, they accepted that. And they accepted, I think, that she is one member of a party. She might have a position in the county party. But there are hundreds of thousands of people who voted on that line around the state.

## **BLOOMBERG'S SPENDING: SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT**

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Now I want to move to money and your campaign during this period. And again, I'd ask you to consider—

**Bill Cunningham:** We had a very limited finance... [laughter]

**Mark Halperin:** This is your chance to help with the history of this, because it was extraordinary how much you were able to spend and not have the candidate's time taken up by fundraising.

In a normal campaign, in some campaigns, you take a budget. You start out, you say, "We are going to raise this much and we are going to spend this much in these categories, month by month." It doesn't always work out that way but there is a plan. Did you have a plan, starting at the beginning of the year, that laid out how much you would spend and on what things? Or was it more fluid than that because you didn't have to plan, because you knew the mayor would always have more?

*"We didn't accept donations from anybody. We didn't accept in-kind contributions from anybody. That's what the mayor's money does; it frees him from all of those obligations."*

*—Bill Cunningham*

**Bill Cunningham:** The mayor didn't become as successful as he has become without having plans and without having budgets for his companies and for the city and for his campaign. Kevin Sheekey actually ran the budget in the campaign, as he did four years ago. And I don't know the exact dollar amount that would have been the projected high mark, other than the fact that we still believe we are running under budget and we are still doing the accounting, so it's going to be a question.

**Mark Halperin:** What is the final figure likely to be?

**Bill Cunningham:** I don't know. The last report was about 67 million dollars. There will be another report in a couple of days. It'll go up. There was spending...

**Mark Halperin:** Preview it for us here. What is it likely to be?

**Bill Cunningham:** I never forecast what it is because I haven't seen all the bills. I'm not the accountant.

**Mark Halperin:** What's the range of where it will be?

**Bill Cunningham:** I believe that in the next filing you'll see... most of our spending in the campaign...there's a final filing, I think, due in January, where you clean up a few items. And you will see that we spent roughly about as much money as we spent last time. And I'd make the point that inflation-adjusted we might be actually spending less money. [laughter]

**Mark Halperin:** If you went back to January and a meeting sitting with the mayor and Kevin and others, is that what you had planned to spend, from the beginning of this year? Were there adjustments made up or down, based on how the race was going?

**Bill Cunningham:** No, there weren't really adjustments made up or down. To make those kinds of adjustments you are

probably talking about the end of the campaign, and based on all of the data available there was no reason for us to adjust upward in our spending.

**Mark Halperin:** So what was that figure based on? That the mayor didn't want to spend more? The symbolism of it?

**Bill Cunningham:** I think he wanted to run as close to last time as possible. I've never talked to him about it. Everybody at this table, I think, everybody in this room talked about a hundred million dollar campaign, I think, at one point. I'm not sure if it was the Ferrer campaign or some pundit who said that if you added both campaigns together, it's two hundred twenty million dollars or something. It won't be a hundred million dollar campaign. And as I said, I think it will come very close to what we spent last time, maybe a little higher than that.

**Mark Halperin:** What were things that people proposed spending money on that were turned down? *[laughter]*

**Bill Cunningham:** Well...

**Mark Halperin:** Which is a normal thing in a campaign, right? People propose, "Let's do this..."

**Bill Cunningham:** Terence Tolbert isn't here, but we did turn down the omelet station at the campaign. *[laughter]*

We actually...I believe if you look at...one of the things I think would be interesting... We ran a different campaign than last time. Generals are always criticized for running the last war. We changed focus. We spent a lot of time and effort and money on creating a volunteer base around the city. We opened storefronts all around the city. And we spent a lot of money on food and coffee for those volunteers. But that was different than the last time.

And we also probably spent less money on mail this time than last time.

**Mark Halperin:** Why?

**Nick Baldick:** That was because you had to do mail last time, right?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, last time we made the decision that mail was a good way for us to get under the radar, get our message out and develop a base for the mayor to run off of.

**Nick Baldick:** But wasn't...9/11 knocked out the TV stations?

**Bill Cunningham:** No, we had made a decision to go with mail long before that. The decision really was.... You know, there are somewhere in the neighborhood of 800,000 blank voters in this city. They are not registered in any party. We wanted to approach them. We wanted to do it under the radar and we did it with mail in the last campaign.

**Mark Halperin:** Again, talking about the period from January through September, did you have goals in terms of volunteers, in terms of efficiency of spending, in terms of endorsements? Did you have goals you did not meet? And if so, what were they?

**Bill Cunningham:** No. I think Kevin set out a goal of trying to get 50,000 volunteers—people who signed up on our website or signed up or called in or were brought in by neighbors and friends. I think we wound up with a list of about 55,000 people who did that in some form or another.

We got the union endorsements we went after, with the exception of 1199. And I can't think of anything where we had major slippage.

**Roberto Ramirez:** And I think TWU, too, may not have endorsed you.

**Bill Cunningham:** Yeah. TWU we never really expected to get. But—

**Roberto Ramirez:** And the only other point I would make is that you guys keep calling them volunteers. If you pay for them, they are not volunteers.

**Bill Cunningham:** Thank you, but I understand the difference in the dictionary between the word "volunteer" and a paid worker. We had paid workers. We also reimbursed the unions for workers who came to help us. And that will be all duly reported. And we didn't accept donations from anybody. We didn't accept in-kind contributions from anybody. That's what the mayor's money does; it frees him from all of those obligations.

**Mark Halperin:** Did you focus-group your spots during this period—your television ads, before you aired them—in some cases, all cases?

**Bill Cunningham:** In some cases, maybe in many cases. I think we did mall testing.

**Mark Halperin:** Mall testing in the city? Because there are not a lot of malls here.

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, I think "mall testing" is a term.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, so where did you do it?

**Bill Cunningham:** I don't do it but that would be done—

**Mark Halperin:** Where was it done?

**Bill Cunningham:** It would be done wherever Penn and Schoen does that sort of thing.

**Mark Halperin:** In this period, what do you consider to have been the most effective television ads that you ran?

**Bill Cunningham:** We had one public safety ad that was extremely effective in terms of moving voters for the mayor. It was probably put on the air in October—the second or third week in October. And the question we had was, “Do we save that for the end or do we put it on right away?” We knew it tested extremely well. It moved about 29 points in movement. So we put it on.

**Nick Baldick:** Was that the only factor at the time, do you think? Was it just the ad?

**Bill Cunningham:** No.

**Nick Baldick:** I mean, there was, you know—

**Mark Halperin:** I want to open it up to the Democrats, but let me ask one last question. You say you met all your targets. Obviously, it’s a unique campaign because you had a very wealthy candidate. What did you learn about the concept of running basically unopposed, a period with a lot of resources, about how to position yourself for the general election?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, we learned this in the first campaign and we saw it again in this campaign. The public—once you explain why you are spending your own money and how you are spending it—the public generally doesn’t care. We weren’t running a negative campaign. All of our ads and mail were very positive. There might have been one radio spot where we defended ourselves regarding something Freddy had said in one of his ads. But that was a very limited thing.

By and large, the public didn’t care because they accepted the premise that if the mayor spent his own money, that he had made by himself, he didn’t owe anybody anything.

We also learned that money alone—we’ve seen this in plenty of campaigns with wealthy candidates—money alone doesn’t get you elected. You can make the case that in 2001, 9/11 got Mike Bloomberg elected. The problems in the Democratic primary contributed to that. His money got him in position to be a viable alternative for the voters.

This time around, spending, as I tried to make the case, roughly the same amount of money, he went from winning by three points to winning by 20 points. And I think that’s a reflection of the record he built up over the four years. He challenged people to judge him on education and on what he did as mayor, and his whole campaign was explaining that to the voters.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, now we’re going to talk about the general election with you all and with Bill Cunningham and his colleagues. Do you two campaigns have anything you want to ask or say about this period of the mayor’s race?

**Steve Sigmund:** I do. Actually, even an earlier period. But first, as one of those pundits who made a prognostication about the two campaigns together—I think I said 150 million, which sounds like I’ll be right, particularly adjusted for inflation... [laughter]

My question is actually about an even earlier period, which was the period right after the initial mayoral polls came out in 2003 and the beginning of 2004. In the administration, how much were you all thinking about the primary field and how much was the 400 dollar rebate a decision to try to get out to the outer boroughs, as you said before, and shore up support very early, before anybody emerged in the primary field?

**Bill Cunningham:** When the numbers were down, I was at City Hall and I was communications director in the mayor’s office. And the mayor would not talk about the politics of any decision he had to make in regard to the budget, the size of the gap, tax increases; he just didn’t want to hear about the political impact of any of that. He was going to do what he believed was right and many times he might have said it to people in this room in conversation: he was running an experiment to see if the voters would appreciate someone who is straightforward, makes their decisions based on the merits and not on polls. And the experiment will be judged in 2005, on election day.

The experiment seems to have worked out the way he hoped it would.



*News India-Times Editor Veena Merchant and El Diario Opinion Page Editor Evelyn Hernández listen as campaign staffers reveal what took place behind the scenes.*

In terms of the rebate, that was a reflection of the fact that the economy was picking up. We had some ability to give back money. The question was, “Where?” The speaker had a tax proposal. It would have been a flat two or three percent change in the rate. It would have given homeowners 80 bucks or something like that. We had a 400 dollar rebate proposal. We believed the rebate was much better fiscal policy at the time, because if the economy turned sour, you didn’t have to give the rebate. You didn’t have to go back and ask for approval to raise taxes. You just didn’t have to give the rebate. It was a 250 million dollar cushion if things went south, whereas a drop in the rate would be a drop in the rate, and you would have to then go back and pass a whole new tax bill if you needed more money. So we had been through that once. We took our lumps for that for a long time and we didn’t want to go through that again.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Do you all have anything else? We need to move to primary day. Anything you want to ask him or say about their spending or other things during that period?

## THE PRIMARY: WEINER DROPS OUT

**Mark Halperin:** No. Okay. Let me ask you one question: your pollster tells you you’re right on the precipice of getting to 40 on primary day. What did you do? What are the key things you did to push at the end to try to get there that were predicated on the notion that you’re either going to make it or you’re not?

**Nick Baldick:** I hate to give our pollster credit but he said 39.

**Jef Pollock:** I was wrong.

*“If we had to bet on who we were going to be in a runoff with ... the person who had the best ability to move, by message and all sorts of other things, was Anthony. Not Virginia. And not Gifford. But Anthony.”*

*—Jef Pollock*

**Nick Baldick:** You were wrong by a point. I think we had... actually, because of spending, we had a more aggressive election day operation on primary day, I think. And we had thousands of people on the street and we knew that Jef had targeted exactly who we should turn out. But we had a similar to what I would say a general election turnout model. But I think the factor, obviously, that helped us was Reverend Sharpton’s endorsement, and maybe Roberto wants to talk about that, to some degree. And obviously, it was the thing that helped us get over the mark.

**Roberto Ramirez:** You are sorely mistaken, by the way, Mark. We’re not going to get 40 percent—I know we’re not. Marist polls told me that. Told me on Saturday: 32 to 30 percent. And I know because I both reached out to the Marist poll and I reached out to the Quinnipiac. It’s impossible; can’t do it. As a matter of fact, Fernando Ferrer is stuck! Can never hit 40 percent. Impossible; will never happen. Latinos will never vote for him. He’ll never get the black vote. Forget it; it will never happen. We did not think we were going to hit 40 percent. We’re thinking we are in the middle of a runoff here.

**Mark Halperin:** Yes, let’s talk about you all. You’re surging and some people said you’d surge to the top. Did you see yourself going higher than you ended up? What did you think the ceiling was as you were getting towards election day? If the campaign had been a week later, would you have moved more, or had you stalled out?

**Tom Freedman:** I think we were living in ambiguity. We knew we were moving. We’d done a poll midway through where we’d asked, “When do you think you’ll make up your mind?” Which was a question you had to be dubious about how accurate people can be, but as I recall, 47 percent said they would make up their mind in September. And another 15 percent said they would make up their mind in the last week of August. So we held every little penny we had to go on the air then. And we sort of had done crude kind of guesses, like how many of these people, once they hear who Anthony is.... And he spoke very directly in these spots—and you can talk to Jim about the ads—but they were just trying to go very directly to who he was.

When they saw that, we tried to project out, “Where do you think we’ll get?”

And I think we thought that we would be able to hold them under 40 and we would get above 30. I think that’s roughly where our head was.

**Joel Benenson:** I think the one other calculation, in our calculus from polling, to make it a viable runoff, a viable proposition, was that the two campaigns, Miller and Fields, would come in about 30 percent. They came in at 26 percent, and we thought if they got to 30, 32, the runoff, instead of being at 39 to 30, gets a little bit tighter and the proposition.... There are 39.58 to 30 on election night. It’s tighter and it’s a very different proposition coming out of primary night.



*Anthony Weiner's campaign team (from left): Joel Benenson, polling consultant; Jim Margolis, media consultant; and Tom Freedman, chief strategist.*

**Jef Pollock:** That is the exact same calculation we had, for the record. Two things. The first thing is that from the very... I said this last night, but on the record today: the Ferrer campaign knew from a year before, from the first poll that we did of primary voters, was, if we had to bet on who we were going to be in a runoff with—we thought we could get to 40, but if we had to be in a runoff with somebody—the person who had the best ability to move, by message and all sorts of other things, was Anthony. Not Virginia. And not Gifford. But Anthony. And the numbers and the polls showed he moved the best from a message perspective—at least in our poll. And then that changed, by the way, post-Diallo. It changed post-Diallo, where the numbers got tighter, though never as tight as the public polls showed, from my perspective.

But the one poll on the election, the one poll that was the weekend before—I think it was the Marist poll... Lee is here—the weekend before, that showed Anthony two points behind us: that I know fully well. I know my friend Joel... there's no way that they had anything close to that. Never. We never saw the margin anywhere under—at least *we* didn't—see the margin anywhere—

**Mark Halperin:** What was the closest you ever had it?

**Jef Pollock:** I had it at... the closest margin I think I had was 11.

**Mark Halperin:** What was the closest you ever had, Joel?

**Joel Benenson:** We didn't have a whole lot of Bloomberg money to spend on polling and at the end of the day I said, "Give it to Jim Margolis and put it on TV." The truth is, we really... Our last poll was right around Labor Day, in fact. So the last two weeks, we were operating—

**Mark Halperin:** Do you think you were ever as close as 11?

**Joel Benenson:** We thought there was a point where we were about eight, that it was—Freddy was in the low 30s, we were in the mid-20s—like 33-25.

**Jef Pollock:** It was never a two-point race. Never, ever.

**Mark Halperin:** Were you polling the Democrats, Bill Cunningham? Were you polling the primary?

**Mark Mellman:** We have to go to Bloomberg to find out what happened in the race?

**Bill Cunningham:** No.

**Mark Halperin:** No, he didn't. *[laughter]*



**Bill Cunningham:** By the way, we just relied on reading Quinnipiac and Marist, Weprin and Blum.

**Mark Halperin:** You'll be their defenders at lunch. Did all three of you talk to the candidate, between the day after the primary... Did you all three talk to him in person or on the phone, after his events and before he got out?

**Jim Margolis:** Yes. We went.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Tell us about the calculation and start with the question: Did you not think you could win the runoff? Or did you not think you could win it the right way?

**Jim Margolis:** Let me start... in fact, as first reported here, Jef and I had some conversations overnight, late at night...

**Mark Halperin:** So let's start there; let's go chronologically. Tell us about those conversations: how they took place, who initiated them, what was discussed?

**Jim Margolis:** I think from Anthony's perspective, if this had been a 34 to 36 race, we would have been in a runoff. There was a recognition, against the Bloomberg campaign, that if we went through two weeks of chad-counting and divisiveness, there was going to be no chance for anybody—and this was Anthony, who is sort of at the center—of *anybody* to get through this thing at the end. We would have been spending money. We would have been in just complete gridlock. So there was that factor.

When the spread was miniscule with you all, at that point, just under the top, and we were eight, nine points—depending on where you were in the evening—behind,

*“We actually tried to put a call in for ... [Freddy and Anthony] to speak. Their event was held in some place where their friggin’ cell phones didn’t work.”*

*—Jef Pollock*

moving toward 10. That’s a different calculation than if it’s a two- or a three-point margin. So from Anthony’s perspective, and this was true...I think the first comment he said is, “Look, this is not going to be a good outcome for anybody if we get into something that’s divisive and difficult. I want to see where this thing goes.” And that was part of the discussion that night, in terms of finding out what numbers we could get.

The conversations that Jef and I had were, “Let’s just keep our powder dry. Let’s not do anything, you know, crazy here between now and the morning.”

**Mark Halperin:** Did you let them know at that point that you might make a different decision?

**Jim Margolis:** No. And in fact Jef was less than enthusiastic as we talked that evening about, “Why, goddammit, aren’t you up?” *[laughter]*

**Mark Halperin:** Hold on one second. Let me just say one thing and then I want him to pick up here. We are going to run a little bit over here since we obviously want to complete this. This will be our last topic. We’ll run a little bit into the break and then I’m going to ask everybody to do a very brief closing statement—which I will say now so you can all think about it—for the Democrats, is: What does the primary process tell you about the state of the Democratic Party? Just one sentence from each of you after we conclude this topic. So be thinking about that.

Jef, you say you might have used some profanity. What was your argument? Were you asking him to concede?

**Jef Pollock:** No. No, no, no. Not at all. Not at all.

**Mark Halperin:** What was the basis of the conversation?

**Jef Pollock:** The anger and frustration over being 400 votes away from getting to 40 percent.

**Mark Halperin:** Did you ask for anything? Did you ask him not to attack?

**Jef Pollock:** A thousand percent no. There couldn’t have been more misreporting the day after.

**Jim Margolis:** That’s right.

**Jef Pollock:** Bad, bad reporting the day after.

**Mark Halperin:** About what?

**Jef Pollock:** About what had happened the night before. Much to my...and I attempted left and right.... There are folks who know I ran down to City Hall to say, “This is not true. I mean, this is really not.” There’s a lot of people talking—

**Mark Halperin:** Like what? Name some things that were wrong.

**Jef Pollock:** First of all, that Anthony and Freddy had spoken.

**Jim Margolis:** Right.

**Jef Pollock:** Here’s the fact...

**Jim Margolis:** Never happened.

**Jef Pollock:** Anthony Weiner...we actually tried to put a call in for the two of them to speak. Their event was held in some place where their friggin’ cell phones didn’t work. *[murmurs of agreement]*

So we actually did make attempts to have a—

**Bill Cunningham:** I suppose that’s our fault. *[laughter]*

**Jef Pollock:** Never, ever happened. Never happened.

**Mark Halperin:** They never talked? There was never a deal?

**Jef Pollock:** There was never a deal.

**Mark Halperin:** Of any kind?

**Jef Pollock:** Never a deal.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, so...

**Jef Pollock:** Never, never. No discussion.

**Mark Halperin:** ...dawn breaks. He does events. He does events.

**Jef Pollock:** He did.

**Mark Halperin:** When did he decide...had he not decided to get out at that point?

**Tom Freedman:** We went back and we had this.... We had a great campaign, but the one mistake was having a holding

room with no cell phone reception. And so we sat there, we stayed until 2:00 in the morning and then I think we continued in another location. He was determined to run. I think he got up the next morning—he went out and he was campaigning in Harlem—and I think he had this feeling that we were going to end up not having a...the notion was we were going to have...our plan had been to have a runoff that was about issues and substance and gain momentum.

**Mark Halperin:** Which one of you is...? Sorry. Go ahead.

**Tom Freedman:** And so we were were...I think...I believe he called me from Harlem and said, "This is not going to be what I thought it was going to be." Because he was out there and we were going to have litigation and trying to count chads.

**Mark Halperin:** Because of the ambiguity about whether he'd make 40?

**Tom Freedman:** Right, I think because of the ambiguity of whether he'd make 40.

**Mark Halperin:** Which one of you is most familiar with the conversations the candidate had with other politicians during this period? Did he talk, directly or indirectly, through one of you or someone else, or directly with Mark Green?

**Tom Freedman:** I believe...I mean, we were with him almost the whole night...

**Mark Halperin:** Did he talk with Senator Schumer? Did he communicate with Senator Schumer?

**Tom Freedman:** As much as I know—and I think he's said this. He would know better than I would. He dropped me off at 4:00 in the morning and he called me at 7:00 in the morning, so he said he had not talked to anybody. Nobody had—

**Mark Halperin:** What about after that but before the decision?

**Tom Freedman:** After he made the decision to drop out?

**Mark Halperin:** What is your best sense of the time he decided to drop out?

**Tom Freedman:** I think he decided to drop out when he started campaigning early, early that morning. He was doing TV, I think, at 6:00 in the morning or something.

**Mark Halperin:** But at that point he had not decided?

**Tom Freedman:** He was still planning on going.

**Mark Halperin:** So at what time of day, on that fateful day, did he say to someone—

**Tom Freedman:** You would have to ask him because—

**Mark Halperin:** When did he first communicate to one of you, "I want out. I'm not going to go forward."

**Tom Freedman:** That was like 7:00 in the morning—to me, I think.

**Joel Benenson:** I called him up when I saw him on TV. He had been out campaigning. He had done the first show.

**Jim Margolis:** He had done the first show.

**Joel Benenson:** He had done the first show and he said to me, "No, we are going to do the 12:00 event. I'm not going to keep doing this." And let me add one thing about it, because it's something that you started quoting Mark on in the beginning, which I think is absolutely right: that you've got to look at the conditions of the campaign. The conditions of the campaign changed that night. We went from being the candidate who was surging—the upstart nobody, into second place with momentum—to being 10 points behind. And all the stories the next day, the headline in the *Times* was "Ferrer Close to 40, Weiner in Second." Our momentum was gone. In the next two weeks the press wouldn't have written a single story about Weiner's momentum. It all would have come about counting chads, counting votes. So the condition of the campaign had dramatically changed.

**Mark Halperin:** So was part of the calculation that you didn't think you could win the runoff?



*Jim Margolis, media consultant to the Weiner campaign, discusses his candidate's decision not to challenge Ferrer in a runoff.*

*“We went from being the candidate who was surging—the upstart nobody, into second place with momentum—to being 10 points behind .... Our momentum was gone.*

*—Joel Benenson*

**Joel Benenson:** No. Actually, I still believed we could run a runoff. The question was, how does this play out? Can you structure a campaign in two weeks, have the kind of campaign you want to have or not? And the spirit—I’m the only native New Yorker on our panel here right now—but the spirit of the runoff was never designed to take away the nomination from someone who won by 10 points.

**Mark Halperin:** So you think you could have won the nomination but been too weak to beat Bloomberg? Is that...?

**Joel Benenson:** I think it would have been a difficult campaign. Look, I’m an optimist. I play to win. I always think we can win, so I’m the last guy to give up.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, let me just go back. You said by 7:00 a.m. he had decided he wasn’t going to go forward, right? Are you saying—again, you may not know every conversation he had, but without fear of contradiction except by him—he talked to *no* public officials?

**Jim Margolis:** I do not believe that he had any conversations with Schumer or Green. That this was really his decision.

**Mark Halperin:** No emails, no voice mails, no communication from anybody telling him—

**Jim Margolis:** I did not ask the question, “Did you get a BlackBerry from somebody?” But to the extent that the reports—let me put it this way—is that somehow there were Democratic power folks who were leaning on him to get out: it is absolutely untrue.

**Mark Halperin:** But stronger than that, no communication. Not just no leaning, no consultation?

**Jim Margolis:** There were reports that he was having conversations with Schumer during election. That did not happen at all.

**Mark Halperin:** Did he consult with any elected official or Democratic Party person, outside the campaign, about his decision?

**Jim Margolis:** I don’t know. If it took place, I don’t know about it.

**Mark Halperin:** Same with you? If he did you don’t know about it?

**Joel Benenson:** I don’t believe so. I don’t know about it if he did.

**Tom Freedman:** Conversations, but certainly, nobody put any pressure on him.

**Mark Halperin:** But you say he may have had conversations—

**Tom Freedman:** He may have—

**Mark Halperin:** But you don’t know?

**Tom Freedman:** I don’t know.

**Mark Halperin:** You don’t know of any.

**Joel Benenson:** We were with him until 3:30 in the morning. I spoke to him three hours later.

**Mark Halperin:** Did any of the three of you urge him to reconsider when he told you his decision?

**Joel Benenson:** In the morning?

**Tom Freedman:** No.

**Mark Halperin:** No.

**Tom Freedman:** I mean, one of the things about this was...I mean, if you know him...he makes up his mind for himself. And so the idea that...you know, we all kibitzed with him but...the guy...I mean, he got into this because he wanted to do it himself and he called us and said, “I want to do this.” And he got out. And I think he was, same attitude as Joel, kicking and screaming at the idea of not going ahead. He spent a lot of time during the race saying, “We’ve lost three times. We need to do something different.” And the notion of having a runoff... Whoever won would have been in a more disabled position going forward. I think that was a big...weighed very heavily on him.

**Mark Halperin:** The most important question in journalism: Anything I haven’t asked you about this that I should have, that would reveal interesting information? *[laughter]*

**Nick Baldick:** The answer is always “no” to that, Mark.

**Mark Mellman:** Can I just say a word, though? No interesting information here whatever. But in an otherwise...from our... it was a rather pedestrian campaign. In my view, the single



most brilliant action by a campaign was from these guys, turning what was essentially a landslide win—better than 10 points, 12 points; a landslide loss, I guess I should say from their point of view—into a moral victory. That is unbelievable. *[laughter]*

And it is brilliant and it is unique in the annals of political history, as far...well, not quite unique. I guess there was one other presidential candidate where that happened. But very rarely can you take a 12-point, landslide loss—especially when everybody thought you were running even and maybe even going to win—and then turn that into a moral victory. It's brilliant.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Gary Hart? Gary Hart, Mark?

## THE STATE OF NYC'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY

**Mark Halperin:** Again, let me say a couple of things. Again, here at the table, be ready to go around and tell me what you think we learned from the primary process about the state of the Democratic Party in this city.

Now, there has been much maligning of press and pollsters during this session and people want to defend their work and that's understandable. We are holding that to lunch. That is when we will discuss the interplay between the press and the polls, in particular. Big topic of lunch, and people will be able to speak about that in great detail and drill down. And pollsters and press will be open to the notion that they perhaps did not perform flawlessly during this election. But also will get a chance to defend themselves. I'm sorry we don't have time to do that now.

Now, we'll break, as soon as we go around the table, until 11:00 and we will come back in this same place and do the general election, much the same way. Nick Baldick, what does it say about the state of the Democratic Party?

**Nick Baldick:** Absolutely nothing.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Good answer.

**Nick Baldick:** I mean, it's true.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Anything that you think it says about the party?

**Ben Bluestein:** To me, as a New Yorker, it just showed how...I essentially felt, much as there were two New Yorks, there were two Democratic Parties here. There were people who were powerful and not engaged and people who were powerful and engaged.

**Roberto Ramirez:** It is unfortunate that we really didn't expand a little bit more on that because, if you really think about it, this Democratic primary achieved something that has not been achieved in the Democratic Party for a very long,

long time, which was a near unanimity of support for the candidate from the three other candidates who ran against him. And from a lot of people who would normally would have gone to the Republican incumbent. And what happened in those two days was really fascinating and I'm sorry that we don't have enough time to go over those days.

I think what it says about the Democratic Party is that it has the ability to come together—if the candidate who does win the nomination had the ability to reach out to everybody. In this case, obviously, Mr. Ferrer did, and the candidates who lost were absolutely terrific about it.

**Jef Pollock:** I agree with Roberto. I think that there's way—

**Mark Halperin:** That's good enough.

**Jef Pollock:** Fine. Good. I'll take that.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Chung?

**Chung Seto:** Yeah, I agree. Everybody expected a fight and there wasn't one, and so—

**Mark Halperin:** Bill Cunningham, you are familiar with the Democratic Party. *[laughter]*

What do you think it says?

**Bill Cunningham:** I am a Democrat.

**Mark Halperin:** Yeah, I know. That's why I say, "You are familiar with the Democratic Party." What does it say about—the Democratic nomination fight that ran against you—say about the state of the party?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, there is always something surprising in every mayoral election, and I think the Weiner phenomenon

*"Very rarely can you take a 12-point, landslide loss—especially when everybody thought you were running even and maybe even going to win—and then turn that into a moral victory. It's brilliant."*

*—Mark Mellman*

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*“This Democratic primary achieved something that has not been achieved in the Democratic Party for a very long, long time, which was a near unanimity of support for the candidate from the three other candidates who ran against him.”*

—*Roberto Ramirez*

is the surprise. And it shows that the Democrats have resources that they may not know about.

**Mark Halperin:** Good. Brian Hardwick?

**Brian Hardwick:** Probably speaking as the least New Yorker at the table, I think what it said in the end, in terms of the general election and then what it said ultimately about the primary, was that party and party affiliation had less importance than it had had previously. And Weiner’s surge said a lot about that too, because he spoke to middle class values and he really spoke to independent voters on those issues.

**Mark Halperin:** Mark Mellman?

**Mark Mellman:** I’m going to take one second to go back to the point you made at the outset and just say that as fascinating as this discussion was—I learned a lot, and I’m sure I will in the next panel as well—the reality is, 85, 90 percent of the things that we’ve spent time talking about had no real impact on the outcome of this race. And while that is...that, to me, is something that ought to be discussed at lunch as well. As fascinating as it is for journalists, does it really matter? And I

think the answer is, as fascinating as it is for us, most of what we talked about had zero impact on the outcome of this race.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Steve?

**Steve Sigmund:** I don’t think it says anything, particularly when a popular incumbent was running, who most people, most Democrats, believe was a Democrat anyway.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Joel?

**Joel Benenson:** Thirty years ago, Mario Cuomo, who Bill and I both worked for at one point, said that in New York, in a campaign, that the problem is the Democratic Party had lost touch with the middle class that were the backbone. And I think that the primary reflects to some extent that in this city the Democratic Party has to not only reconnect with the middle class workers and working families, but recognize that that term includes whites, African Americans, Asians, Hispanics...and they were the backbone of the party and we’ve got to get back in touch with them.

**Jim Margolis:** I guess it’s been said.

**Tom Freedman:** I think there are big lessons to learn. I think we really do need to focus on ideas that are relevant to people, and it’s not just ideas. I thought it was very interesting, early on Joel had a question and says, “Here are some plans

people have for New York.” And they were all good ideas. And then when you asked, “Is this feasible?” the numbers changed dramatically. And I think people really want to hear a candidate who says, “I can do this, this and this, very realistically.” That’s very relevant to the middle class and those people who are struggling to get there.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. I apologize to those of you who say, “Where do I go to get my 15 minutes back?” See me during the break and I’ll see what I can do. *[laughter]*

But we will reconvene not in a half-hour, but in 15 minutes, starting right at 11:00 with the Bloomberg and Ferrer campaigns. Thank you. *[applause]*

# SESSION II: FERRER VS. BLOOMBERG

## WHO'S WHO

### Moderator

Mark Halperin, Political Director, ABC-TV News

### Mike Bloomberg for NYC

Jordan Barowitz, Campaign Spokesperson  
Bill Cunningham, Communications Director  
Josh Isay, Campaign Consultant  
Terence Tolbert, Senior Political Adviser  
Stu Loeser, Head of Press Relations

### New Yorkers for Ferrer

Nick Baldick, Campaign Manager  
Jen Bluestein, Communications Director  
Jef Pollock, Polling Consultant  
Roberto Ramirez, Chief Political Adviser

### New Yorkers for Fields

Chung Seto, Campaign Manager

### Miller for New York

Mark Mellman, Polling Consultant

### Anthony Weiner for New York

Joel Benenson, Polling Consultant

**Mark Halperin:** We are going to go ahead and get started. I'd welcome representatives of the Democratic primary campaign, the—if you'll pardon the expression—losers. If you would like to come sit at the table and comment some, we would love to have you up here.

*[inaudible comments from Ferrer representatives]*

It's a term of art, a clinical term.

And let me just say a few things before we get started. Again, we'll go till 1:00 and then straight into lunch.

Speaking of lunch, as I said, I think the press in this city, as in most cities and nationally, doesn't necessarily learn lessons about its own conduct during campaigns and it's important to do that. One of the big issues in this race, regarding press coverage, was polls. And the pollsters, I think, will also be open to talking about their work and what they did.

This session is not devoted to what was, no question, one of the fundamental issues in the general election. We can touch on it. I welcome—and I'm sure the Ferrer people will touch on it and cite it in particular instances—but we are not going to drill down and talk about what the press did wrong, what the pollsters might have done wrong regarding coverage. We are not going to deconstruct that here. That's what lunch is for. You may cite it, though, please, if it is

applicable to something we are talking about. I will try to stay roughly chronological here. But some things obviously carry through chronologically and are more thematic. And again, I would ask both sides: please, ask to be recognized. If things occur where you say, "Hey, we wondered why you were doing that" or, "We thought you would do something else" or, "We couldn't figure out what you were doing then. Could you explain the rationale?" I urge you to do that. Because that is, I think, where we will get some of the best interaction.

One more thing, the Bloomberg campaign won and had a lot of money. The Ferrer campaign lost and had less money. These were very important facts.

**Jef Pollock:** Less?

**Mark Halperin:** Quantitatively so. These were important issues. As Mark Mellman says, perhaps none of what we are about to discuss, or almost none, determined the outcome. But there are things to be learned and there are things that.... As I said, I think the Bloomberg campaign did very well. I think they had a candidate who performed, in many instances, very well. I think they spent their money in very interesting ways. I'm not going to demand, nor could I, that the Ferrer campaign, as I said in the beginning, trash their candidate, trash each other, trash their colleagues, say "We did a horrible job." However, if mistakes were made and there are things that people can learn from, I urge you to be honest about that and to talk about those mistakes, if you think you made them.

Many people said the Ferrer campaign did not have a message. Many people would say the Ferrer campaign won, being generous, five of the news cycles in the general election. Is that generous? Five?

**Nick Baldick:** There was more.

**Mark Halperin:** More. Okay. There have got to be reasons for that. Maybe it was just the money. Maybe it was incumbency. But as we talk about them, please feel free to acknowledge that perhaps you didn't do things perfectly, if that's the way you feel.

## BLOOMBERG'S AD STRATEGY

**Mark Halperin:** Where I would like to start is something that I think, again, has not been very much discussed...was the ad strategy of the Bloomberg campaign. I'm sorry that Mr. Knapp—who also happens to be a Democrat—is not here, who was also involved in making the ads. But what I would like to do is to start not with the Bloomberg campaign but with Nick Baldick for his critique of what was smart about the Bloomberg ad strategy, in terms of the content, the timing, the placement, everything. And then I would like you all to critique his critique and say where it's right and where it was wrong.

**Nick Baldick:** Well, first of all, I—what the hell is that, Stu?

**Stu Loeser:** It's a recorder. *[laughter]*

**Terence Tolbert:** Stu is tracking himself.

**Nick Baldick:** He's self-tracking. Stu is self-tracking.

First of all, I think—

**Mark Halperin:** I'm sorry, can I interrupt you? One thing. Dalí is back there and if you've got a question you would like to ask in a timely or untimely fashion, please catch her attention and get a card and submit it back to her.

**Nick Baldick:** First of all, I think one of the things that was not covered in the earlier panel is the job the Bloomberg folks did from getting from 28 to 45. I'm sure you guys will talk about it, I hope you will, in this discussion, because I would argue that once you got there and you knew you were going to spend 74, 75—whatever Bill says the new number is—million dollars, that if you did what you did, which is execute a message plan, that the last 20 points of approval rating were probably easier than the first 20.

But that said, I thought that the media strategy, unless I'm wrong, was to run media, which raised its favorables because you didn't want to go negative on television because if you're spending ten to one over somebody, going negative on television—even this press corps might have called you on it.

**Mark Halperin:** That's kind of a luncy remark.

**Nick Baldick:** Okay. *[laughter]*

**Nick Baldick:** And the voters, as Bill said, I think the voters didn't care that Mr. Bloomberg spent his own money, but if he had gone negative they would have cared. So I thought that it was a brilliant strategy to raise his approval with ads that subconsciously got underneath the voters' heads. A lot of the ads that Bill did... I think it was also Squire... it was Bill Knapp, right? From what I could tell, the overall format of the ad didn't change much. The content changed by switching in faces, regular New Yorkers. And so I think for many New Yorkers who saw the many ads, they subconsciously started seeing it as a comfort thing. And the message was perfect and I thought it was brilliant. And then they ran an unbelievable oppo research program.

**Mark Halperin:** We will get to that. Stick to the ads.

**Nick Baldick:** But I think that was part of the media strategy. They didn't think they had to go negative because they had a very effective oppo program.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Anything else anybody here wants to say about their television and radio ad strategy?

**Roberto Ramirez:** There were a lot of them.

**Mark Halperin:** Yes. Josh, I don't know which one of you wants to take this, but how many spots did you run on TV?

**Stu Loeser:** Nick's statement is predicated on a slight shading of the truth. I gather the Ferrer campaign has some issues with the public polls, expressed during the earlier panel.

**Nick Baldick:** I don't think I raised any issues with the polls.

**Stu Loeser:** But the moving from 28 to 45 in the public polls happened before the first ad was aired.

**Jef Pollock:** We know that.

**Nick Baldick:** Right. That's what I'm saying. I'm saying you moved from 28 to 45 in 2004, mostly. And a little bit in the spring of 2005, and that when you ran the first ad you were at roughly 40—something in May.

**Mark Halperin:** Let's go chronologically and, again, you all can choose who addresses this: how did you move in the polls without the paid media during that period? What would you say were the elements of that? And I will say, again, this is not a panel about government or testing scores, so as much as you can, focus on the politics of—for instance, I am sure you will cite the mayor's strong performance—the politics of that. How did you make that move?

**Bill Cunningham:** I mentioned earlier that the State of the City laid out basically what we would be doing in the campaign, the mayor's record and where he wanted to take the city. If you look at the timeline that you handed out today, you will see that there was a poll that had the mayor down by 13 or 14 points in December and dead even at the end of January, right after he gave the State of the City remarks. That told us that the substance, the record, was what we were going to run on. It was a good record and we had to get it out before the public as much as possible.

All through 2004, the mayor was moving throughout the city. For months at a time we were doing things that were not noticed or reported on. There was one time when he went to some black churches on a Sunday and the press reported, "Oh, he's moving into black churches." He had been doing it for six or seven months before that. It hadn't been noticed for some reason or other.

And so all of these things are cumulative and I think part of it.... The public gets used to a new mayor over a certain amount of time. They also are able to evaluate the status of the city and whether or not they think it's getting better or not. And they start to judge in their own minds his personality versus his potential opponent's.

But in terms of us getting to sort of a break-even mark? That was him moving around the city, doing his job and *not* engaging in politics. He constantly talked about what he needed to do as mayor and he spent three years, over three years, saying, "I don't have a political organization; I'm not



doing polling; and I have a job to do and I'm going to do the best job I can."

**Jordan Barowitz:** If I could just add to that. There were a couple of very difficult decisions that the mayor made early in his term that bore fruit by the time the election rolled around. The property tax increase in December 2002. The decision was made to raise taxes early in the term, not have to fight that battle in the remaining two or three years of his mayoralty. So that allowed...that set the table for being able to provide good news in the last couple of years of his administration. The Smoke Free Air Act is another one. Very controversial decision. By the time the election rolled around, most New Yorkers liked it.

So, I think there was a.... Taking on those tough decisions early in the term was instrumental.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Let me ask again for the ad strategy. Respond to his positions about the nature of the content, the nature of the ads.

**Josh Isay:** I think we had a few goals in the ads. The first one was to tell the story of the administration, which goes to Jordan's point, which was we took.... The mayor became mayor after 9/11, taking on a city that was in recession with the worst fiscal crisis in a generation and led the city through that into a place where people really think the city was moving in the right direction. People were happy with the current status of the city.

So first, we had to tell that story: where we came from and where we are.

Second, we had to attach accomplishments to the mayor. He had a tremendous record of accomplishments: on crime, bringing crime down; on creating jobs; on test scores. So we needed to attach those accomplishments to the mayor. And I think we did that effectively. We had to relate it to everyday lives, which goes to Nick's point about this kind of testimonials...using testimonials, which was a way to relate it to people's everyday lives.

And really take the major issues individually and talk about them. So, on jobs, creating new jobs. On crime. On security. On education. Lay out a record and a vision that again attached the mayor to what was really a remarkable record of achievement. It was a pretty simple goal. I think it was executed effectively, clearly. It was a pretty simple goal and one that was very straight forward.

**Mark Halperin:** How many spots—separate spots—did you make that you aired?

**Josh Isay:** How many did we air? I actually don't know the number offhand, how many we aired.

**Mark Halperin:** Any idea? More than 50?

**Josh Isay:** No.

*"I think the voters didn't care that Mr. Bloomberg spent his own money, but if he had gone negative they would have cared. So I thought that it was a brilliant strategy."*

*—Nick Baldick*

**Mark Halperin:** What are things that you made that you never aired?

**Josh Isay:** We made spots that never aired but those never aired. *[laughter]*

**Mark Halperin:** The campaign is over. Why don't you give us one example of either a negative spot or a positive spot that you chose not to air and explain why.

**Josh Isay:** I think there were spots...some of the positive spots where the language didn't quite work as we produced it and edited it and showed it, internally, and we said, "Well, we are going to tweak the language and put it on the air." I think there were spots that were tweaked to make it worthy for air. And that's the natural process that I think every campaign goes through and I'm sure the Ferrer campaign also had ads that never aired.

**Mark Halperin:** Probably not. *[laughter]*

Did you produce or script negative spots to just have in case you needed them?

**Josh Isay:** I am not going to talk about the negative spots that we did or did not make.

**Mark Halperin:** You know the campaign is over, right?

**Josh Isay:** I know the campaign is over.

**Mark Halperin:** Does anyone else want to speak to that? Did you produce negative spots? Would you deny that you produced negative spots?

**Jef Pollock:** Well, they produced one. One went on the air.

**Josh Isay:** That was a response.

**Jef Pollock:** It was a negative spot.

**Mark Halperin:** You had a spot with Rudy Giuliani in it.

**Josh Isay:** We had a few spots with Rudy Giuliani.

**Mark Halperin:** What was the strategy about where to air those?

**Josh Isay:** We aired those spots all over the city. In the general market broadcast television.

**Mark Halperin:** But did you think about using them more? Did you think about other endorsements? I'm just looking for—

**Josh Isay:** We used a lot of endorsements. If you look at the television ads, you had Floyd Flake in the ads, you had Rudy Giuliani in the ads, you had Ed Koch in the ads. We had real...we had non-politicians in the ads.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask it this way...

**Bill Cunningham:** They were all in the same ad.

**Josh Isay:** And in fact they were, many in the same ad.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask it this way. You were trying to tease out the special advantages you had because you had so much money. So for instance, were the spots...? They seemed very well produced.

**Josh Isay:** Yeah.

**Mark Halperin:** Were they more expensive per spot to produce than a normal campaign does?

**Josh Isay:** I think it depends. I think you can do...there's a wide range of campaigns and the amount of money that they have and the way you produce spots. So, were they more expensive than a campaign ad for a borough president or congressman? Sure. Absolutely.

**Mark Halperin:** Do you know how much it cost to produce one of your spots, the more expensive ones? Any idea?

**Josh Isay:** I do. I think it's on the filings how much we spent on production.

**Mark Halperin:** I mean individual, 30-second—

**Josh Isay:** Again, I'm not going to talk about how much an individual spot cost, but it is fair to say that if you have one person with a video camera and not much lighting and not a lot of gaffers and grips and people to help you with the spot, it is going to cost you less than it will on film, with a larger crew and more high-tech editing.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask you two more questions about the TV ads. They seemed to me to be, as Nick, I think, suggested, kind of intended to just be subtle, to fit in, to be part of the wallpaper almost, and not to kind of grab people by the lapels, as some spots do. Is that an over-reading of the semiotics of those ads or...?

**Josh Isay:** Look, I think that positive ads, by their nature, do not grab you by the lapels like slash-and-burn negative ads do. We were talking about crime going down and test scores going up and I think we did it in a very straightforward way. We did not make a conscious effort to have no one notice our ads. That would be counter-productive. But I think that the topics that we were dealing with were.... We said, "We don't have to...." The truth is, the accomplishments—and I know this is going to sound self-serving in a way—the accomplishments spoke for themselves. Crime going down so dramatically speaks for itself. All you have to do is lay those facts out there. That was our theory, is if we can lay the facts out there, on crime and schools and jobs, etc., that there is nowhere for our opponents to run. And there was no rationale at that point; and that's what we did and I think we did that effectively. There was no other place for our opponents to run; no rationale for them to win with; no reason to fire the mayor.

**Mark Halperin:** I have a few more questions about the ads. Did the mayor screen the spots before they aired?

**Bill Cunningham:** Yes.

**Mark Halperin:** Tell us about that, about how he would tweak things. Did he look at scripts first or you'd show him cut spots? How did his role in that work?

*Josh Isay, consultant to the Bloomberg campaign, details the campaign's television ad strategy.*



**Bill Cunningham:** Well, I think initially he might have looked at some scripts but eventually he would look at the finished or nearly finished product and he would be involved in the ultimate decision about which ads would go on the air. We might have an ad that we wanted to tweak, as Josh said, and we'll show it to the mayor, we'd explain what we wanted to change in it, get his approval and then go with it.

**Mark Halperin:** And what were the comments would he make, looking at ads?

**Bill Cunningham:** He would wonder why one ad versus another. And the mayor is sort of trained as an engineer, so he believes you lay out a plan and you follow your plan from A to Z. And in a political campaign sometimes you divert from A to A-minus or A-plus. And, there is an example, when the test scores came out on the schools' reading and math scores, we changed the sequence of our ads. We moved education up by about two weeks. We were going to do housing first and then we moved education up to take advantage of the news that was coming out about the schools. And we had to go explain to him, "We're changing the sequencing." And he would understand that, certainly. But that is the kind of thing he was involved in.

**Mark Halperin:** Did you show him research? Would he say, "I want to see the focus groups on this ad"?

**Bill Cunningham:** No, he does not want to watch focus groups.

**Mark Halperin:** President Bush's re-election campaign suffered some controversy over the question of using national security, 9/11 in their advertising. You all had a controversy related to a mailing related to 9/11, but in terms of your television advertising, how much security, the word "security"—the mayor used provocative or suggestive language—how much did you think about where the tipping point was on him being accused of exploiting 9/11 in your television advertising?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, Josh could join in on this. We discussed that extensively. We, in no way, were going to use any footage from Ground Zero or firefighters at Ground Zero or anything like that. We did have to tell the story about where the city was coming from. So we had to be very careful about the language, talking about the time the mayor took office and what he faced. And he faced not only the recession but the fact that we had suffered the attack on 9/11 and all of the aftermath of that.

We talked about public security and we talked about eventually what the PD [Police Department] has done in terms of counter-terrorism and those activities. They're reported in the news all the time.

The flap that you are talking about is a photo—once again, a stock photo coming into the news—of a view across lower Manhattan that apparently was taken from the top of the old Trade Center. And it didn't show Ground Zero. It didn't

*"The accomplishments spoke for themselves .... There was no other place for our opponents to run; no rationale for them to win with; no reason to fire the mayor."*

*—Josh Isay*

show the Trade Center. But it became an issue and what happened is we tried to close it down as quickly as we could.

**Mark Halperin:** Josh, within the content of this paid media, where was the line—not using explicit pictures of Ground Zero—but was there any line you saw and tried to avoid regarding using security as an issue?

**Josh Isay:** Well, look, we didn't want—

**Mark Halperin:** Asked another way, how big a deal was it in your paid media strategy to associate the mayor with being strong on security?

**Josh Isay:** I think that was...two things, as Billy said, and I think Billy answered the question well. We had a story to tell about taking the city after 9/11 and leading the city forward through recession and fiscal crisis and rebuilding, etc. And I think there is a story to tell about the security measures that the mayor took to keep New York secure in this new era. And I think we told that story and we told it knowing that we had to be mindful of not being exploitative. And I think we did.... That was always in our mind. And we made sure that we didn't.

**Mark Halperin:** Is there anything I should be asking you about the paid media strategy that I haven't asked?

**Josh Isay:** Who are Jen Blustein and Nick Baldick emailing, BlackBerrying? Are they spinning reporters?

**Mark Halperin:** They are emailing Fernando Ferrer. *[laughter]*

So nothing else you want to say about paid media? Any of you want to comment on paid media?

**Jef Pollock:** Well, the security...we never actually sort of went down the "exploiting 9/11" path. That wasn't ever a discussion. The real play that security had was, of course, in and around the Apollo debate and what happened then. And the mayor's team—

**Mark Halperin:** We'll get to that.

**Jef Pollock:** What I am talking about is the ad. The ad that came on seemingly right after, that had already been produced. It wasn't about, you know, 9/11 and throw it in your face, but it was, "Stay the course; we got to keep the path down here." And so it was a very subtle and effective way of saying, "You can't change things." And to that, they deserve credit.

**Mark Halperin:** Again, as Nick, I think, may have pointed out, there was a real disproportionate balance in terms of the advertising and other spending between the two campaigns.

**Nick Baldick:** Really?

**Mark Halperin:** But was there anything you could do...was there anything you did do to try to deal with their paid media, to counter their paid media, since you couldn't counter it on the air?

**Nick Baldick:** You can't really stop Bill from buying ads. And as I said, I thought their ads were effective. I think our only way to deal with that was to try to get more press coverage and more people to focus on our ads, the few that were running. The fact that we could count how many they were running...which I would argue is sort of the opposite approach than these guys took. They sort of pounded through a message, I thought, very effectively.

And we had to go the opposite route, which was to try to get earned media out of our ads.

*"We had a story to tell about taking the city after 9/11 and leading the city forward through recession and fiscal crisis and rebuilding .... We told it knowing that we had to be mindful of not being exploitative."*

*—Josh Isay*

## THE ROLE OF OPPO: FERRER'S RECORD FROM BOTH SIDES

**Mark Halperin:** Let's go—and again, this relates to the press but it is not talking about the press' conduct but rather the campaigns'. What was your campaign's free media strategy in the general election as it pertained to opposition research and negative information about the mayor? What did you have in terms of research? What did you have in terms of a plan to disseminate that in the most effective way, targeted and tailored for the New York City media, with its very particular entities and customs?

**Jen Bluestein:** I think in both cases, but particularly the mayor, much of what we had...everybody had already. Because much of it was from the 2001 race or had been covered in the 2001 race.

**Mark Halperin:** About yourself?

**Jen Bluestein:** No, about him.

**Jef Pollock:** Bloomberg.

**Jen Bluestein:** I'm sorry, I thought you were talking about—

**Mark Halperin:** You mean stuff that had happened to him before he ran the first time?

**Jen Bluestein:** Yeah. A great majority of the oppo that we had was stuff that had been out already.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me stop you on that point. Was there...? The mayor, it's pretty well agreed, had at least some success in his first term and there were not scandals or huge failures, catastrophic failures. So did you make a survey of the government? Did you file Freedom of Information requests? Did you look for things in the city and determine there was really nothing there to talk about? Or did you not have the resources to do that?

**Jef Pollock:** We did some FOIAing. I firmly believe that they spent more on copies of FOIAing Freddy than we did on the whole campaign. So the resources were not the same that we could use. But there were plenty of things that we had to say about the mayor's record over four years that we attempted to get out and sort of attempted to push. None of them were evidently as salacious as talking about old Freddy stuff.

**Jen Bluestein:** To be perfectly honest, we had an enormous amount of, some might even say, quite minute detail in which we were addressing his record and what he was saying was his accomplishments and trying to point out some inconsistencies and some things that we felt were not true and/or could be done better. That proved extremely difficult to get the press corps interested in. And I don't want to take that to the lunch thing but—



*Ferrer Communications Director Jen Bluestein describes how the Bloomberg team's opposition research affected Ferrer's campaign.*

**Mark Halperin:** Before we get to the point at which a campaign says, "Here's a deliverable. What's our strategy for handing it to the right press organization?" let's just talk a little bit more, though, about getting to that point. Who was in charge of your opposition research? What did you inherit when you came in from the last race? You talked about the things from the mayor from before. What was that process? Do you think it was done as well as it could have been done? Did you have things to deliver and then the press part of it got messed up? Or the press wouldn't do it? Or did you not do as good a job on that as you could have?

**Jen Bluestein:** One of things you ask about is: What did we inherit? I think the larger question is, "What did everybody else inherit?" because it seems to me that virtually every reporter here had the Mark Green oppo book on us. So...it could have come from anybody...so we...Jef was involved with it, I was involved with it. We had a terrific research director.

One of the things that in a very candid way I will say—I think we were outgunned in terms of resources on this, as we were on almost every aspect of the campaign, and something we were constantly having to do was to essentially research ourselves in response to things that they were putting out there.

**Nick Baldick:** Let me say something on that, and again, it's mostly praise, I think in this case on Stu's operation. Freddy at one point was asked about a quote he gave in 1984, to a high school paper. *[laughter]*

Nicely done, Stu. That level of research was done and we would get those kinds of missives two to three times a day.

**Jen Bluestein:** Usually after 4:00.

**Nick Baldick:** Right. You could set a clock to it. Stu's first shot would be at 4:00, his second shot would be about 5:15...

**Stu Loeser:** That's actually not true, and you should blame the press. Because we would send it out earlier. *[laughter]*

**Mark Halperin:** They were at lunch or OTB and would get back...

**Jen Bluestein:** They are just very slow readers, actually.

**Mark Halperin:** Hold on one second. Now, you moved from research on the mayor to research on yourselves. Let's make that move but let me ask you—

**Nick Baldick:** I think that's leading to some extent to where I was going there. I think that the Bloomberg campaign did such a great job of research, 'cause, I mean, they had resources but they also did a good job. It's not...you have to execute with money; it's not just money. And they basically nailed



down our communications operations to some extent for six hours a day, where you were basically playing defense. Jen, Christy, etc.—for literally everything after 1:00, you could just literally write off. Anything after 1:00 until about 8:00, there was some reporter calling with something Stu gave them.

**Mark Halperin:** In my experience—and again, resources is clearly an issue here. You didn't have the ability to hire five researchers to research yourself and five researchers to research the mayor. But in my experience in campaigns, there's two kinds of campaigns: ones who understand that they have incomplete research files on themselves and ones who don't think about it.

**Nick Baldick:** Oh, we understood it.

**Jen Bluestein:** We thought about it a lot.

**Mark Halperin:** So did the candidate understand that? Did he know?

**Jef Pollock:** Yeah.

**Jen Bluestein:** Definitely.

**Mark Halperin:** So, what? It was just, "Que será será"? "There's nothing we can do"?

**Roberto Ramirez:** No. Remember, first you have the primary. So you have three other candidates, so oppo research and all that, you're doing that. By the time you get to the primary, you never had the ability...and particularly when you look at researching someone who has a rather extensive wealth...

**Mark Halperin:** But couldn't you have...the day he said to you, "Roberto I'm going to run," wasn't it incumbent upon you to say, "Mr. President, here's what we need to do. One of the things that's got to be started first is we've got to do research on you so we know everything about you, 'cause that's got to start today"?

**Roberto Ramirez:** Actually, that was about the fourth thing, because the first thing that you say to the candidate is, "Mr. President, we've got to raise a lot of money. Mr. President, we've got to hire staff. Mr. President, there is an office that needs to be set up, by the way. And Mr. President, you decided to run but you really have no apparatus, no infrastructure, no governmental staff." So you sort of go about the business and somewhere along the line the main question becomes first, you got to look at the candidate and the candidate himself. Remember, Mr. Ferrer had run for office before. We had...we didn't have it but we knew that there were a number of books that had been done on Mr. Ferrer. So you gear up figuring out where your position is on the primary. Then you look to the—

**Mark Halperin:** I'm looking for an accountability moment.

**Nick Baldick:** Mark, can I just—

**Mark Halperin:** Let me finish this one question and I'll go right to you. Who is accountable for the failure of Mr. Ferrer's staff to adequately research himself from the earliest time?

**Roberto Ramirez:** The question is inartfully asked.

*"We were outgunned in terms of resources on this, as we were on almost every aspect of the campaign, and something we were constantly having to do was to essentially research ourselves in response to things that they were putting out there."*

*—Jen Bluestein*

**Jen Bluestein:** It's an unfair question.

**Mark Halperin:** Because?

**Jen Bluestein:** We do not use the word "inartful." We use "careless." [laughter]

**Mark Halperin:** Was it done adequately?

**Jen Bluestein:** It's an unfair question. You're predicated your question as if you could ever do enough research in the face of what was coming at us.

**Mark Halperin:** Was it done adequately?

**Jen Bluestein:** The man had a 25-year career.

**Nick Baldick:** No, Mark. It couldn't have been done.

**Jen Bluestein:** It couldn't have been done adequately.

**Mark Halperin:** And no one even accountable?

**Roberto Ramirez:** Given the resources, it was done adequately.

**Jef Pollock:** I'll take accountability.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. What would you have done differently?

**Jef Pollock:** Nothing. We did not have the money, Mark, but you want us—

**Jen Bluestein:** More time and more money.

**Mark Halperin:** But you chose—and I'll get right to Josh. You chose. You said, "Here's our resources, in terms of personnel and money. We just don't have the time to do this."

**Jef Pollock:** We also said, "We've got research," because I've been down this path with Freddy before. I had worked with Freddy since 1997. I had done two research books on Freddy before. I updated it in terms of what we had in that time.

**Mark Halperin:** So they would come up with things like the high school quote and you would say...?

**Jef Pollock:** No, we would never...we'd *never* get that. We couldn't.

**Mark Halperin:** So you made the judgment that you had everything you could get. And anything that they could get was a product of their superior resources that you would never have, even though it was about you and not him?

**Jef Pollock:** We made a judgment that there was only so much we could do.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Josh.

**Josh Isay:** My only point—actually, Jef just made it, which is: he ran for mayor in '97. He ran for mayor in 2001. He ran

for mayor in 2005, and was not in public office between 2001 and 2005. So I'm sure...I don't know exactly specifically what you are talking about what attack was made that was not responded to correctly. But I can't imagine there was a lot of stuff in Freddy's record that, between the four people sitting on that side of the table, they didn't know what was coming or what was.... I don't know what this high school quote you were referring to is.

**Jef Pollock:** There were only a couple of things that like completely threw us.

**Josh Isay:** There was the blog entry, but that wasn't—

**Jef Pollock:** But that's not oppo.

**Mark Halperin:** But there were aspects of his record as borough president that got coverage.

**Jef Pollock:** Which?

**Mark Halperin:** Housing.

**Jef Pollock:** That's bullshit, in the most explicit—

**Mark Halperin:** In the bullshit sense of what? It didn't get stories written?

**Jef Pollock:** It did get stories written because Ed Koch decided he had a burr up his you-know-what and even though we had quotes from Ed Koch praising Freddy on any number of things...

**Jen Bluestein:** Which we released. We have tapes of Ed Koch talking about how successful Freddy's housing plan was.

**Jef Pollock:** We knew about Freddy's housing record.

**Roberto Ramirez:** I thought you wanted to have that conversation at lunch.

**Mark Halperin:** Yes. About the press role. Stu?

**Roberto Ramirez:** That is the press' role.

**Mark Halperin:** I understand, but I—

**Roberto Ramirez:** But to take a man's record, as he had in the Borough President's Office.... And I asked the question before. During that period of the coverage of the different newspapers, did he actually...was he responsible for building the housing? Did he actually turn the borough around? Did he actually help to build jobs? So you name me another county in this city that created 67,000 housing units during that same period of time. The fact of the matter became that his record was either the record or it wasn't. And what happened was that there was a clear decision made that the record that Fernando Ferrer had in the Bronx did not exist. It was a rewriting of history. And there is no amount of research that anybody can do to correct that.

*“It's not uncommon to have problems going back and sifting through your candidate's past. The boss is not always terribly enthused about that process.”*

*—Jordan Barowitz*

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask it this way. When you said you were tied up for six hours in the communications shop dealing with it, what would have been done to avoid that? Nothing? Whatever you had done, they had the capacity to do that?

**Nick Baldick:** We could have hired a lot more staff. I'm not sure that would have worked necessarily effectively. Look, I think that there was also—I know this is the lunch conversation. By the way, I'm not sure I'm going to make lunch. It should be a very interesting conversation. But the lunch conversation...all of the stuff that came out in the 2001 race—and I was not here—that I guess Stu produced...that was produced on the mayor for the 2001 race, became off the table. For most of the press corps, you would call and you would say, “Are we going to talk about that?” And they would say, “No, it was covered in 2001.”

But it's...maybe I'm wrong, but I think, as Josh pointed out, most of the stuff about Freddy that we are talking about was covered in '97 or 2001 and that didn't necessarily apply.

**Jen Bluestein:** You asked what we could have done about those six hours. We could have opted, in any given moment, not to fight. And to allow whatever had been said, whether it was kind of on a more personal thing or about people he knew or colleagues he had or very, very specific bored-down policy issue. We could have opted not to fight. But given the imbalance, and given the fact that the man has pride in his record, we opted to fight.

And you may all think that that was a bad use of our time and that we should have taken a pass on it and gone on the attack and picked up a new conversation. But there were some issues—given that we were running on a record of things like housing, for instance—that keep it getting into the fight. And it was the only choice to do, in our minds.

**Josh Isay:** Mark, can I say one thing? I'm sorry, with all due respect, this is a major campaign. This happens in every

*“There’s a fundamental truth. Fernando Ferrer, I believe, was a far better candidate—universally, a far better candidate—in 2001 when he had the full resources of the Office of the Borough President behind him.”*

*—Stu Loeser*

major campaign. Mayor’s races, senate races, governor’s races. When you are in the press office, you spend time and you’re running against a real opponent. This is what happens. There is nothing unusual, it seems to me. There is nothing unusual in this race and in any other race. So, in my opinion—

**Jen Bluestein:** I’m not suggesting that there is anything unusual in spending your time—

**Josh Isay:** Stu was dealing with the same thing. It’s like...it happens in every race.

**Jordan Barowitz:** Speaking in generalities, defensive research and talking to your candidate about their past and their history is an extremely difficult endeavor to.... Throwing you guys a life preserver. But it’s not uncommon to have problems going back and sifting through your candidate’s past. The boss is not always terribly enthused about that process.

**Mark Halperin:** Was that a factor for you all in any case?

**Jordan Barowitz:** I don’t know if it was.

**Roberto Ramirez:** Let’s ask. Let’s ask. I appreciate the preserver but I want you to hold it. Don’t throw it yet. Let’s talk about what exactly was it that we needed to defend Mr. Ferrer. We needed to defend Mr. Ferrer on his accomplishments as a borough president. We needed to defend Mr. Ferrer on his label of being a political machine creation. We needed to defend Mr. Ferrer on his statement on Mr. Diallo. We needed to defend Mr. Ferrer on the fact that once he showed up at a press conference and there was a senator in the Bronx that was labeled homophobic, so therefore we needed to defend him. We needed to defend him on a statement that he made in 1987 to a high school

graduation that said that in fact he had been fired when he had really been laid off. So what is the record that we could have possibly...what was it that we were defending? We were defending a presumption. We were defending a mindset that got established that had to do with the fact that that was Mr. Ferrer, he came from the Bronx, and there was a number of things attached to him. There is no amount of research that anyone could have possibly have done to handle that mindset. It is the reason why I think a number of us are here today.

**Mark Halperin:** And I know that’s an important topic and it’s a lunch topic. *[laughter]*

I don’t say that flippantly. But it is.

**Josh Isay:** This is going to be quite a lunch.

**Jen Bluestein:** This is going to be like the worst...

**Mark Halperin:** The question is, could you have had the press react to adopt more of your attitude? Let me just go back to TV for one second, ‘cause I did want to ask something that will lead to another discussion. Did you study any past campaigns in planning your TV strategy?

**Josh Isay:** Did we study past campaigns?

**Mark Halperin:** How people have made ads, how people bought ads? Did you have any models?

**Stu Loeser:** No, but we’ve all done a lot of campaigns, so—

**Mark Halperin:** Right. But nothing in particular.

**Josh Isay:** No.

**Mark Halperin:** In terms of research, did you have any models of things you looked at and how to effectively deliver on position research?

**Stu Loeser:** There was, fundamentally speaking, no difference between our research on the Ferrer campaign and any other campaign. Anything that I learned doing...learned working for...anything I saw...our tactics...we had people who had worked on other campaigns and applied what we had learned. I was associated with the Gore research team. I was working with the DNC for a while. These are standard practices that are honed.

Two points, and I am not supposed to really talk about our strategy internally but I am sort of pretty glad to hear that. We never heard it admitted until now when Nick said our efforts to put out issues or previously undiscovered documents or quotes or whatever—

**Mark Halperin:** What we call facts.

**Stu Loeser:** Our facts...kind of twisted up Jen and Christy for the afternoon. Now, the flip side of it is, very little of it actually ended up in print.



**Nick Baldick:** Oh no, a lot of it did not.

**Stu Loeser:** Yeah, most of it did not. We would put something up and they would—

**Roberto Ramirez:** That's because we had a great team.

**Stu Loeser:** Or it was not extraordinarily relevant or whatever.

**Jen Bluestein:** *[laughs]*

**Stu Loeser:** No, no, no, no. Relevant to the story of the day. And we talked about media strategies and you have issues about media coverage and you can discuss it. But in 1996 I was in Davidson County, Tennessee, in Nashville, working for the Clinton/Gore campaign. And James Carville came for a “rah-rah” thing and he said something that I think he says for everyone, which is, “It’s very hard to fight when you’ve got a hand in your face or a fist in your face.” The fact of the matter is, we didn’t really do anything different than most campaigns. And it’s really not...it’s a resource intensive but not a financially intensive thing. We had a number of people, who tend to be young, tend to be...they all are smart, they tend to be fairly young, working on this. And it was not extraordinary...you have to find people who are young and willing to do this. You don’t pay them a great deal of money, research aides. And the costs are limited basically to photocopying costs; and subway fare to and from the various places.

**Jen Bluestein:** Mark, can I respond to that for a second?

**Mark Halperin:** Google can get pretty expensive, though.

**Stu Loeser:** What?

**Mark Halperin:** Google can get pretty expensive too.

**Stu Loeser:** We had a Nexis account; you guys had a Nexis account.

**Jen Bluestein:** Okay, wait, wait...

**Stu Loeser:** No, there was really very little difference.

**Jen Bluestein:** I actually agree with you that there is probably very little difference in terms of what we wanted to do to each other. Okay. I think that— *[laughter]*

**Mark Halperin:** Keep it clean.

**Jen Bluestein:** That sounded funnier than I meant it. I think that first of all something that you just said, which is that it’s resource heavy but not financially heavy—or maybe you said resource intensive but not financially intensive—that may be a distinction with a difference when you have 75

million dollars to spend. It is a distinction with a very great difference—

**Stu Loeser:** No, it’s—

**Jen Bluestein:** Wait, let me just finish. You talk about paying people maybe a little...you think it’s a little bit. A little bit for you guys is a comparative lot for us and we had to.... It’s false not to acknowledge that we had that framework.

Now, the second thing is that—and again, I’m sure you guys observe the same Chinese wall between government and the campaign as the Miller people did but— *[laughter]*

We were creating...we had only...we had 38th Street. We had our campaign. We had our staff. We had a couple of consultants. Right? We had some goldfish. That’s what we had to produce our campaign. And so when we talk about the impact of being tied up by research on our guy at the end of the day, even if some of it didn’t come out—a lot of it didn’t end up in the press—we were also responsible for putting forward positive things to happen during our candidate’s day and to push for coverage of those things as well. And so we were under, I think probably, a pressure that you guys were *not* under.

**Mark Halperin:** I’ll stop you. Stu. And then I’ve got a question.

**Stu Loeser:** So this is actually a good example of.... You say that, Jen. My immediate reaction—and were this a campaign environment I would probably call Josh and say, “Do you think I should say this?” before I say it, but without—



*Stu Loeser, head of press relations for Bloomberg, discusses the opposition research he conducted on Fernando Ferrer.*

**Mark Halperin:** We're past that.

**Josh Isay:** No.

**Stu Loeser:** And he would generally say "no." *[laughter]*

I would say, if you had said that to a reporter and the reporter called me, I would say, "That is..." Well, let's not characterize that. I would say, "Okay, well, what about 2001?" There's a fundamental truth. Fernando Ferrer, I believe, was a *far* better candidate—universally, a *far* better candidate—in 2001 when he had the full resources of the Office of the Borough President behind him. And that when he had days in which you had to kind of do something for the media cycle—discuss nutrition programs in schools or something—that was handled, in the 2001 campaign, by the Office of the Borough President. My recollection, clearly and distinctly from working on the Green campaign, was that there were daily cases in 2001 in which the Ferrer campaign crossed the line. Advance work for events was done by an individual in the employ of the Office of the Borough President, driving a Ford. I have the license plate written down somewhere.

If you said this—

**Jen Bluestein:** What is your point?

**Stu Loeser:** My point is that if you were to say that there's a Chinese wall and poor you guys, all you have is 38th Street...

**Nick Baldick:** Stu, she wasn't criticizing the Chinese wall. She was making the point you were making.

**Stu Loeser:** No, no. I would argue that Freddy Ferrer was particularly egregious in kind of shadowing that difference in 2001, and if we were to have this discussion through reporters, that is what I would be discussing and the reporter would call you back and I would probably, in that time, be able to find some examples of this, that or the other thing in which case—

**Jen Bluestein:** But why are you talking about the 2001 race?

**Nick Baldick:** She's not making an attack. I know it's tough—

**Mark Halperin:** Stop, stop. We're going to move on.

**Stu Loeser:** My point is that's actually in evidence of—

**Mark Halperin:** Were there things in the mayor's record, personal life, record before he was mayor, time in government, that you thought they would come up with and put out that they never did?

**Bill Cunningham:** I think Mark Green did all of that in 2001.

**Mark Halperin:** About the mayor?

**Bill Cunningham:** About the mayor.

**Mark Halperin:** But what about the mayor's record since he's been in office? Was there some scandal or problem or statistic or document that you thought—

**Bill Cunningham:** No. There were no scandals. We are very proud of the administration, in that regard. I think by all accounts the mayor gets credit for honesty and integrity. His administration gets similar credit. And he has kept politics out of each of the agencies. And to a large extent, that's why he has the quality of people that he has.

**Nick Baldick:** Just for the record—as Mr. Cunningham said earlier, in the morning panel—the biggest soft spot for them during the administration was eliminated by Speaker Silver. So I think all the campaigns were planning to go right there and, as Mr. Cunningham pointed out, he owed Speaker Silver a nice bouquet of red roses.

**Josh Isay:** And the truth is you had four years of the press looking at his record every day.

**Jordan Barowitz:** A very high-scrutiny environment.



*Ferrer Campaign Manager Nick Baldick discusses the impact of Bloomberg's many endorsements by Democratic heavy-hitters.*

## DEMOCRATIC DEFECTORS: THE ROLE OF ENDORSEMENTS

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask either Roberto or Nick—your choice—to give your critique of what the Bloomberg campaign strategy was to capture Democratic donors and keep them from giving to Mr. Ferrer. What was that? How did you interpret the history of that and that strategy?

*[addressing the Bloomberg team]* Then I will ask you to tell them whether they are right or wrong.

**Nick Baldick:** First of all, I think it was brilliant. I don't think it takes brain surgery. Here's a guy who was a Democrat, who many people perceived as a Democrat, and had relationships with people who lived near the park. I think that...it wasn't just a campaign to go out and get the Ratners of the world, though. At the same time they were sending a clear message of both inevitability and incumbency: that you shouldn't support the Democrats.

I actually...the example I'm going to point to was, I think, a donor to Giff Miller's campaign got a phone call from someone within the administration, if I'm not mistaken, so that's politics. It was smart. Did it hurt our fundraising? Unbelievably.

I think there is one last factor that should be considered. The fundraising base for a Democratic candidate in a race for mayor are doing it for two reasons: one, as I discussed, because they think that one of the candidates is going to win, which in this case was not an option for us because we were perceived by both pollsters and the press as having no chance from the beginning; and the second is relationships. And to be honest, Mike Bloomberg is much more comfortable with the folks, the traditional donors who are not incumbency-based, than Freddy Ferrer.

**Josh Isay:** You forget they thought he might have a good record.

**Roberto Ramirez:** Yeah, let me—

**Josh Isay:** They might actually think he is doing a good job as mayor and want to see it continue, which I think was what happened here. With all due respect to the panel here, it was he had a good record and they wanted to see it go on.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask you a question; incorporate it into your answer. Did you all get wind of Democrats who were being courted and have a chance to try to talk them out of it?

**Roberto Ramirez:** Yeah, on both accounts. Let me go to the first one. Ninety-eight percent of all incumbents get re-elected. Number two: you had here a mayor who.... Crime had gone down, scores had gone up in the fourth grade. Generally a good sense about who the mayor was. No racial...

**Nick Baldick:** No race riots.

*“A donor to Giff Miller’s campaign got a phone call from someone within the administration, if I’m not mistaken, so that’s politics. It was smart. Did it hurt our fundraising? Unbelievably.”*

*—Nick Baldick*

**Roberto Ramirez:** No racial tension to deal with.

**Mark Halperin:** You could have helped them with their spots.

**Roberto Ramirez:** No, but then you also have this notion that, “Don’t give us, just don’t give to them,” in terms of the money. That’s basically...look, you don’t have to give to us...Bloomberg...just don’t give to them, because there’s a number of ways. Now, where Freddy Ferrer fits into that: if, in fact, you know that 98 percent get re-elected and this has the inevitability, right? And scores are going up on the fourth grade. Well then Fernando Ferrer has to make a very difficult case, which is that 50 percent of the kids are dropping out. That there isn’t affordable.... And that’s not the kind of stuff that is tailor-made to raise money. Particularly when you have the kind of inevitability sense that the mayor... *[break in recording]*

**Mark Halperin:** When you say 98 percent, what is the universe you are talking about?

**Roberto Ramirez:** Offices of Congress, Assembly members, New York City. How many mayors have not won a second term, outside of Mr. Dinkins and Mr. Beame?

**Mark Halperin:** Give me an example, whether you are willing to name the person or not...

**Roberto Ramirez:** Of course not.

**Mark Halperin:** ...of a Democrat who you got wind was being courted and the kind of conversation. Would the candidate call? Would you call? How would you try to head that off?

**Roberto Ramirez:** I would never use somebody else’s reason or rationale for supporting or not supporting the campaign and publicly say what anybody said. What I do know...I have a

name for you: his name is Steve Ratner. He decided to go out there, so I guess he gave me the chance.

**Mark Halperin:** But did the candidate call him? Did you call him?

**Roberto Ramirez:** Call whom?

**Mark Halperin:** Call Mr. Ratner, beforehand, to try to head him off?

**Jen Bluestein:** Mr. Ratner made it fairly clear he didn't want to hear from us.

**Roberto Ramirez:** And once you announce your support for the incumbent mayor and a number of other Democrats—

**Bill Cunningham:** I think there's one thing...for the record—

**Nick Baldick:** I had a conversation with one of the Ratner crew, who I had a prior relationship with. And to be fair to Josh, one of the things she mentioned was she thought the mayor had done a good job. But I also think that to some extent the Ratner group gave a social approval—made it easy for people who are in that donor world to say, "Hey look, Ratner is doing it, blah, blah, blah. Etcetera is doing it. It's fine." And again, to repeat what Roberto said: he wasn't asking them for money. It was the easiest fundraising ask ever: "Just don't give any money!"

**Jen Bluestein:** Keep it for yourself.



**Mark Halperin:** How accurate is that account? How did you court that group?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, we were receiving an awful lot of inquiries from Democrats to see how they could help us. What could they do? Steve Ratner was one of the people. There was a meeting at the campaign office of about 20 prominent Democratic fundraisers and donors. And they all wanted to know what they could do. And out of that meeting rose the idea of creating a Democrats for Bloomberg committee, that Steve would organize, and that this would be the core group of. And they were looking for a way to help us, knowing that we wouldn't take their checks. So we said, "We'll take your names and we will create a committee." And once somebody signs onto a campaign, unless it's a lobbyist or a major business of some kind, they generally don't give to the other side that they're not supporting.

So, to some degree, we certainly wanted a Democrats for Bloomberg committee early on. But when we kept getting approached by people it made it easier for us to form that.

**Mark Halperin:** Did you deputize them to go out and try to discourage other Democrats from giving? How aggressive were you in trying to keep his fundraising down?

**Bill Cunningham:** No. Look, it's sort of like...this is the way it works. If you sign up more and more people to join the Democrats for Bloomberg Committee, they're not going to be giving money. You don't have to say it. It becomes sort of the way it works.

If somebody signs onto a committee and authorizes their name, they generally don't—some people do, but most people don't—give money to the person they are not supporting. And yeah, it was easy; they didn't have to write a check, but most of the people we are talking about here could well afford the check, if, in fact, we were looking for their money.

They wanted to support the mayor and we gave them the committee to do it.

**Mark Halperin:** Josh?

**Josh Isay:** I'll make a couple of points. One: In 1998, Chuck Schumer ran for Senate against a very powerful incumbent, chair of the Banking Committee, Al D'Amato, and was 35 to 40 points behind Geraldine Ferraro in a primary. And managed to raise money. Enough to beat Geraldine Ferraro and then to beat Al D'Amato. In part because the people that he had courted and had relationships with thought he would be a very good senator. In large part that's why. Even though, at that point, it looked, frankly, like a quixotic race and your friend Adam Nagourney would call me every day saying, "Just let me know when he is going to drop out, please. Just let me know. Let me be the first when he drops out."

*Jef Pollock, polling consultant for Ferrer, talks about his candidate's fundraising efforts and the role money played in the campaign.*



**Mark Halperin:** He at least said “please.”

**Josh Isay:** He didn’t really say “please.” [laughter]

And yet we were able to raise the money. So that’s one thing.

Second, there was a point in time when Freddy Ferrer was ahead of the mayor in this race. And yet there was no money raised during the time when he actually looked to be a more viable candidate for mayor, someone who could actually win. So I think there—

**Mark Halperin:** Is that a mistake?

**Roberto Ramirez:** I want to answer both. First point, it’s unfortunate, because it’s apples and oranges. Absolutely, Chuck Schumer did run for Senate. He was also a prominent member of the United States Congress with nine million dollars in the bank.

**Josh Isay:** He did not have nine million dollars. Roberto, with all due respect, he did not have nine million dollars when Geraldine Ferraro got in the race. He did have a sizeable war chest, but he raised a *lot* of money between the time Geraldine Ferraro came in.... They were 40 points ahead...

**Jef Pollock:** He actually *won* the primary and also the general. And you had D’Amato, who was hated by every Democrat on the planet. It is a total apples and oranges thing.

**Josh Isay:** I’m sorry, I’m talking about the ability to raise money...

**Jef Pollock:** I got that.

**Josh Isay:** ...against an incumbent who is powerful.

**Mark Halperin:** Let’s stipulate there’s some similarities and some differences and move on to the second point.

**Roberto Ramirez:** By the way, Josh, I did allow you to finish the point, but I’m not gonna disrupt again. So the point is comparing Mr. Schumer to Mr. Ferrer in 2005 is absolutely ludicrous. Second point, the notion that Mr. Ferrer had an opportunity to raise money when he was ahead of the polls? Mr. Ferrer created a committee on November 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>, immediately after the primary; in January of 2005, the poll came out that in fact put Mr. Bloomberg and Mr. Ferrer tied. Since he created the committee in November, December, Christmas comes in. At which point was it that he had this ability to raise funds?

**Mark Halperin:** Follow up, then. Would it have been smart, would it be in the race and raising money?

**Bill Cunningham:** In March...Roberto...Mark...

**Roberto Ramirez:** In 2002, absolutely. But that was not when the candidate had decided.

*“The Ratner group ... made it easy for people who are in that donor world to say, ‘Hey look, Ratner is doing it, blah, blah, blah. Etcetera is doing it. It’s fine.’ .... It was the easiest fundraising ask ever: ‘Just don’t give any money!’”*

*—Nick Baldick*

**Bill Cunningham:** In March, a poll came out that had Freddy ahead by eight points and that was after January, so he moved back into a lead in at least one poll.

**Nick Baldick:** Clearly it would have been better to raise money earlier. It would have been better if Freddy announced earlier or decided to run, and I think we made that point in the primary panel. I think we pointed to the fact that Gifford did a better job.

**Mark Halperin:** But when you were back ahead, when it was still a much more plausible case, you were the front-runner, you were ahead in the election year. Could you have been more aggressive?

**Nick Baldick:** January, February and March would be—

**Mark Halperin:** Could you have been more aggressive? I understand. But during that period, could you have been more aggressive, pre-Diallo, in raising money off of your status?

**Jef Pollock:** Wait, wait, wait. We *were*. We *did*. And we actually did quite well, from a Democratic perspective in the first filing, in terms of the amount of money that we raised. So let’s not rewrite history entirely. The amount he raised.... First of all, we talked about it this morning. Freddy does not like to raise money. Now, I don’t know any candidate who does, but Freddy particularly does not like to raise money.

**Jordan Barowitz:** Chuck Schumer does.

**Jef Pollock:** Chuck? Chuck likes to raise money. Thanks for the apple and orange on that one.

So then, we did raise money during that time and then quickly the polls did start to change. And then Diallo, etc., etc. So we all agreed this morning, we would have loved for Freddy to have been in the race earlier, raising money. It is a fantasyland scenario that doesn't exist, because he hadn't decided to run.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, Mark Mellman. And then we are going to move to labor unions.

**Mark Mellman:** I just want to say one quick word about the viability issue because, while it's clearly true that there were polls that showed Ferrer tied or ahead, I think the general sense in the community, in the press and in the political community, was that Mike Bloomberg was not going to lose. I'm not sure...we can argue whether that was justifiable or not, but I remember my friend Brian Hardwick calling me up demanding that I write memos saying that if Freddy Ferrer is tied with Bloomberg to prove somehow that Bloomberg could be beaten, even if not by us but by somebody. And so I think the general sense was, irrespective of the specific poll numbers, that Mike Bloomberg was not going to get beaten, even when I—

**Jef Pollock:** Look, the public poll numbers from March of 2005...in March the mayor's job approval rating was a net negative. The mayor's numbers did start to go up before he spent money, but the mayor spent, what I have, approximately seven or eight million dollars, and at that point was when the first time that the approval/disapproval numbers finally met even. So the mayor had already spent seven million dollars and the numbers reach an even point and they begin to go north.

*“You can't dismiss the notion of the advantage of being able to advertise starting in March and April .... The mayor spent more in the first five days of the general election than we could have spent in the entire campaign.”*

*—Jef Pollock*

And again, God bless him for doing that, but you can't dismiss—as much as you keep wanting to, Mark—you can't dismiss the notion of the advantage of being able to advertise starting in March and April and beginning the process of changing those numbers. Because that seven or eight million right there? The mayor spent more in the first five days of the general election than we *could* have spent in the entire campaign.

**Stu Loeser:** You know, Jef, I recall in 2001 Alan Hevesi started advertising in March and April. You were involved in that race.

**Jef Pollock:** He didn't start—

**Stu Loeser:** He started advertising in March.

**Jef Pollock:** But we all had the same amount of money.

**Mark Halperin:** A thousand five hundred points?

**Jef Pollock:** We all had the same amount of money in 2001. We all had the same amount of money in 2005.

**Mark Halperin:** Not all our own TV is created equal. Bill Cunningham, tell us smart things you did to get union support that we don't know about.

**Nick Baldick:** Mark, it's early and forever TV. There is a distinction here.

## THE UNION ENDORSEMENTS

**Mark Halperin:** What are the smart things you did to get union support that we don't know about?

**Bill Cunningham:** I think you probably know about most of the things we did. The mayor had a very large capital construction plan for the city. The stadium is the prominent example of that. When that was stymied, he didn't cry about it. Within a week he had the Yankees and Mets stadium projects ready to go. The construction unions saw a guy who was committed to building and employing their members. And we not only got the support of the unions, we got them to help us create that Rangel Commission to open up some of these jobs for kids who in the past—or young adults—who have been shut out of these good jobs. There is so much work, they need the bodies. They need the people. And that, I think, helped us overall.

In terms of the public employee unions, there were plenty of issues. We had labor contracts hanging out there, the teachers' union hanging out there. We got DC 37 to come on board first, as a major public employee union. And then it became acceptable for.... Well, we probably got elements of DC 37 before we got the entire District Council. But it became acceptable for public employee unions to start talking to us about an endorsement.

One of the things that we did not want to do and.... In the case of a couple of these unions, they endorsed us before they had any labor settlements. The DC 37 endorsement—which some people will point to and I think your notes point to coming the day after they got a one percent increase—that one percent had been negotiated in their contract that had been in place for months and months, maybe going back to the previous winter.

So that was going to happen at some point or other. That was money that they were going to get. It had nothing to do with their endorsement. What happened is the mayor, as he does with a lot of people, spends a lot of time talking, meeting, having coffee, having dinner; and I think a relationship developed between the union leaders and the mayor that they said they could work with him. And the profound change from 2001 to 2005 is that union leaders, whether they are public or private unions, said, “This is a guy we can work with. We may disagree from time to time.” We’ve just seen an episode of that last week regarding the Council’s actions regarding the Campaign Finance Board and whether unions can give money from each of their locals. But the mayor will explain why he’s opposed to it and he’ll talk to you about it. He’s had an open door policy at City Hall. Everybody’s been welcome to come in and make their case to him or to his staff. And that basically came back to help him in his race.

**Mark Halperin:** Was it idiosyncratic about this mayor—for his funding, for his record, for his personality? Or is this something more profound about the two parties and unions in this city?

**Bill Cunningham:** I think a lot of this is driven by Mike Bloomberg. And a lot of it is driven by the way he approaches his job. Once the election was over, I remember him saying... I said something to him about... I can’t remember the exact words but it might have been along the lines of, “Good, we can get even with somebody.” And he said, “You don’t understand, we won. That’s all the getting even we need. Now we have to govern.” And that’s his attitude.

The big question was would he meet with Al Sharpton. He went up and shook his hand and everybody took his picture. There was no issue after that about talking to Al Sharpton. And, you know, he had breakfast with Freddy after the last election, up in the Bronx. The fact is, he believes that you finish one project, you start the next one. You lose a stadium, you find some other way to help the city with construction or jobs or housing. You end a campaign, you get on with government.

**Mark Halperin:** Why did the 1199 story end differently?

**Bill Cunningham:** You know, I don’t understand. They were talking to us. Apparently they were talking to both sides right up to the time they made the decision to go with Freddy. And I can’t speak for Dennis Rivera. I don’t know. Some of the folks in the Ferrer camp may have a better sense of what tipped him in that direction. He hung out for a long time, a

*“The profound change from 2001 to 2005 is that union leaders, whether they are public or private unions, said, ‘This is a guy we can work with. We may disagree from time to time.’”*

*—Bill Cunningham*

lot longer than many people thought he would. I think a lot of people suspected that he would have been, as he was four years ago, with Freddy from the beginning.

But they were talking to us about a lot of issues and then they went with Freddy.

**Mark Halperin:** Tell us about those talks. Where were they stalemated or why didn’t you achieve what you wanted with those talks?

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, we were hoping to get an endorsement. We believed we had a very good working relationship with Dennis on a number of issues.

**Mark Halperin:** What was said to him in connection with those talks to try to entice him into endorsing you?

**Bill Cunningham:** I wasn’t in the discussions with Dennis but I believe we went over the record of what we’ve done with him and his union on issues that he cares about. The fact that we crafted, along with the City Council—I’m not trying to take sole credit for this, but it was part of a budget solution—an earned income tax credit at the city level for the first time. And even before that, the city had worked with his union and others to publicize how people could get additional money back on their taxes if they fall below a certain threshold in income.

But in the conversations with him, it was about all the good working relationships and the things we had done along with 1199 and others, to move the city forward. At some point, he decided to go with Freddy.

**Mark Halperin:** Mr. Ramirez, a billionaire on the Upper East Side got the support of some representatives of working people over some of the Bronx. How did that happen?

*“I think [for the unions] it was a function of, basically, ‘If this man is going to win and he is going to be the mayor, how do we live with that fact?’ Nothing more and nothing less.”*

*—Roberto Ramirez*

**Roberto Ramirez:** Yes, he did. First of all, let me just first correct something. In 2001, Dennis Rivera wasn’t with Freddy from the beginning. Actually, Dennis Rivera endorsed Freddy the Thursday before the Tuesday primary. So it was not unusual.

**Bill Cunningham:** I’ll stand corrected if I said from the beginning, but he was with him, which is my basic point.

**Roberto Ramirez:** He was on the Thursday before the primary and there was a runoff for two weeks, so let’s just lay that one on the right side of history.

Second one: on the notion of labor, it’s true there was all these contracts hanging over labor. And you asked the question, how is it that a billionaire mayor from the Upper West Side—Upper East Side, Jef corrects me.... I would add to that “incumbent.” I would add a presumption that he is going to get re-elected. So I think that institutions make decisions based on what they believe they are going to have to live with, and the moment that it became obvious that Mr. Bloomberg would be re-elected, then all that was left was, how do you negotiate a contract with the mayor, because the truth of the matter is...I think in people’s mindset was, “Well, he is going to be here for the next four years, how do we end up not having to be...for lack of a better word, not having to end up the way that firefighters, police officers, teachers and child care workers ended up for three years—without having a contract, without being able to negotiate because the mayor wouldn’t?” The whole notion of labor coming on board, I think, is not just a function of niceness and having coffee and talking to people. I think it is a function—and by the way, I’m going to make just one other point. I do not hold the Bloomberg campaign or the mayor...somehow that they did something wrong because they kept people from giving money to Freddy. It is their job to do that! If you’re running for re-election, you hope that people don’t give money to your opponent. That’s just the way it is.

However, the question with labor here is—and this is something for lunch—that whenever one of these events happened, the way that it was presented, it was presented as another great accomplishment of Mr. Bloomberg. And when one union did endorse Fernando Ferrer, it became a quid pro quo. It became something that was nefarious, something that was wrong. It became about what it is that this...how people view Mr. Fernando Ferrer’s ability to convince labor to endorse him versus Mr. Bloomberg’s ability to convince labor to endorse him.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me put down a marker for lunch and the way I’m going to work the lunch—

**Roberto Ramirez:** I’m just gonna stay for 15 minutes.

**Nick Baldick:** Wait a second, we’re going to leave labor and not talk about that?

**Mark Halperin:** No, no, no, I’m not leaving labor.

**Nick Baldick:** I mean, the DC 37 story versus 1199 story...

**Mark Halperin:** I’m not leaving it but here’s the question for the media. Your analysis...some people may question your analysis of the content. I don’t.

**Roberto Ramirez:** I think a lot of people do.

**Mark Halperin:** I don’t question your analysis of the content. The question is going to be, for lunch, on most of these things is, “Why? Why was the coverage different?”

**Roberto Ramirez:** Is that the question?

**Mark Halperin:** Yes it is. I’m just raising it now rhetorically.

And you have been quoted as saying it may have had something to do with the press not wanting there to be a Hispanic mayor. I don’t know whether you said it or not but you were quoted as saying that.

**Jef Pollock:** You *were* quoted as saying that.

**Roberto Ramirez:** Do you want me to go with that?

**Mark Halperin:** No, I don’t. I just want to say—

**Roberto Ramirez:** You just want to leave it lingering. You don’t want people to leave.

**Jen Bluestein:** He may need a lunch all his own, actually.

**Mark Halperin:** My focus on lunch is you all have a number of accusations you’ve made about the press coverage. This is one of them, which again, I think in many cases can be backed up by the content. The question for lunch will be why the press coverage—



**Nick Baldick:** Let's talk about the facts real quick. Jef, you were there.

**Jef Pollock:** By the way, I was the one in the negotiations, in terms of what—

**Mark Halperin:** You talking about 1199?

**Jef Pollock:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Mark Halperin:** Before you do that—because you all are the only ones who raised this controversy—I want to ask Mr. Ramirez: If you are right about labor's motivation, what does that say about the state of labor unions in this city—their leadership, at least—and their relationship with the Democratic Party, if they are making decisions based on what you described as them basing them on?

**Roberto Ramirez:** I think there is a historical shift that is not just New York City or New York State. It's a national historical shift that you have seen particularly in the last 20 to 30 years, when in fact labor.... And that, by the way, a lot of it has to do not necessarily with individual candidates but it is what the Democratic Party nationally and locally stands for. So that when a labor union begins to see very little difference between the Democratic Party nationally and the Republican Party nationally and locally, they begin to question what is it that they are required to do and how do they take care of their own members' interests. In the City of New York, I think it was a function of, basically, "If this man is going to win and he is going to be the mayor, how do we live with that fact?" Nothing more and nothing less. And I suspect as we move on from this election onto future elections, we will come back and you will see exactly the same kind of mindset that has always existed in the city. The city is basically, fundamentally, a Democratic city. It's a Democratic state, as you are seeing it, as we are going through this election cycle. And labor will make decisions, rightfully so, in what they believe is the best interest of their membership.

Where I take exception, or where I have a right, is to when I believe that it is not in the best interest of those memberships in the long run, to say so.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Yes, sir.

**Bill Cunningham:** Just to get back to Roberto's point about the unions. The contracts that he refers to only deal with municipal unions. It doesn't explain why all of the other unions endorsed Mike Bloomberg. The construction unions certainly had an interest in—

**Nick Baldick:** I think we know why they endorsed. *[laughter]*

**Bill Cunningham:** But when Dennis came aboard, he didn't bring along SEIU, the rest of SEIU, the hotel and restaurant workers, which are not municipal employees. He didn't bring along UNITE, which is one of the more liberal and progressive unions in the country. They endorsed Mike Bloomberg. They don't have municipal contracts. There is

something about the mayor's record and the way he dealt with people that engendered that support. And I think it's important not to think that labor is simply municipal unions. It is more than that. And I would also make the point that I don't think anybody from labor is here today. So I will gladly defend them in this room today.

**Roberto Ramirez:** And I think you should, given the benefit that you received. *[laughter]*

But let me point out three issues so that it is clear: a) you are absolutely right, the labor in New York City is not just municipal labors. So let's go through them.

Construction, trades: West Side stadium. Ratner: Bronx Terminal Market. By the time this came about, the trade unions had made a fundamental decision.... Did I miss one?

**Nick Baldick:** No, but they were done at that point.

**Roberto Ramirez:** They had made the fundamental decision that the best interests lie with Mayor Bloomberg. Wonderful. Put it to the side.

Thirty-two BJ—absolutely not a municipal union. But everyone who sits here, I think, understands that the issues that affect a union like 32BJ go beyond municipal contracts. That they're issues of security and they're issues of what kind of impact the mayor has or doesn't have. And UNITE, absolutely. Not a municipal union. But UNITE marched. And other unions that worked with UNITE also have a specific instance. And my reason for saying this—

*"I do not hold ... that they did something wrong because they kept people from giving money to Freddy. It is their job to do that! If you're running for re-election, you hope that people don't give money to your opponent."*

*—Roberto Ramirez*

**Nick Baldick:** In UNITE's case, if I'm not mistaken, the mayor, and I think, did the right thing on helping on the Waldorf and that other transitions.

**Jef Pollock:** The Plaza.

**Nick Baldick:** The Plaza. And I think that most of their contracts were up next year here in New York.

**Roberto Ramirez:** And I don't wish to take credit away from the mayor. I just don't wish it to be said and left lingering that somehow this was not a done deal. That it's an accomplishment. Whether it is to the mayor's credit or not, that labor made a fundamental decision. I believe that when this mayor happens to be part of a policy-making network that extends all the way to the White House, that eventually that's a mistake. But again, that's my humble opinion.

## FERRER SEEKS NATIONAL SUPPORT

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, when the Ratner developments were occurring, when the union developments were occurring, did you all reach out to national people? To the head of the nationals of those labor unions, to the Democratic Party, and say, "We need help. This is—"

**Roberto Ramirez:** Traveled to Washington. Yes.

**Mark Halperin:** Tell us about those conversations. I'll just say—



**Roberto Ramirez:** They were short; they were brief. It depends on which period are you talking about. Are you talking about before June? Are you talking after it became obvious that the mayor was going to get re-elected?

**Mark Halperin:** I'm looking for the most interesting ones. But I know, for instance, that when the Democrats for Bloomberg came out, *The New York Times* tried to get a reaction from the Democratic Party, similar to when Democrats—including some here and Bill Knapp—worked for Bloomberg. Very tepid reaction from the national Democrats. Tell us about your efforts to go to the AFL, to go to national Democrats and say, "We need to be criticizing and ostracizing these groups and our people who are supposed to be with our side."

**Jef Pollock:** It's tough to piss on the sugar mamas. It is very tough.

**Mark Halperin:** On the what?

**Jef Pollock:** Sugar mamas. The funders.

**Mark Halperin:** Who were your short meetings with?

**Roberto Ramirez:** On the labor side, we met with a number of national unions who, at the time, were very predisposed to support Mr. Ferrer. That, of course, changed over a period of time.

On the Democratic side, the national Democratic side, we rightfully called the chairman of the National Democratic Party. I had a number of rather lively discussions.

**Mark Halperin:** What did they say in response to your requests? What did you request and what did they say in response?

**Nick Baldick:** I think their response was that Governor Dean was doing everything *he* could do. That *he* was traveling here. That *he* was campaigning. But they did not offer, as Jef put ever so eloquently, to slap around their own donors. I would have put it slightly differently. Piss on the sugar mamas? No. It's not in Howard Dean's interests or the DNC's.

At the same time, as far as national Democrats go, Senator Clinton, Senator Schumer, Senator Kerry, Senator Edwards and Governor Dean all did as much as they could, I thought, and were great.

**Mark Halperin:** Did you enlist the assistance of the Clintons in trying to get either the unions or the donors to not be for Bloomberg?

**Roberto Ramirez:** We enlisted their support. We also know the limitations that.... Remember, each one individual who gets elected gets elected and has a certain set of priorities that they have to live with as well. So we enlisted them in what

*Ferrer Chief Political Adviser Roberto Ramirez says that the national Democratic Party failed to support his candidate.*

we felt they could do for us. And whether it was Clinton or Hillary—and she did do a fundraiser.

**Nick Baldick:** Remember, by the time we were the nominee, the Ratner group has already formed. That is a really high percentage of Senator Clinton's donors. She did two fundraisers for us. She made calls on behalf of us. She helped tremendously.

**Roberto Ramirez:** But I tell you what I do believe the consequence of this is: that the Democratic national party will have to reckon with their failure. It was an absolute, total and complete, absolute failure to recognize the importance and significance of a constituency coming of age in New York City. It is their failure and they will have to live with it.

**Mark Halperin:** Last question on this.

**Nick Baldick:** Hold on a second. You said we were going back to the DC 37/1199 comparison. I didn't see us go back.

**Mark Halperin:** I was trying to avoid that.

**Nick Baldick:** I think that comparison—

**Jef Pollock:** The funny thing is that it's one of the few things that I actually found...and they didn't make a lot of mistakes. It was one of the mistakes I thought they—

**Mark Halperin:** Let me ask a question before that and then you—

**Jef Pollock:** Don't you care?

**Mark Halperin:** I didn't—

**Jef Pollock:** You're talking about things that bore people. Labor? Come on.

**Mark Halperin:** How did the candidate...what emotions did the candidate evince, based on the defection of the labor unions and the donors? How did he feel about that? What questions did he ask about it? What did he do about it?

**Jef Pollock:** I don't know. What did he do about it? He felt angry. There's no question that Freddy felt angered by...we felt very strongly that right going into the general, we were going to have a massive outpouring—financially, certainly—of support. It was a historic occasion. So there is no question that Freddy was very disappointed with what came about. He did make a number of phone calls, sort of tried to deal with it personally. But you are asking somebody to do something incredibly hard, at that point. Which we asked him to do and he did.

**Roberto Ramirez:** Surprise is a good word.

**Mark Halperin:** Surprise.

**Jef Pollock:** He was surprised.

*“The Democratic national party will have to reckon with their failure. It was an absolute, total and complete, absolute failure to recognize the importance and significance of a constituency coming of age in New York City.”*

*—Roberto Ramirez*

**Mark Halperin:** Three minutes, explaining your perception of the difference in the two labor endorsements.

**Jef Pollock:** I wasn't even going to hit that. I was just going to say I don't think they made a lot of mistakes. I think we did. I think that one of the mistakes, in my opinion, was their leak of the 1199 “deal,” which...there was no deal on our end, *ever*. A hundred percent.

Their leaking of it, to the *New York Post*, and putting it on the front page only served to juice up Dennis Rivera, who had been hanging out there for so long, as Bill said. So from a tactical perspective, actually, I thought it was a rare mistake that they made—along with the attacking the dead guy, which people have heard me talk about before.

That was...it pushed in a way for Dennis that I don't know necessarily would have been as emphatic before that.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Bill Cunningham? We need to switch now. Tell us about your—

**Bill Cunningham:** Wait a second. On behalf of the dead guy, and having lived in Albany for a long time, where there's a long tradition of the dead voting...and Mayor Corning, who once told me that you don't lose your constitutional rights simply because you die... *[laughter]*

He was fair game.

**Mark Halperin:** Tell us what—

**Nick Baldick:** He was fair game? He just—

**Jen Bluestein:** That is so—

**Josh Isay:** He was a voter—

**Jef Pollock:** Go ahead, go ahead. I said two mistakes. Go ahead.

## THE DEBATE OVER DEBATES: DID THE APOLLO MATTER?

**Mark Halperin:** What was your debate strategy and your debate about debate strategy, and how successfully would you grade yourself in having executed it?

**Nick Baldick:** Just so we are clear: 1199? DC 37? Not done.

**Jen Bluestein:** Do we gotta start at lunch?

**Mark Halperin:** I gave him a chance to do it. We'll do it over snacks.

**Jen Bluestein:** Okay. *[laughter]*

**Bill Cunningham:** In terms of the debates, we had made a decision that there'd be two debates. That was—

**Mark Halperin:** Because?

**Bill Cunningham:** Because that's a) what we know had been done in the previous few mayoral elections. And that's what we wanted to do. And whenever you get into these debate strategy decisions and you are not bound by the CFB rules—and even their rules only call for two debates—it seemed like that's what made sense. It made sense tactically to us. It made sense in terms of the schedule and the timing that we wanted to have for the campaign.

*“We understood that once we made a decision [about the Apollo debate] and told the world, that somebody would find fault with us. The interesting thing is that the public basically didn't care.”*

*—Bill Cunningham*

Then we had a number of offers. The two that we accepted were on ABC and on NBC, and the one that we declined, that everybody talks about, is on NY1. So some people could find fault with that strategy, but it seemed to have worked out for us.

**Mark Halperin:** It did lead to some bad days of coverage, however. Could you have done more, without accepting the offer, to minimize that?

**Bill Cunningham:** No, I think as soon as we said “no” the die was cast; we were going to get pummeled by our opponents, perhaps by some pundits, certainly.... Let's complain about the press. The press is going to beat us up about it. But the fact of the matter is we understood that once we made a decision and told the world, that somebody would find fault with us.

The interesting thing is that the public basically didn't care.

**Mark Halperin:** Did you poll on that?

**Bill Cunningham:** We did get some polling data as we went along.

**Mark Halperin:** What kind of questions did you ask to determine the public didn't care about that?

**Bill Cunningham:** We asked questions about “Do you think it's important for the mayor to debate? Do you think it's important that he debate at the Apollo Theater? Do you think it's important that he debate early in the campaign or late in the campaign?” That kind of stuff. And the upshot of it was, you've agreed to two debates; okay, there's going to be debates. What's the big issue?

**Mark Halperin:** Given the emphasis that you've put on the African American vote, weren't you taking a risk that you couldn't necessarily measure in advance, skipping the Apollo debate?

**Bill Cunningham:** I think, at this point in time, Terence Tolbert, who has remained stoic and seemingly implacable in the face of all this, should respond to this, since he is a Harlem resident and has some experience with this.

**Mark Halperin:** Mr. Tolbert, was there a risk involved that you couldn't measure?

**Terence Tolbert:** There is always a risk when you make a decision about what could be considered a race issue. The thing that was important, though, was that—and this is something that Harlemites have to learn themselves—is that not all black people live in Harlem. Not everyone is.... The Apollo as an icon for the community was a great place to debate, but it wasn't something that was important to everyone out there. People who—and this was a funny story that we witnessed the other day—at another...at a class that Stu and I were at, we asked, basically, “Of all the people in this room on public policy, how many of you actually watched



the debate?” In a room of 45 people, one raised their hand. The interaction at the debate left you with the idea that this wasn’t something that black people cared about. Their issues weren’t discussed. All the hype that was made about, “The mayor will not talk to black people in their own community,” didn’t matter to a black person who lives in Southeast Queens. It didn’t matter to someone who lived in Central Brooklyn or the Bronx.

What mattered to them was whether or not the mayor had a track record and cared about the issues that they were concerned about. And that, I think, was something that he had a great record on.

You could say he didn’t go to Harlem to debate, but one of the things that the press didn’t cover was the fantastic Town Hall meeting he had in Harlem four or five months before, where he talked to the community about their issues, had his commissioners do whatever it was that was needed to address their concerns. And that’s what people were concerned about: whether or not the mayor was interested in dealing with their issues. And he had proven over the last four years that he had a good track record.

**Mark Halperin:** Leaving aside the terror alert, which we will get to in a moment, do any of you want to say anything about the Apollo debate or the debate strategy?

**Nick Baldick:** I think.... By the way, I thought our communications and Roberto and other folks did a great job of creating pain for these guys for about four days there.

I think Terence’s evaluation is probably post-text winning by 19 or 20 points. I think at the time you probably were a little more nervous than you are letting on right now.

**Terence Tolbert:** No, I wouldn’t say, Nick, that we were nervous. We knew we were going to take a hit. This was one of those things where you’re like, “Okay, what is Reverend Sharpton going to say?” And I remember someone from your camp calling me and saying, “Terence, thank you. You’ve given us such a great gift. We are going to use this till the cows come home.”

And when you started talking to people in the focus groups.... I remember we did this huge focus group and this issue came up and people said, “You know what? I don’t care about the debate. What I care about is whether or not the mayor is going to deal with the fact that I can’t find housing or whether my kids are doing well in school or what jobs there could be made out there.”

**Nick Baldick:** Was that focus group in those four nights, Terence?

**Terence Tolbert:** No, this focus group was well after.

**Nick Baldick:** After the terror alert?

*“All the hype that was made about, ‘The mayor will not talk to black people in their own community,’ didn’t matter to a black person who lives in Southeast Queens. It didn’t matter to someone who lived in Central Brooklyn or the Bronx.”*

*—Terence Tolbert*

**Jordan Barowitz:** Also, a compelling criticism does not a message make. So while, sure, score a couple points on the Apollo debate, it’s like voters are looking for a reason why somebody should be mayor. And at the end of the day saying, “Oh, he’s only going to do two debates...”

**Jef Pollock:** But you know this better, this is about tactics.

**Jordan Barowitz:** “...and not come to Harlem for a debate,” is not a reason why somebody’s going to vote for them to begin with.

**Jef Pollock:** I said I thought they made two mistakes. I actually think they made a third mistake. Because it would have been just easy to do that debate and not have any of this agita. And you know very well, Jordan, that this isn’t about a message about getting people to vote, this is about the tactics of a campaign strategy four weeks before election day. And the fact that we got four good days of coverage, there was reason to praise hallelujah. Allah as well.

**Nick Baldick:** Especially considering Parks said we only had five the whole campaign. And Stu would have said it would be a little higher.

**Jordan Barowitz:** And that was the problem, was that it was purely tactical. There was no sense of message.

**Mark Halperin:** What was the message associated with the Apollo criticism?

**Roberto Ramirez:** By the way, I think they made the right decision, given what an incumbent would do. An incumbent



*Bloomberg Senior Political Adviser Terence Tolbert discusses his candidate's decision not to debate Ferrer at the Apollo Theater.*

What was not discussed—and this is what *your* mistake was—was that you did not use this as an opportunity to put forth a platform for how you were going to deal with the issues that your pundits brought up.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, I need you to stop. In two senses, because we have two big, complicated—

**Jen Bluestein:** You asked a very simple question. Or Jordan posed a very simple question, and the message, I think, was... there were three messages. There were three opportunities for us to make points off it. The first was that the mayor held himself, as we have been trying to say again and again, essentially above the rules that govern other candidates. The second was that he, for all of his willingness to spend quite a lot of money defending or touting his record on TV, he was unwilling to come defend his record in a live situation that couldn't be controlled and sort of created by him. And the third was this issue of what the location did or didn't mean. And those were very clear, simple messages.

**Mark Halperin:** Some might say those were not positive messages, but.... Here are the two topics we are going to do.

**Jen Bluestein:** You didn't ask what the positive was.

**Mark Halperin:** Good point. There are some excellent questions—

**Jen Bluestein:** The positive was there was an empty podium.

## THE TERROR ALERT: WAS IT A FACTOR?

**Mark Halperin:** There are some excellent questions that people have sent up, which I want to get to, so at quarter of, wherever we are in the topic or conversation, we are stopping and we are going to call on some of those people to ask their questions that touch on some of the topics we have already done. So that gives us just over 10 minutes to cover two big topics.

One is, what was Fernando Ferrer's general election message?

And the other is the terror alert.

So, I think we'll start with the terror alert and ask anyone from this campaign to tell us briefly, very briefly, what is the essence of the most serious allegation you are now making, based on the facts of what you know and based on what your candidate said publicly, about how the Bloomberg campaign used the terror alert, at all, for political purposes?

**Jen Bluestein:** What? I'm sorry...

**Nick Baldick:** I'm confused.

doesn't want to debate, doesn't want to allow the other one.... I think that the first debate clearly showed that if the debate in the Apollo had taken place, then there may have been different movement and discontent, because I think that most people would argue that in the first debate Fernando Ferrer not only showed that he belonged in that stage. Actually the mayor had somewhat of a lackluster performance. So the debate of the Apollo, the failure to debate at the Apollo, given though I believe that it is not about the people that live in Harlem. It's about the people who live in this city, 50 percent of which are either African American or Latino, and you tell me, among those debates, which debates were geared, directed, solely concentrated on issues of poverty, dropout rate. None of that.

So the issue here wasn't just the debate at Apollo. For the *campaign* purposes, the Bloomberg campaign obviously made the right decision.

**Mark Halperin:** I need to.... Go ahead, real quick.

**Terence Tolbert:** If I can. But that's not what the Apollo debate was about either. Not one concern about African Americans or Latinos was addressed in any way by any of the candidates who spoke there.

**Jen Bluestein:** You don't consider education or housing as concerns to African Americans and Latinos?

**Terence Tolbert:** Education or housing, yes, but the hype that was built up...the debate was formulated as, "What was the mayor going to do about the African American or Latino community?" That was not the discussion. That was what every attack was. He didn't show up. He didn't show up to a debate that very few people watched. I can live with that.

**Jen Bluestein:** You want us to answer questions about the terror alert.

**Mark Halperin:** Based on your candidate saying he didn't think it was for political purposes, based on the facts that have come out since that time, what is the most serious allegation you are prepared to make today about what the Bloomberg campaign did?

**Jen Bluestein:** I just want to say one thing, which is what our candidate has said in recent days, in that there is no campaign anymore, is not of relevance to what the people at this table are willing to say.

**Mark Halperin:** Fine. So what is the most serious allegation you're prepared to make today about the role the terror alert played by manipulating...?

**Roberto Ramirez:** None.

**Mark Halperin:** None.

**Roberto Ramirez:** The campaign is over. Mr. Bloomberg became the next mayor of the City of New York. That is for everybody to figure out, whether.... And not only that, I hope that they look at a lot of other stuff, so.... I thought the campaign was over.

**Mark Halperin:** You don't even want to talk about it or you don't think they did anything improper?

**Jen Bluestein:** I think, if I could just...I will restate what I said then. I think I was the person in the campaign who spoke to this. We felt that it was...we were respectful of the many law enforcement folks who were working with the mayor's office at that time. We were respectful of the fact that we didn't think that the mayor was craven enough to do such a thing. We felt that it was ironic that given that he was so effective at deciding when he would or wouldn't debate that he was also then a little bit...there seemed to be a little bit of diciness of how much information got out and when. And there were some questions about that, and many people said that, not just us. *The New York Times* said that in their reporting. Many, many people raised questions about that. That is the only thing we ever said. We did not say that there was anything politically motivated or suspect about the terror alert.

**Mark Halperin:** Bill Cunningham: from a political point of view, leaving aside the performance of the government and the mayor as an incumbent, was the terror alert good politically for your chances of winning?

**Bill Cunningham:** The first thing I would say is—

**Mark Halperin:** I'm sorry, that was just a yes or no question to that. Was it good for you?

**Bill Cunningham:** We don't go to debates with yes or no questions and we don't answer yes or no questions.

**Mark Halperin:** Was it good for you politically?

**Bill Cunningham:** Ultimately, yes.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. Tell us why and how you accommodated that possibility that it would be good.

**Bill Cunningham:** Look, this is a city that has been attacked twice. There is an underlying concern among every resident and visitor to this city with that. You had a mayor who was given information from federal and local law enforcement and acted. The job of a mayor is to act. The job of a mayor is to protect the citizens. And that's what the public saw him doing. And at the time—I give the Ferrer campaign credit—they did not engage in any conspiracy theories or anything like that. In fact, when they were critical of the mayor about the Apollo Theater, they actually created a radio ad with Al Sharpton; never mentioned the terror alert. Just talked about whether or not he would go to Harlem.

So, it was good for the mayor in the sense that people saw him taking action from a credible threat.

**Mark Halperin:** Let me just ask any of you to say, was there a message that you thought the Ferrer campaign would seize on in the general election, that you felt would have made the race more competitive? And if so, what was it?

**Nick Baldick:** Stu, the answer is no. *[laughter]*

**Bill Cunningham:** Well, I think they covered a lot of ground, so I'm trying to think of what they didn't cover that they could have.

**Mark Halperin:** How about something they might have settled on?

*“The job of a mayor is to protect the citizens. And that's what the public saw him doing [with the terror alert]. And at the time—I give the Ferrer campaign credit—they did not engage in any conspiracy theories.”*

*—Bill Cunningham*



**Chung Seto:** Can I ask? I know that we talked about the stadium and you breathed a sigh of relief, but how hard did you pray for the test scores to go up? And if it did not go up, how would it have influenced your strategy after the test scores?

**Bill Cunningham:** I actually got through high school and college praying a lot about test scores, generally my own. But I didn't pray this time. There had been a lot of data about the reforms working in a lot of different levels. The fourth-grade and seventh-grade state test scores had gone up. And then we saw evidence of improvements in the other grades as well. We shouldn't forget that.

*“They were not attacking the Bloomberg administration. They were saying, ‘We could deal with this problem, this core problem, that the Bloomberg administration has neglected.’”*

*—Wayne Barrett*

*Wayne Barrett, senior editor at The Village Voice, discusses Fernando Ferrer’s “two New Yorks” campaign theme.*

And there wasn't a lot of prayer but there was an awful lot of hard work by the people who have to run the education department.

**Stu Loeser:** Chung, you know, I think I'm unique in the campaign for thinking this and there's no empirical evidence to back it up. I always felt that Mike Bloomberg had won the education issue long before the first test scores came out. Because it was a choice of status quo—a system that had failed generations of students for 30 years or longer—and doing something to try to introduce accountability and results and starting to turn the schools around. Whether or not...I always felt, on a personal level, whether or not the...before the test scores came out, no matter what they said, I felt in conversations that I would have with ordinary New Yorkers, be them as they may, felt like, “At least he's doing something.”

And there was a time or two in the campaign where we drew a contrast between a mayor who introduces accountability and reform and results and someone who has supported a status quo system that failed.

And we could have done that contrast between a status quo political system that failed our students and introducing accountability and reform with or without the test scores.

## THE CANDIDATES' MESSAGES

**Mark Halperin:** I need to stop. I've left five minutes for what many people I think would say is the most important part of the general, and that is kind of unfortunate. Hopefully, we will talk more about that in the last 15 minutes and at lunch.

I would like no one from the Bloomberg or Ferrer campaign to vote, and you may close your eyes, if you wish, for obvious reasons. How many people elsewhere in the room thought, whether you agreed with it or not, the mayor had a clear message in his re-election campaign? Show of hands if you thought the mayor had a clear message in his re-election campaign.

And how many people thought the Democratic nominee had a clear message in his re-election campaign? How many people? One, two, three, four, five.

Wayne Barrett, what was the clear message?

**Wayne Barrett:** The clear message...I think it took a while to get there, but I think the clear message was embodied in the commercial that aired the most, which was: the poverty rate is going up in New York. That message was associated with the issues of health policy and housing and education, the dropout rate and so forth, that he had stressed. It took him a while to get there, but I thought by the end of the campaign it was pretty clear that the message was that there is a whole, very significant part of the city that is *not*



benefiting directly from what is otherwise.... I think they also made it pretty clear that they were not *attacking* the Bloomberg administration. They were saying, "We could deal with this problem, this core problem, that the Bloomberg administration has neglected." I found it surprising, I still find it surprising, looking around this room. This is the first time, in my lifetime, in covering a mayoral campaign that I thought a mayoral candidate actually made poverty his core issue.

I don't remember anybody doing that since Lindsay. And I'm talking about in a general, because certainly Freddy did some of that in 2001 as well.

**Mark Halperin:** Does anyone else who raised their hand and said Ferrer had a clear message, have a substantially different idea about what that clear message was? Or does everyone agree who raised their hand that that was his message?

Everyone agrees.

Do you all agree? Was that the message that you wanted to be running on and that you did run on?

**Jef Pollock:** Yeah, the polling told us a couple of things. First of all, you are looking at a mayor with a 6 percent job approval rating by the time we're in the general election. And everybody in this room will admit that.... *[break in recording]*

We knew that there were a couple of weaknesses when you looked at the data. First was housing. The one thing that voters thought there had not been enough done on was housing. Stu is right that the education message, in fact, showed that it was going to be hard for us to break through. The voters did respect the fact that the mayor had gone and taken over the schools and done all of those things. The one avenue that we found that was, to some degree, effective for us and certainly in the polling, was the dropout rate, and what did that mean and what did it signify to voters?

**Mark Halperin:** It does sound like the "two New Yorks" theme.

**Jef Pollock:** Well, there *are* two New Yorks. It's all "two New Yorks."

**Mark Halperin:** Was it a mistake to not just—

**Jef Pollock:** No. It was not a mistake. We did "two New Yorks." We did a "two New Yorks" speech in February. We talked about two New Yorks and the mayor agreed with us that there were two New Yorks. Again, talk about taking something off the table. We gave a speech at Lehman College in February; we said there were two New Yorks. The mayor said, "I agree. There are two New Yorks."

And I think the core things that we talked about from February until November were about the crisis of affordability and the dropout and all those things that are embodied by the "two New Yorks." You guys may have wanted us to use those words but our experience and our life experience from 2001—thank you for the whiplash that I have—is from

*"The question is not, 'Was there a message?' The question there is, 'Was there a message that I want to hear?' Because that message affects the people that I have to deal with every day."*

*—Roberto Ramirez*

hearing about it being cast in the limelight of race. And therefore everything that we did was *about* two New Yorks; we just didn't necessarily use those two words, which by the way wasn't even what we used in 2001. Three words, sorry. The "other New York."

I can't count; I'm only a pollster.

**Jen Bluestein:** We printed up a lot of posters that said, "Building One New York." You don't have to be very, very smart to figure out from that that we think the city is divided and should come together. I don't think we were ever running away from that message. I think we were absolutely consistent in that message.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, Mr. Ramirez, last statement and then we've hit that wall that I created.

**Roberto Ramirez:** Absolutely. It was fascinating, it was telling, when you asked the question, to see who raised their hand and see who didn't. Because the question is not, "Was there a message?" The question there is, "Was there a message that I want to hear?" Because that message affects the people that I have to deal with every day. Every single policy that Mr. Ferrer put forth—from the stock transfer tax to the housing proposal to his issues with dealing specifically with the ability to be able to address the 50 percent dropout rate—every one of them, you take a step back.... And the one thing that was just said here, this is the first time, certainly during my lifetime, that a candidate for mayor chose to risk winning so that he could...or in the process of raising issues that will not be raised in the next election for governor and will not be raised in the 2009 race because those issues are affecting a percentage of the population in this city which are not in this room.

By the way, whoever invited people here, I wish to give you my Rolodex because this is by invitation only. Second point

that I would make, next time, if you have a reporter who wrote on the other side, like Juan Gonzalez, you may want to have him here.

**Mia Lipsit:** He was invited.

**Roberto Ramirez:** I spoke with him this morning and he was not.

Second point: there may have been a couple of other people who should have been here. The point is, the message did not resonate with the people because that message—in this room—because that message was not poignant to the experiences that people have had.

**Jen Bluestein:** Mark, can I say one more thing, please?

**Mark Halperin:** You can't, 'cause we've hit quarter of and I need to let these people ask their excellent questions. I'm sorry, because I said quarter of. Now I'm going to call on people, please get them the mic. If you no longer want to ask the question you submitted you can pass. But otherwise, please ask the question that you did send up.

Jim Rutenberg first.

## DEMOCRATIC DEFECTORS REVISITED

**Jim Rutenberg:** I will start with Terence because he's had the least voice time here. And I guess this would go for Stu, too, and I figured not for Bill and Josh, just because

they were in the 2001 campaign. But were there incredible recriminations...? I want to start with Terence. When you joined the Bloomberg campaign, did you hear from Harlem leaders, from black leaders, "Why are you joining the Bloomberg campaign?" And Stu, did you hear generally from, you know, the Schumer, Jewish, Democratic... "Why are you doing this?" and "You're abandoning the party"? And the overarching is...

**Nick Baldick:** Jim is putting you in boxes.

**Jim Rutenberg:** I'm not. Well, we talked a lot about race and I'd like to...if I'm going to be attacked...there's a lot of press attacks.... I'm asking for obvious reasons, because there's a lot of talk about coalitions. You and I talked about coalition-building in the beginning.

**Stu Loeser:** One thing, by the way, that Jim never reported, or anyone, is that Terence directed our Jewish operations. *[laughter]*

It's true. It is totally true and no one ever reported that.

**Roberto Ramirez:** And you did a terrific job, by the way.

**Terence Tolbert:** Thank you. Being the smart political operative that I hope I am, I'm sure I checked with them before I took the job.

**Jim Rutenberg:** What did people say?

**Terence Tolbert:** They said, "You are going to work for Bloomberg? Good."

**Josh Isay:** "Mazel tov." *[laughter]*

**Terence Tolbert:** I could never say that. *[laughter]*

**Jim Rutenberg:** Was there any recrimination? Was there any... did you get letters or emails when it came out—from people you didn't know, you didn't check with?

**Terence Tolbert:** I don't think there was anyone who didn't know. I was very thorough in my conversations with people before I took the job. And I was pretty certain that.... The only person who did call me—and I will name her—was Donna Brazile, who said, "Terence, I just read a *New York Times* story..."—and it was a month later— *[laughter]*

"...that said you were working for Bloomberg. Brother, what are you doing?" And I explained to her what I thought about the mayor and what I thought about his record and afterwards she said, "I'll see you on the other side." And that was it.

**Mark Halperin:** Stu, do you want to say anything about that?

*New York Times reporter Jim Rutenberg asks Terence Tolbert how fellow Democrats reacted to his working for Bloomberg.*



**Stu Loeser:** Yeah, I think the issue wasn't so much Schumer people, I think the issue was Mark Green people. What I think would interest the audience.... Outside of Mark Green's staffers who were working for other candidates in the primary and one other person who is the room now, no. Nothing negative. Not at all. I'm not a spokesman for former Mark Green staffers but based on the ones I spoke to who weren't employed by other Democratic campaigns, they basically felt that this mayor was somewhere between a good and excellent mayor, depending on the person. And that was that.

**Mark Halperin:** There are lots of obvious follow-ups but I want to get as many of these questions in as we can. So Bob Hardt, if you are still here...

**Bob Hardt:** I'm gonna pass.

**Mark Halperin:** Bob Hardt passes.

*[exclamations of disappointment]*

**Nick Baldick:** Can't believe it.

**Jen Bluestein:** No!

**Mark Halperin:** Fred has submitted a couple of questions, both excellent. He can choose, but only one. Deanship has only so many privileges.

## NATIONAL DEMOCRATS REVISITED: PARTY LOYALTY?

**Fred Hochberg:** I have to remember which ones I posed. The last one I remember is: Roberto, you made a comment about the DNC and the national Democrats would have to reckon with the outcome of this. What do you actually mean by that? What is the ripple effect of this nationally? And I'll throw out the other question, actually, and you can choose. I'll let you choose. The other question I had was: Herman Badillo ran for mayor, lost, ran again. Freddy Ferrer ran for mayor, lost, ran again. Is there something about a losing candidate trying to run again that just makes it very hard to run a second time after you've lost either locally or nationally?

**Roberto Ramirez:** On the second question, yeah, of course. If you've run and lost, particularly if you don't hold elected office, it's much more difficult for a host of reasons that we've gone over. On the first issue of the Democratic National Party, no question that the chairman came to the city and tried to help; but there's a fundamental problem when the core constituencies of a party launch candidacies that emanate from those communities and every single time there is a reason or a rationale why they are not good enough. And in this instance, in the City of New York, I think that if you think about nationally, you have these growing constituencies that have always been very, totally, completely loyal to the Democratic Party—sometimes even to their own detriment,

*“The decision of the campaign was, ‘No one talks to Weiner about him pulling out,’ because the last thing that we wished to have in this campaign is affirmative action. Either Mr. Ferrer won the primary or he didn’t.”*

*—Roberto Ramirez*

people would argue. I don't, but that's what people would argue. And vote at 80, 90 percent. And you look around the city and you look, particularly in this state, and you ask yourself the question, “Okay, you've got somebody who got nominated. Earned the primary.” It was not given to him—which was one of the things that I wanted to say on that evening when Mr. Weiner and the conversations and the discussions were, “Whom from the Democrats should be talking to Weiner?” I believe that the decision of the campaign was, “No one talks to Weiner about him pulling out,” because the last thing that we wished to have in this campaign is affirmative action. Either Mr. Ferrer won the primary or he didn't. And if he didn't, he'll go into a runoff.

See, the Democratic Party, I think, has failed to realize that its future is very much tied to this constituency. And the one thing that I think the Republicans have done is that they have seen that neglect and in 2005 what happened was that the Democratic Party nationally could have made a different decision. They could have done what I'm hearing is being done with gubernatorial campaigns now and said, “I am going to send my top fundraiser.” Or, “I am going to send my three top operatives.” From anywhere in this country. And it wasn't because we didn't call. They failed to realize the significance of Mr. Fernando Ferrer's campaign. Not to Mr. Fernando Ferrer, solely, but to the future of the Democratic Party, and that is a shame.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, Bob Hardt reasserts his place in the queue, and then Mark Mellman.

**Bob Hardt:** The dean's question kind of touched on mine, so that's why I had to follow up to Roberto. You talk about party loyalty and the base. Do you think that the Bronx Democrats,



*NY1 News Political Director Bob Hardt asks Roberto Ramirez about his support of the Democratic nominee in the 2001 race.*

language so amazing. He said, “Slavery has been done away with.”

Now, I don’t know what slavery has to do with fundraising or giving money to a national party. And then he says, “We control the party. We are the party.” And then he said, “I don’t know of any prominent Democrat who is endorsing Mr. Ferrer.”

Now, I never had the heart to tell the senator—either one or two of them or the ex-president or Mr. Spitzer—that Mr. Ratner was.... But I’m hoping that they, at some point, will point out to Mr. Ratner, even though I do believe what Mr. Jef Pollock said is right, is that sometimes it’s kind of hard to—

**Mark Halperin:** What do you say you and I cut out of the lunch and see if Ratner is free? *[laughter]*

**Jef Pollock:** Yeah!

**Roberto Ramirez:** I would love it.

**Mark Halperin:** Mark Mellman.

**Roberto Ramirez:** By the way, I never met the man. Don’t want to.

**Mark Halperin:** Very nice guy.

and you specifically, were loyal enough to the party’s nominee in 2001?

**Roberto Ramirez:** Was I what?

**Bob Hardt:** Did you show enough loyalty to your party’s nominee in 2001?

**Roberto Ramirez:** I endorsed his candidacy and when I believed that it was not in my...that he had not done what he needed to do, I did not go out there and work for him. But I have the same constitutional rights as any other citizen does, which is that in order for you to get my vote you have to be able to demonstrate to me that your candidacy is significant to me—hold on, let me finish the question, then I’ll have you follow up. So yes, not only was I there in 2001, I was there in 2000, I was there in 1998, I was there in 1996, I was there in 1994 and 1997. Sometimes when other people walked away.

**Bob Hardt:** But I guess what I’d ask you is, what is the difference between having dinner when you could be doing GOTV stuff and like Steve Ratner saying, “Hey, I’m not with you guys this time”?

**Roberto Ramirez:** The difference is that I don’t think we did anything to Mr. Ratner. I don’t think that we took any steps that would give Mr. Ratner the right to do that. I believe that the race in 2001 raised a number of issues that were never answered during that year. That’s the difference. The difference is that on one hand you have a candidate who is going to be mayor, whose policy will affect your life. On the other hand, you have a national fundraiser who has made a decision—and if you remember his language, I found his

## BLOOMBERG’S DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS

**Mark Mellman:** Going back to the emphasis on fundamentals, and then I do want to get to a point—but look, at the end of the day, the fact you have an incumbent mayor running for a second term in a city where things are going pretty well, without scandal.... If he hadn’t spent a dime, he probably would have won. It would have been a closer race, but if he hadn’t spent a dime he probably would have won.

On the other hand, you add the money to it, and I think the basic outcome is foreordained again, irrespective of any of the things that we talked about here. But the one liability, disability that this mayor faced, which I thought, again, has been handled in a very interesting way, is the fact that this is basically a Democratic city and he happens to be running on the Republican line.

As they used to say in *Pravda*, it’s no accident—my guess is—that everybody in this room and most people in the city know that Mike Bloomberg *used* to be a Democrat. And it’s also probably no accident that.... I know well some of the people here. I know *of* all the people here. I am sure all of them are Democrats. And Bill Knapp and Doug Schoen are also Democrats. And in fact, all the people here and those guys have prominent associations with the most



prominent Democrats in this city and in this state. So I'm just wondering to what extent you guys...who, somewhere, consciously decided it was critically important to play as many Democratic cards as possible, including joining less than half the Democratic caucus in the United States Senate and coming out against John Roberts?

**Mark Halperin:** Excellent question.

**Bill Cunningham:** Is that a yes or no question? *[laughter]*

**Nick Baldick:** Yes or no.

**Mark Halperin:** More like essay.

**Nick Baldick:** No, it's "Do you agree with me?"

**Bill Cunningham:** Look, in a city that is five to one Democratic, you play as many Democratic cards as you can. That's just common sense. Any kind of sport, game, poker, you do the best you can with the deck.

The mayor was endorsed by NARAL in July. He was going to be very critical of Justice Roberts on the issue of choice and on *Roe v. Wade*. And he wasn't satisfied with the answer and he said at the end of the hearings he would make an announcement about his view. And he did. That was...we don't control the appointment of Supreme Court justices or the hearing schedule in the US Senate. It just happened to work out. It was an opportunity to reaffirm his commitment to certain basic issues that a lot of New Yorkers care about. And a lot's been written over the years that he became Republican in order to run for office. He has governed, as mayor, as a New Yorker, in a way that nobody's shut out, as I said before. And I think many of our opponents in the various campaigns always talked about how he just *left* the Democratic Party or he *used* to be a Democrat or he chose *not* to be a Democrat. So there were plenty of people reinforcing the idea that Mike Bloomberg for most of his life was a Democrat.

**Stu Loeser:** I think municipal races, mayors' races, are not necessarily seen through the same partisan lens as senate races, congressional races, federal races. So I think that, what Lindsay said, "There's no Democrat or Republican way to pick up the garbage." So I do think there is an element—

**Bill Cunningham:** LaGuardia said it.

**Stu Loeser:** LaGuardia said it. Excuse me. *[laughter]*

**Mark Halperin:** I want to try to sneak in a couple more questions here.

**Bill Cunningham:** In the immortal words of Pat Moynihan: "subliterate." *[laughter]*

**Mark Halperin:** John Mollenkopf, where are you?

## REBUILDING DOWNTOWN: WAS IT A FACTOR?

**John Mollenkopf:** I agree with Mr. Cunningham that 9/11 probably was a reason or the principle reason that the 2001 election went the way it did. The polls leading up to the general election indicated that the public felt that the mayor was not doing enough around rebuilding lower Manhattan, but yet that didn't really become an issue in the election. So I'm wondering why. Or why not?

**Bill Cunningham:** You should direct that question to the Ferrer campaign.

**Jen Bluestein:** I think we did spend a lot of time trying to point out the slowness of the rebuilding process, the unnecessary slowness of the rebuilding process, as an example of the mayor's misplaced priorities, which are, I think, a familiar theme to everybody in this room. We pointed out that he had spent massive amounts of time and energy and resources going after the stadium, going after the Olympics, while meanwhile an empty hole sat down at Ground Zero.

We did talk about that and to be perfectly honest, I'm not sure why it didn't take on. I have to say that I think, probably you guys would agree with me, there's something a little bit third-rail about talking about Ground Zero. You have to be really careful and sometimes you are so cautious and so discreet in how you try to talk about it that it doesn't ignite people. Whereas, if you try to really ignite people, you go too far and all of a sudden you're in a shit storm. So that's my only honest answer to you.

**Roberto Ramirez:** I think the other issue is that I think it was perceived by a lot of people to be a governor's issue. It was a state issue more than the mayor's.

*"You have an incumbent mayor running for a second term in a city where things are going pretty well, without scandal.... If he hadn't spent a dime, he probably would have won."*

—Mark Mellman



*Medgar Evers College School Of Business Dean John Flateau asks how we can mobilize disengaged voters in the future.*

**John Flateau:** Follow-up: what kind of GOTV operations did the campaigns have on election day to reach and touch voters?

**Jef Pollock:** Kevin Sheekey said he didn't see any of our people in southeast Queens, so.... We had a GOTV operation that was largely based on volunteers that was smaller than we would have liked, but that's the financial resources that we had to deal with.

**Mark Halperin:** Did you want to say anything about voter turnout?

**Roberto Ramirez:** And Jef was being very kind about our GOTV operation.

**Terence Tolbert:** Jef, I did see your people in southeast Queens.

**Jef Pollock:** Thank you.

**Terence Tolbert:** I think we—and people will talk about what this campaign did—I think we talked to voters. We talked to them. We told them there was an election. We told them who our candidate was and why they should come out and vote. The big issue that I think we were worried about was that everyone would think that there wasn't going to be an election and our vote wouldn't come out. So we spent a great deal of time putting together offices and field staff and talking to voters about coming out. We called, we mailed. Jef is right. It's an election cycle that usually turns out low numbers and I don't know that you can take the horse to water and make it drink. You can tell them there's an election, you can tell them where to go to vote, you can drive, you can do whatever you want. But in the end, voters decide what they are going to do and you can't do anything more but give them the opportunity to know there is something going on.

**Jef Pollock:** Again, historically: open mayor's race like four years before? You have high turnout. Incumbent mayoral re-election, particularly one that is deemed to be a *fait accompli*? Lower turnout. It is what it is, unfortunately. I don't think there's very much you can do except change the dynamics of the race. And if you change the dynamics of the race we could have changed the dynamics of turnout, and we didn't do that.

**Mark Halperin:** Okay. I want to thank everybody for coming, particularly the campaign representatives, for speaking so fully, in most instances, about the decisions that were made in the campaigns.

Thank you.

## GETTING OUT THE VOTE

**Mark Halperin:** Okay, this gentleman here, last question and I will make a few announcements.

**John Flateau:** Actually, I'm the yellow card. I didn't know you wanted them signed.

**Mark Halperin:** It was a good question. I flipped it over because I didn't know who to call on.

**John Flateau:** Voter turnout was only 1.2 million out of four million registered voters in New York City. Something is going wrong with the strategies and tactics in mayoral campaigns and elections when that many registered voters in New York City are demobilized and disengaged. What do you think those symptoms are? And what can be done about it?

**Jef Pollock:** There's a very clear correlation in all that. There are far more brilliant people here than I who can tell you about the influence of...this is the one place that public polls really do matter. And that is on turnout. And there is nothing that we could do that will influence that. And that's not about the accuracy or not. That's about if the voters view an election as a *fait accompli* they don't come out to vote. And that's true in a presidential campaign as well. If you look at Bill Clinton running against Bob Dole, we had one of the lowest voter turnouts nationwide, because—

# **FOR THE RECORD: ESSAYS ON THE 2005 MAYORAL RACE**

## **THE RACE FOR MAYOR: CAMPAIGN ROUNDTABLE 2005**

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# FOR THE RECORD: A FIGHT TO FORGET

**ROBERT HARDT JR., NY1 NEWS POLITICAL DIRECTOR**

Writing this essay, I feel like a sportswriter being asked to recount a particularly ugly and one-sided heavyweight title bout. Fernando Ferrer vs. Michael Bloomberg was hardly one for the books, but even a sluggish contest can provide a few lessons for the political geeks before the next mayoral go-round in 2009.

First off, I was genuinely shocked by the Ferrer campaign's inability or unwillingness to go for the jugular during much of the campaign. Stop reading this and go look at the early poll numbers in the race: Michael Bloomberg was hardly Fiorello La Guardia with most voters in the early months of 2005. City residents—particularly those outside of Manhattan—still remembered that the mayor had pushed through an unpopular set of tax increases; shuttered firehouses to save a relatively small amount of money in a \$50 billion budget; and tried to show he was in touch with the average guy by spending \$500 on a mountain bike when it looked like there was going to be a transit strike in 2002. On top of all that, the mayor rolled out the Republican National Convention's welcome mat to George W. Bush—the Darth Vader of the national political scene for most liberal Democrats.

Of course, the vulnerable Bloomberg had several big arrows in his quiver—the power of incumbency, a bottomless pot of campaign gold—plus the fact that many of the city's top opinion makers disliked or distrusted all of his opponents.

But instead of acknowledging that the playing field wasn't level and moving on, the Ferrer campaign seemed obsessed with the fact that politics isn't fair. After Ferrer was caricatured in the *New York Post* in 2001, should there have been any anger or surprise when the *Post* slimed him with another cartoon in 2005?

Since early in his administration, Bloomberg was praised by the Manhattan-centric editorial page of *The New York Times*, which seemed enthralled with Bloomberg's post-Giuliani “politics-free” style of governing (even if that wasn't an accurate reflection of reality). So should anyone have been surprised that the *Times* editorial board was tilted toward Bloomberg?

What Team Ferrer needed to do was suck it up and come up with a master plan to defeat a powerful Republican incumbent. Where were the weekly tours to libraries across the city that were closed on weekends during Bloomberg's watch? Where was the trip to Washington, DC, to challenge Bloomberg to take on his fellow Republicans in Congress and in the White House? Where was the bridge-building to the fire marshals who had been demoted less than five years after 9/11? And how could the Ferrer campaign not hold a single press conference to highlight Bloomberg's very questionable relationship with Lenora Fulani and Fred Newman of the Independence Party?

But the most flatfooted moment for Ferrer was his complete inability to rebound after telling a police union that the highly-criticized NYPD shooting of Amadou Diallo wasn't a crime. This opinion was coming out of the same mouth of a man who was arrested in front of police headquarters in 1999 to protest the shooting. Ferrer's words struck many as hypocritical and his damage control in the immediate aftermath of his gaffe only served to further cloud the matter. To this day, I'm personally still not sure if Ferrer thinks the officers who shot Diallo should be in jail.



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Undoubtedly, Ferrer's high point in 2005 was capturing a prize that had long eluded him—the Democratic nomination for mayor. Ferrer had both a strong Latino base and such high name recognition compared to his three opponents that the nomination was his to lose—but he still almost lost it. It took the city's Board of Elections six days to declare him the primary's winner. Making matters worse, the second-place finisher, Anthony Weiner, appeared to be helping push Ferrer over the top by saying he wouldn't campaign against him were there to be a primary runoff. Much like Ruth Messenger's disastrous 1997 mayoral bid, Ferrer left the primary process enervated instead of energized. And worst of all, instead of redoubling his efforts after winning the nomination, Ferrer seemed almost as if he were taking a victory lap around the city rather than mounting a strong challenge against the mayor.

During all of this, Bloomberg was working hard at bringing his own numbers up by playing politics, despite his frequent claims of being above politics altogether. The mayor reached out to municipal unions he had earlier shunned, bagging the endorsement of District Council 37 a day after the union announced its members would receive extra raises because of a productivity agreement with City Hall. The Independence Party—which provided Bloomberg with his margin of victory in 2001—backed the mayor again while one of its key leaders won a Department of Education contract (later canceled) for his youth group. Greatly aiding Bloomberg's cause, of course, was his checkbook, which paid for a highly sophisticated direct mail operation. Chances were that even if you were an Asian American lesbian single mother living in Park Slope, there was a piece of Bloomberg campaign mail targeted specifically to you.

Probably the mayor's only major misstep in the race was underestimating the backlash he'd receive by skipping the debate (which I helped organize) at the Apollo Theater on October 6th. The symbolism was there: the city's mayor had refused to speak to an audience in Harlem. Making things more interesting was that only hours before the debate the mayor announced a terror alert for the city—effectively banishing the image of the empty lectern on the Apollo stage from most TV screens and onto the back pages of the newspapers.

Rather than seize on the Apollo debate issue, Ferrer was reluctant to embrace it. And while it would have been a major risk to have accused Bloomberg of playing politics with the terror alert, at that point Ferrer needed to try something—anything—to shake up the race. It was yet another missed opportunity.

Of course, I don't know if Ferrer could have beaten Michael Bloomberg even if he had done everything perfectly. But it could certainly have been a much more competitive race. Instead, I was left wishing the referee had stepped in and stopped this wretched fight.

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# FOR THE RECORD: THE PRESS PRIMARY

**ERROL LOUIS, NY DAILY NEWS COLUMNIST AND EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBER**

From start to finish during the 2005 campaign season, I could never quite shake a queasy feeling that the press was failing the public we serve by missing an important opportunity to help educate voters about major issues facing our city. Operating on the principle that it's better to light a candle than curse the darkness, I worked extra hard during that season, chipping in more than my usual allocation of columns throughout the year, appearing on various talk shows, tracking local races, researching and drafting endorsements as a member of the *Daily News* editorial board, and serving as a questioner in televised primary and general election debates.

Even so, I would conclude that coverage of the 2005 mayoral election was not a high or proud moment for the New York press corps. Collectively, we ended up doing, far too often, all the things that readers and viewers routinely tell pollsters they hate about politics and the press. Too often, we treated the race like a horse race—a sporting contest in which little matters except the ultimate winner. Too often, we focused on personalities rather than policies and idiosyncrasies rather than institutions.

And along the way, we gave short shrift to basic quality-of-life issues that are, literally, life and death matters for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

When Fernando Ferrer stated the plain, painfully obvious truth that there are two New Yorks—and that life is a grim, tenuous business for the city's 1.7 million residents who live in poverty—he was routinely dismissed or condemned. “Divisive,” declared pundits and political reporters, who guessed, perhaps correctly, that raising class issues would not translate into votes for Ferrer.

But imagine what might have happened if the press had taken the time to examine, up close, what it really means to feed a family of three on \$292.40 a week or less (the current definition of poverty in New York City). A staggering 1.7 million of our neighbors—about one in five city residents—live in conditions that rest of us would consider a dire emergency. For perspective: 1.7 million people is roughly the size of Atlanta, Miami, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh and Birmingham—combined. How does the city plan to help these people move from desperation to some degree of stability and prosperity?

Another untapped journalistic vein involved Mayor Bloomberg's considerable financial and political support for pro-gun Republican politicians all over America. Following the election, Bloomberg began mounting a passionate, high-profile effort to tighten restrictions on guns and lift onerous federal laws that prevent local law enforcement agencies from sharing data on the small handful of gun dealers whose guns regularly end up shooting and killing New Yorkers, including police officers. But would it not have made sense, during the campaign, for reporters to question Bloomberg aggressively about his massive donations to the very GOP politicians whose loosening of gun laws has done serious, measurable harm to public safety in New York?

Fernando Ferrer thought so, and gamely tried to put such matters on the public agenda. The press just as diligently ignored his efforts.

Why? Because long before he lost the race for mayor, Fernando Ferrer lost the “press primary”—an informal but unmistakable consensus among editors and reporters that Ferrer would not be given a break. The unspoken agreement was that coverage of Ferrer would not follow a favorable

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campaign storyline, such as: Puerto Rican kid from Hunts Point starts out shining shoes, works his way through school and rises to the top of the political heap. Instead, Ferrer's attempt to unseat a billionaire mayor was consistently portrayed not as David taking on Goliath, but as a political fool's errand.

To give an idea of the press primary at work, let me describe a scene I saw repeated more than once during the campaign. Reporters from various news organizations would be seated in the green room of a television station, preparing to go on the air and talk about the race for mayor. When Ferrer's name came up, one journalist might snort, roll his eyes and say, "The guy has no chance—totally out of his league." Another might chime in, "I'm so sick of Freddy. He just looks like a loser. Bloomberg looks like a mayor." A third would say, "Nobody I know is supporting him, not even lifelong Democrats."

A few minutes later, when these reporters went on the air to talk about the campaign, their words were not nearly as blunt—but the effect was, if anything, even more devastating for Ferrer, whose problems were presented to the public in neutral tones as being insurmountable and political in nature, rather than the personal perceptions of a few reporters.

The treatment Ferrer got stands in stark contrast to what I'm told took place in newsrooms around the city in the closing days of the 1989 mayoral campaign. I wasn't working in journalism at the time, but colleagues who were tell me that, shortly before the election, hard-hitting information about alleged marital infidelity of candidate David Dinkins was leaked to the press—information that was, I am told, sufficiently well sourced that it could have been published. At paper after paper, however, editors simply turned down the story. According to my sources, this was because there was a broad consensus among editors that it was time for New York to have its first black mayor, and that Dinkins would be that mayor. If what I've been told is true, competitive news organizations mutually agreed to pass on a very big, juicy scoop in favor of maintaining a political storyline that clearly benefited one candidate.

Ferrer got no such break. For whatever reason, the first-Latino-mayor storyline did not take hold, at least not with Ferrer in the starring role. Even in a city where Democrats vastly outnumber Republicans, losing the press primary meant Ferrer would be given no hope of beating the GOP incumbent—even though Bloomberg had initially squeaked in thanks to an unlimited bank account, the chaotic aftermath of September 11, 2001, and a Democratic Party split along ethnic fault lines.

As an opinion writer, I have the privilege of being upfront, publicly and privately, about what I think, whom I don't like and how I handicap any given race. Many of my colleagues are just as passionate and partisan in their thinking but, because their jobs require them to be "neutral," mask their opinions while still delivering them in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. The insidious power of the press primary is that it takes place behind closed doors, where candidates have no opportunity to rebut or challenge opinions before they hit the news pages and airwaves. My guess is that many of my colleagues might even deny it exists.

Ferrer, a consummate professional, kept an upturned chin and a sense of humor as he played the hand he was dealt. But the press stacked the deck against him.

# PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

**Nicholas Baldick** was Fernando Ferrer's campaign manager in the 2005 mayoral election. In 2003 he was national campaign manager for Senator John Edwards' presidential campaign and in 2000 he served as state director for Al Gore's New Hampshire primary campaign, bringing the vice president from a 15-point deficit to a four-point victory despite being outspent by \$1.5 million.

**Jordan Barowitz** was Michael Bloomberg's press secretary in the 2005 mayoral election. Prior to joining the campaign, he was communications director for the New York City Council. Barowitz previously served as communications director for Vallone 2001 and New York press secretary for Gore/Lieberman 2000.



*At lunch, Lee Miringoff, director of the Marist Institute for Public Opinion, speaks about the role of polls in the 2005 race for mayor.*

**Wayne Barrett** has been an investigative reporter specializing in state and city politics at *The Village Voice* for 26 years, and a senior editor there for the last decade. His reporting has focused on a variety of public officials including Al D'Amato, Ed Koch, David Dinkins, Geraldine Ferraro, Andrew Cuomo and George Pataki. His latest book, *Rudy: An Investigative Biography of Rudolph Giuliani*, completes a trilogy that covers New York City politics at the end of the 20th century.

**Joel Benenson** is founding partner and president of Benenson Strategy Group (BSG), a New York-based strategic research firm. Prior to this, he was a principal at Penn, Schoen & Berland where he managed internal polling operations for Clinton/Gore 1996. Benenson has also been a political journalist for the *New York Daily News*, communications director for Mario Cuomo's 1994 campaign and a vice president at FCB, a New York-based ad agency.

**Gregg Birnbaum** is political editor of the *New York Post*. A veteran reporter and editor who has covered numerous city, state and national races, he has been with the *Post* since 1993, first in the Albany bureau, then relocating to the city in 1999 to cover Hillary Clinton's Senate campaign. Birnbaum then briefly joined the City Hall bureau prior to becoming the paper's political editor in 2001. He is also proprietor of the JustHillary.com website.

**Jen Bluestein** was communications director for Fernando Ferrer's 2005 mayoral campaign, Cory Booker's 2002 Newark mayoral campaign and Betsy Gotbaum's 2001 campaign for NYC Public Advocate. She has been a consultant to groups such as the National Council for Research on Women and DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa). Bluestein has also worked as a communications strategist and spokesperson for *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Talk* and *The New Republic*.

**William T. Cunningham** is director of communications for Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, and took a leave of absence to serve in the same role in the mayor's 2005 campaign. Previously, he was a senior staff member for Governors Hugh Carey and Mario Cuomo; deputy commissioner of the New York State Department of Transportation; and assistant director of economic development at the New York State Department of Commerce.

**Tom Freedman** was senior strategist for Anthony Weiner's 2005 mayoral campaign. Previously he was a senior adviser to President Clinton and legislative director for then-Rep. Charles E. Schumer. Based in Washington, DC, he is a consultant to nonprofit organizations, corporations and electoral campaigns.

**Maggie Haberman** joined the City Hall bureau of the *New York Daily News* in 2003, where she covered the 2005 mayoral primary, the Bloomberg administration and rebuilding at the World Trade Center site. Previously, Haberman was City Hall reporter for the *New York Post*, where she covered Bloomberg's 2001 campaign. She also covered the Clinton-Lazio Senate race in 2000 and the 2004 presidential election.

**Mark Halperin** has been political director of ABC News since 1997. He manages the editorial coverage of politics throughout the ABC News universe. Previously, Halperin covered special events for ABC News, served as White House producer and covered Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign. He joined ABC News in 1988.



**Robert Hardt Jr.** is political director of NY1 News and executive producer of its hour-long nightly political program, “Inside City Hall.” On the NY1 website he compiles a daily digest of New York’s political stories from the day’s newspapers, known as “The ItCH.” Before joining NY1, Hardt was a political reporter for the *New York Post* and the Associated Press.

**Brian Hardwick** was Gifford Miller’s campaign manager in the 2005 mayoral race. He oversaw four battleground states during the 2004 presidential election and was Joe Lieberman’s deputy campaign manager in his bid for the presidential nomination earlier that year. In 2002, Hardwick was campaign manager for the Colorado senate campaign of Tom Strickland, and from 1999 to 2000 he was national finance director of the Democratic National Committee.

**Patrick Healy** is Metro political correspondent for *The New York Times*, covering City Hall, Albany and the city’s congressional delegation. Before joining the *Times* in January 2005, he spent five years as a reporter at the *Boston Globe*, where his beats included the Kerry presidential campaign; the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; and the aftermath of 9/11 in New York City. His coverage of higher education for the *Globe* earned him a 2002 Livingston Award and other prizes.

**Evelyn Hernández** is opinion page editor at *El Diario/LA PRENSA*, the nation’s oldest Spanish-language newspaper, and a member of the paper’s editorial board. Previously, she was a reporter at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and *The Miami Herald*, and an editor and reporter at *New York Newsday*. Hernández is also a past president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, and appears regularly as a political commentator on “Kirtzman and Co.” and on NY1.

**Heather Hsieh** joined *World Journal*, the largest Chinese-language daily in North America, in 2003, and covers City Hall. Previously, she worked for the China Environment Forum at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Originally from Taipei, Taiwan, Hsieh began her career as a reporter with *Business Weekly* and *Global Views Monthly*. She won the Independent Press Association-NY’s 2004 Ippies Award for best public affairs article.

**Andrew Kirtzman** is a political reporter at WCBS-TV, where he hosts “Kirtzman & Co.” and presents “Kirtzman’s Column.” Prior to this he was a political reporter and anchor of “Inside City Hall” at NY1 News. He also wrote a bi-weekly column for *New York* magazine on the 1997 mayor’s race and 1998 US Senate race, and is author of *Rudy Giuliani: Emperor of the City*. In September 1999, *Brill’s Content* named Kirtzman one of “New York’s 10 Most Influential Journalists.”

**Stu Loeser** was spokesperson for Mayor Bloomberg’s 2005 re-election campaign, where he oversaw day-to-day press operations and research. A veteran of the Clinton/Gore and Gore/Lieberman campaigns, he was also research director for New Hampshire Gov. Jeanne Shaheen’s successful 1998 re-election campaign; Mark Green’s 2001 mayoral campaign;

and Carl McCall’s 2002 gubernatorial campaign. He has also served as Sen. Charles Schumer’s communications director.

**Errol T. Louis** has been a columnist at the *New York Daily News* since 2004. He is a member of the paper’s editorial board and frequently speaks on television and radio, including NY1, WNYC and WCBS-TV. Previously he was associate editor of *The New York Sun*, where his columns won an award from the New York Association of Black Journalists.



*During the lunch discussion, World Journal reporter Heather Hsieh talks about the role of the press in the 2005 mayoral race.*

**Jim Margolis** was media adviser to Anthony Weiner’s 2005 campaign and is a senior partner at GMMB, which was the lead media strategist for Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign. He joined the firm in 1985 and has a broad background in media production, campaign management and service as a top appointee in the US Senate and House of Representatives. Margolis’ current clients include Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Barbara Boxer (D-CA).

**Mark Mellman** has helped guide the campaigns of 16 US senators, more than two dozen members of Congress, and four governors, as well as numerous state and local officials. The Mellman Group clients have included Democrats Dick Gephardt, Tom Daschle, Steny Hoyer and Harry Reid, and it has helped Democrats pick up a Republican seat in every cycle since 1994, including Maria Cantwell’s upset win over a three-term incumbent in Washington State in 2000.

**Veena Merchant** is director and editor-in-chief of the *News India-Times* as well as *Desi Talk*, a weekly online newspaper. She is a founding member of the board of directors of the Indian American Center for Political Awareness (IACPA), a nonprofit organization. Previously, she was deputy publisher of the *India Abroad* group of newspapers.

**Joseph Mercurio** has been a political consultant for more than 30 years, providing polling and media services on nearly 500 campaigns, propositions and ballot initiatives in every part of the US. His past and present clients include the Democratic National Committee, Gary Hart and Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Mr. Mercurio is also adjunct faculty in the NYU Political Campaign Management Master's program and a regular commentator on WCBS-TV and NY1 News.

**Luis Miranda** was a senior adviser to Fernando Ferrer's 2005 mayoral campaign and is a founding partner at Mirram Global, a political and marketing consulting firm. He is founder and former president of the Hispanic Federation, and a former special adviser to Mayor Ed Koch.

**Lee Miringoff** is director of the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion, a survey research center that regularly measures public opinion in New York and the US and is used as a source by print and broadcast media organizations throughout the country. The Marist Poll has been called "one of the most widely respected surveys ... and a key player in shaping news coverage for a decade" by *New York Newsday*. Miringoff also serves as a polling consultant for WNBC-TV.

**Jeffrey Pollock** is president of Global Strategy Group and was the 2005 Ferrer campaign's pollster. His other clients include former presidential candidate and Senator John Edwards (D-NC), West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin, New York State Attorney General and gubernatorial candidate Eliot Spitzer, the US Senate Democratic Policy Committee, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and several members of Congress.

**Roberto Ramirez** was a senior adviser to Fernando Ferrer's 2005 mayoral campaign and is a founding partner of Mirram Global, a political and marketing consulting firm. He was also chair of Ferrer's 2001 mayoral campaign. Ramirez is a former member of the New York State Assembly and a past chair of the Bronx County Democratic Party.

**Jim Rutenberg** is City Hall bureau chief for *The New York Times*. He covered the 2005 Bloomberg campaign for the *Times*, and followed the 2004 presidential campaign trail to report on political communications and the news coverage of the race. Prior to joining the *Times*, Rutenberg worked at *The New York Observer*.

**Dorothy Samuels** is a member of *The New York Times* editorial board, and writes on a wide variety of domestic issues. Prior to joining the newspaper, she was a frequent contributor to *The Nation* and other publications. She also served for three years as executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union. Her first novel, *Filthy Rich*, was published in 2001 by William Morrow & Company.

**Chung Seto** was campaign manager for C. Virginia Fields in the 2005 mayoral election. From May 2001 until March 2005, she was executive director of the New York State Democratic Committee. Seto was previously communications director of New York State's Victory 2000, and served as a member of the Clinton/Gore campaigns during both the 1992 and 1996 elections.

**Stephen Sigmund** was communications director for Gifford Miller's 2005 mayoral campaign and a senior communications adviser to New Yorkers for Ferrer. He is currently director of communications and senior policy adviser for City Council Speaker Gifford Miller. From 1998 to 2001, he was communications director for New York City Public Advocate and 2001 Democratic mayoral nominee Mark Green.

**Ben Smith** is a staff reporter at *The New York Observer* and writes the paper's political blog, *The Politicker*. He has worked for *The New York Sun* and *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, and written for *The New Republic*, *The Los Angeles Times Magazine*, *Newsday* and other publications.

**Chris Smith** is the "City Politics" columnist at *New York* magazine. As a feature writer for the magazine, he has also covered crime, sports and entertainment. He began his career at *New York* as an assistant to political columnist Joe Klein.

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