

BIG APPLE

New York's Mayor Rudy Giuliani has championed conservative values in the capital of liberalism. The result is a safer, cleaner, and more livable city. Can he do the same for the country? JOHN CORRY

New York

If the atmosphere wasn't charged, it was at least prickly: Rudolph W. Giuliani, standing behind a portable lectern at the corner of 47th Street and First Avenue, was answering questions from reporters. Minutes before, he had helped dedicate a monument to Raoul Wallenberg, but now a controversy beckoned. The *Times* had reported that morning that federal officials, "alarmed" by the declining number of welfare recipients in New York, had pressured the city into relaxing its rules. It could no longer require applicants for food stamps and Medicare to make two visits to a welfare office; they would now have to make only one. This would not be much of a news story anywhere else, but remember this was New York. No good deed there can go unpunished. The welfare rolls were at their lowest level in thirty years, so obviously something was wrong. The feds thought the Giuliani administration had been sabotaging the welfare system, and the reporters questioning Giuliani about the *Times* story had their suspicions, too. After all, one asked him archly, wasn't it his "basic philosophy to put roadblocks in the way of people who want welfare?"

And Giuliani, who is the most successful urban politician in America, and who, while speaking at the Wallenberg monument, had called New York "the capital of the world and the most tolerant city in America," and who could have called it the most liberal city in America, as well, answered like a man who still believed there had been a Republican Revolution.

He said the food stamp program had encouraged "scandalous behavior." Cheats had arrived at the welfare office in limos, and addicts had peddled food stamps for drugs. He said

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"left-wing ideologues" wanted to give benefits to anyone who sought them, and "apostles of dependency" wanted to keep everyone on the dole. He also said apostles of dependency and unhappy bureaucrats had leaked the spurious, frivolous, and wholly misleading story to the *Times*, and that the reporters should not be taking it so seriously.

But the reporters still wanted to know about the change in requiring not two visits to the welfare office but one, and their shouted questions rose in the air. Giuliani told them to "please be civil," and not all talk at once. Telling people to mind their manners, in fact telling the whole city to mind its manners, is one way he governs, and it is almost as novel for a New York mayor to do this as it is for a New York mayor to talk about left-wing ideologues. Ed Koch sometimes called for manners, but when he did it was usually with comic exasperation, and it was hard to know whether he meant it, or if he was just doing shtick. Giuliani, though, seems to mean it. References to civility and courtesy sprinkle his speeches, and in a city famous for the supposed rudeness of its residents he insists that you cannot have an orderly society unless everyone observes rules of appropriate behavior. He is, of course, right, although his calls for decorum, and no-nonsense mien in general, make him suspect among members of the city's elites, and among many of their acolytes, too. In their hearts they know he's right, but in their sensibilities they feel threatened. Think of them as people who once praised graffiti as art, thought *Hair* made a political statement, and now find wisdom in "The Talk of the Town" in the *New Yorker*. Giuliani makes them nervous.

But back to 47th Street and First Avenue, where the sparring between the Mayor and the reporters continues. The reporters still want him to admit the feds caught the city acting improperly, but he declines to do so. Out of either frustration or malice then,

REAGANITE

a reporter does something he shouldn't. Giuliani is married to a television journalist, Donna Hanover, although they are seldom seen together in public, and their marriage is the subject of gossip. The reporter wants to know if the mayor has been neglecting his wife. "That's an unusually nasty question, and you should be ashamed of yourself for asking it," Giuliani says icily. Then the other reporters, who had looked embarrassed, though interested, return to the welfare issue.

But it does not get resolved, and indeed it is only Monday, and the welfare argument—remember this is New York—will sputter on until Thursday. A magisterial *Times* editorial will then close out the debate by declaring that "for the poor,



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at least, Mayor Giuliani's New York offers no free, easy lunch," and therefore there may be a problem. Even if his welfare policy appears to be successful, the *Times* will warn, the Mayor must "make certain that it is humane enough for those in need throughout the city." This seems to mean that Giuliani will get by this time, but clearly he still needs watching.

In fact, some 425,000 fewer people are on the welfare rolls now than in 1995, and City Hall initiatives—turning welfare offices into job centers, encouraging applicants to find work, or get help from relatives—obviously have been effective. At the same time there is no evidence the poor have suffered or been picked on, even though the city now asks applicants for benefits to prove they actually are eligible to receive them. More or less, in the past, no questions were asked, and New York staggered under a huge welfare caseload, with part of it always made up of deadbeats who didn't belong there. The unacknowledged assumption was that the deadbeats, like squeegee men, panhandlers, and boom-box louts, were embedded in city life, and that any attempt to dislodge them, besides being futile, would be mean and undemocratic. Meanwhile crime was up, and municipal services were down, and the sound of the city was a car alarm at two in the morning. New York was the poster city for liberalism gone sour. But under Giuliani the *Zeitgeist* now has changed.

In 1989, Giuliani, then U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York (4,125 convictions, with only 25 reversals,

according to his official biography), ran against David Dinkins for mayor, and lost. He ran again in 1993, and won, and was re-elected in 1997. You may measure liberal attitudes toward him over those years through *Times* editorials. It is no doubt unfair to cite the *Times* again this way, but it is also irresistible. The *Times* listens to the elites, and the elites listen to the *Times*, and on municipal matters they speak as one. Their thinking about who should be mayor, and why, has been explained in election-endorsement editorials.

In 1989, for example, the *Times* supported Dinkins for mayor. Giuliani, it feared, was a Reagan Republican. He might also be "harsh and moralistic." Dinkins, on the other hand, was probably an incompetent (you had to read between the lines there) but, "warts and all," he was a "known quantity" and a "practical Democrat." And as New York's first black mayor, he would "instill a sense of pride and participation in blacks and other minority groups."

In 1993, the *Times* still went for Dinkins, although it needed a tortuous editorial almost twice as long as the first one to do it. The city was in decline, and Dinkins was a dud. Race relations were worse than ever, and the whole dreary mess had to be explained away. Try as the *Times* did, though, it was unable to do that, and so instead it attacked Giuliani. He was "a man of hard attitudes," who was "prone to lurching behavior" (whatever that was), and at a police rally he had once used "barnyard language." Moreover he recommended "tax cuts that the city cannot afford," and his plans for New York amounted to no more than "civic Reaganism." The *Times* said the election was about "values," and if you understood that, you knew that Dinkins was "clearly the more worthy."

But Giuliani won, and good things happened. One of the first was that the squeegee men who extorted small change from timorous drivers at stop lights were roused. For a city long resigned to its own decay that was important. Giuliani had campaigned on a promise to improve the "quality of life," and when the squeegee men vanished, it was a sign other changes were also possible. Almost immediately New York began to feel better about its future, and, as things turned out, the *Times*, in a way, had been right about civic Reaganism. Public places began to fill up with families and children, and not panhandlers and junkies. Then budget surpluses grew, and modest tax cuts were enacted, and the Great Lawn in Central Park even got resodded. It was morning again in New York.

Consequently the *Times* surrendered in 1997, and endorsed Giuliani for re-election, although it still had reservations. Yes, it admitted, he had fought organized crime in the wholesale food markets and elsewhere, attracted new business to the city; and imposed a more rational structure on the public-school system; and yes, under his administration, poor black and Latino families no longer had to reconcile themselves to gunfire on their streets. On the other hand, he still had a "combative temperament," and his "pugnaciousness" was unattractive. The *Times* said he had to learn to control himself. A big Bronx cheer now for liberal fastidiousness. Giuliani's moral values have proved far healthier for New York than those of his critics, even if they refuse to admit it.

The Giuliani administration often cites statistics, and while many are of no consequence, some are so significant that ignoring them is willful neglect. In 1993, for example, the year Giuliani was elected, there were 1,681 murders in New York. There would be fewer than 600 murders, however, in 1998. Neither changing demographics nor a booming economy, or any combination of the two, can explain that steep decline. Soon after becoming mayor, though, Giuliani merged New York's transit and housing cops into the regular police department, and told this new force of 38,000 that the incidence of crime—the number of shootings, say, or robberies—mattered more than arrests did. Then, if incidence rates rose in any of the city's 73 precincts, he wanted to know about it. Indeed he would call precinct commanders himself when the incidence rates rose rather than fell, and ask them what the hell happened. His pugnaciousness and combative temperament apparently were helpful when he did. New York, once the butt of late-night television jokes, is now considered the safest big city in America.

So here is Giuliani again. The meeting with reporters on First Avenue is over, and he is back at City Hall, where he says he will veto a bill to mandate weekly recycling. That may not be exactly a profile in courage, although for New York it is close. Recycling is a mom's apple pie issue, and the City Council, mindful of polls in its favor, had passed the bill unanimously. But Giuliani insists it is impractical and expensive, and will do more harm than good, and he does this at a hearing that is attended only by the bill's supporters. These include representatives of the borough presidents of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan, along with members of recycling boards, solid waste boards, and various environmental boards, and a young woman who identifies herself only as an "environmental organizer." When she testifies, she charges racism in high places, goes way over her allotted time, and then tells Giuliani in her peroration, "You are a very unacceptable man."

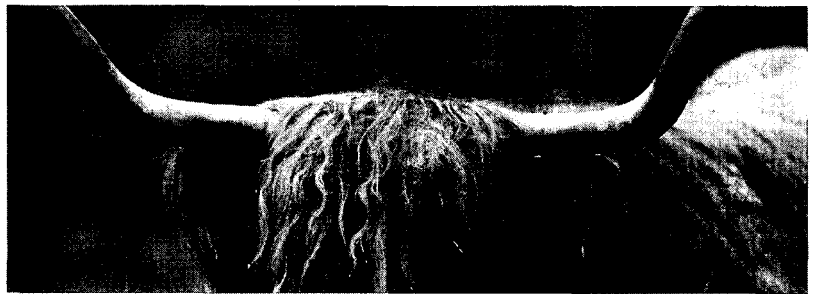
Giuliani flinches, but then lets it pass. The *New Yorker* has sniffed about his being the "rudest anti-rudeness guy in town," and the *Times* has said he has "a knee-jerk inclination to lash out at opponents." Nonetheless he ignores the young woman, and talks instead about the bill; and if he is annoyed it shows only when he says the bill's proponents think of recycling "as if it were a religious or supernatural thing." In a conversation the next day he brings that up again. Recycling, he says, has become a "secular humanist revolution." But it is not recycling itself that bothers him, of course; it is the kind of dizzy passion people attach to it, and it is hard to imagine Giuliani on any of those wilder shores of thinking himself. This

grandson of Italian immigrants is a mainstream man, and he is positioned very nicely now as a Republican.

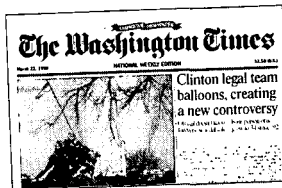
True, he supported Mario Cuomo and not George Pataki for governor in 1995, but there seems to have been a statute of limitations on that, and hardly anyone—Pataki excepted, of course—now seems to hold it against him. Giuliani appears everywhere at Republican dinners, and has even been to New Hampshire, and if he wants it, the nomination to contest the retiring Pat Moynihan's Senate seat is his for the asking. A poll of New York City residents, at least, found that two-thirds of them were favorably inclined to vote for him if he ran. Meanwhile some New York businessmen are whispering to him about the presidency, and, as far as anyone knows, he hasn't told them to stop. There is also the talk about him and George Bush: Texas WASP, New York Italian American; wouldn't that be some balanced ticket?

Giuliani says he will decide what to do soon. He is, as they say, weighing his options. His term as mayor ends December 31, 2001, but if he should run for Moynihan's seat, he would have to leave office a year before that, and turn over City Hall to Public Advocate Mark Green. The City Charter stipulates that the public advocate, a kind of civic ombudsman, is next in the line of succession. But while Green is generally regarded as a very nice man, he is also a very liberal Democrat, and as mayor he would bring the old gang back again. Giuliani's innovations would be undone, and New York would return to its past. Meanwhile those Republicans who were willing to forget Giuliani's endorse-

A point here, a point there,



and a lot of bull in between.



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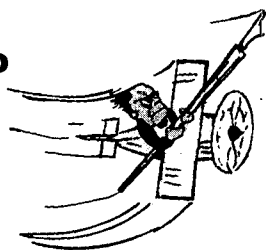
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ment of Cuomo would have had their old fears revived. Giuliani had supported one liberal Democrat for governor, and now he was surrendering the city to another one. Was Giuliani a conservative, or was he not? That first lapse had been excused as a mistake in judgment, but a second could be seen as a betrayal of faith.

The other argument against Giuliani running for the Senate is that he would be bored to death if he got there. The action in Washington is not the same as the action in New York, and while business in the Senate may be important it is hardly ever immediate. The mayor would have to adjust. The week that saw the welfare and recycling arguments, for example, saw any number of other things, too. The City Council issued a report on police brutality. (A "rehash," the police commissioner said.) Then there was the incident of Sammy Sosa's bat. It had been displayed in City Hall, and inscribed to the mayor, and was supposedly the bat with which Sosa had hit his 66th homer. But someone pointed out that it was a Louisville slugger, and that Sosa had hit No. 66 with a Hoosier model. Giuliani had to change the bat display.

Meanwhile, one cop was shot in Brooklyn; three other cops were suspended in Queens. The Transit Authority reported that subway ridership was way up, although subway maintenance was way down. Scratchiti, or scratched windows, were pervasive; subway cars were getting dirtier. Giuliani marched in the Veterans Day parade, and then gave a speech about revitalizing the armed forces. (The *Times* reported the next day that the two F-16 jets that

made a pass over the parade had frightened people.) NASA and City Hall entered into negotiations over John Glenn's parade. A paroled criminal slipped out of an electronic monitoring bracelet, and raped a 16-year-old neighbor. Giuliani then denounced the New York State Assembly for refusing to abolish parole.

And there were also all those things that might not touch the mayor directly, but nearly all of which would somehow, some way, become a problem, a topic, or an embarrassment for City Hall. The Mets general manager was hit with a sexual-harassment suit. A self-portrait, sort of, by a now dead graffiti artist was auctioned off for \$3.3 million at Christie's. Meanwhile there was an incident involving Monica Lewinsky. The *New York Post* reported that Peter Strauss, her stepfather, grabbed two paparazzi by their arms when they tried to take her picture. The scuffle apparently ended, however, when Ms. Lewinsky—the *Post* now refers to her as "the portly pepperpot"—sped away in a cab.

So if it's not one thing it's another, and as Giuliani was saying one night in his office, sometimes being mayor really is the second toughest job in America. On the other hand, he said, he loved being mayor, and as mayor he had had a great advantage. When he was a prosecutor, he said, he had learned about the "good things and the phoney things, and all the things that were wrong." Therefore he knew what to do about the city, and more or less how to do it.

"There was a philosophy," he continued: "There's not much you can do about crime, about dirt, about problems. I had somehow to get a bureaucracy to turn around, like turning a ship around. And my conception was that I only had a few years to do it."

And so, he said, he had governed as if he would be around only for one term, and he had always told everyone where he and the city were going.

"I needed to articulate that constantly," he said. "Even laws don't make things happen. People have to accept ideas: that you can reduce taxes, that government was too large. I had to change the whole culture."

And then the mayor talked about "the American people." He said they wanted "practical solutions to practical problems, and a consistent philosophy," and to "know what you're for, and not what you're against," and "answers to specific problems, and a sense of positive movement into the future."

Then the mayor talked about "our party." The Republicans, he said, had "a core of strong principle," and the answers to problems, but they were not very good at explaining them. He sounded like a candidate for office, of course, although there was simply no telling which office he had in mind.

Meanwhile he is still mayor, and as even his critics now concede, it is a job he does quite well. So here he is one more time, at the corner of Broadway and Chambers Street, announcing the city's new policy on Christmas holiday traffic, and also telling everyone why they had to behave themselves. There will be a hotline set up to report traffic congestion, he says. There will also be stiff fines for violators, and there will be police all over the city. "Everything is intended to get people to pay attention to their responsibilities," he says. "Everyone has to work together to have a civil society." ❧

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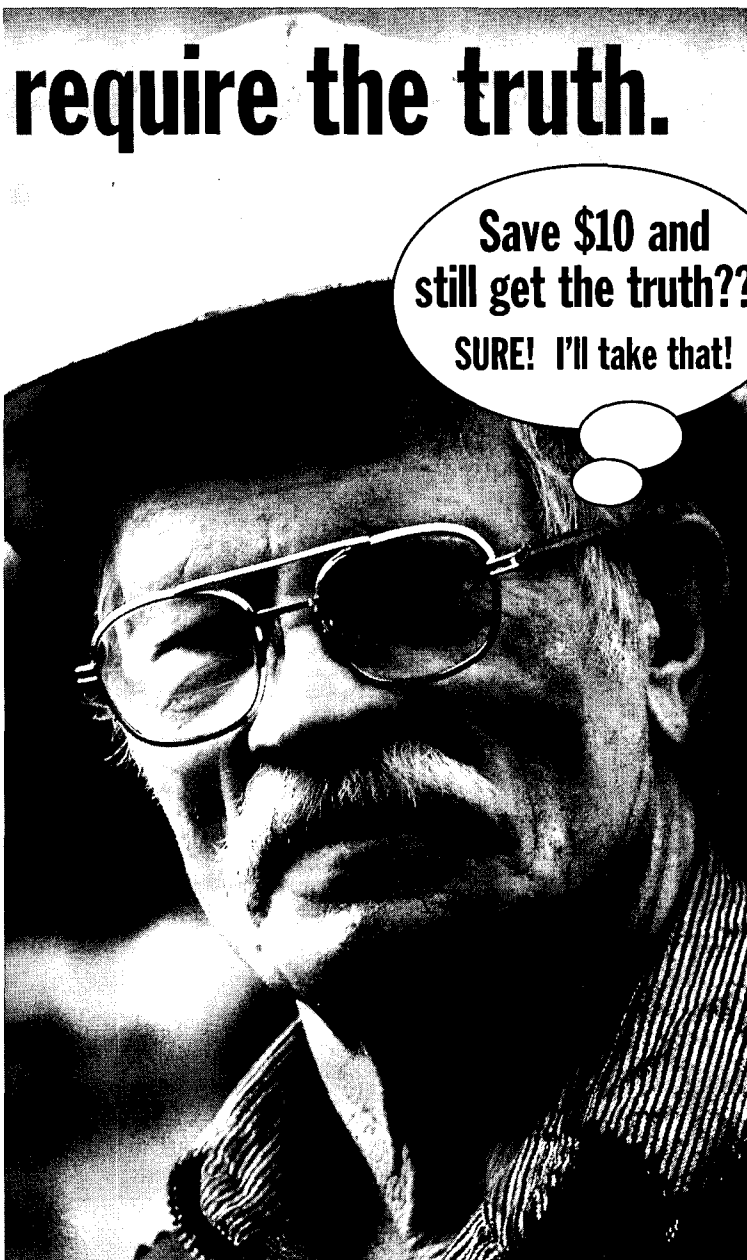
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