

By Daniel Lazare

NEW YORK

ANYONE WHO ATTENDED A RECENT DAVID Dinkins fund-raiser hoping to hear something fiery and inspiring was in for a disappointment. Dave Dinkins doesn't do fiery. He doesn't inspire the masses or rouse the faithful. Instead, his forte is healing wounds, bridging differences or (less charitably) causing the lion to lie down with the lamb by lulling both to sleep.

His performance at the \$1,000-a-plate fund-raiser at the Tavern on the Green on February 1 was typical. After enthusiastic introductions by Harry Belafonte, Gloria Steinem, American Stock Exchange Chairman of the Board Arthur Levitt and others, Dinkins took the mike to declare that after two months of thinking about running for mayor, he had nearly made up his mind, and what's more, when he did, "I think you'll like the answer." That bombshell out of the way, he went on to thank, Oscar-style, a number of people for giving him a hand in politics over the years. Then, finally, he got to the heart of the matter—the meaning of a Dinkins candidacy.

"I have a strong commitment to integrity in government at every level," he began. "I believe in a fair and equitable distribution of resources. I support thoughtful, responsible fiscal guidelines." As the platitudes grew thicker, eyes throughout the room began to glaze. "I will bring us together...a climate of hope for all New Yorkers...stand on the threshold of a great decision...momentous judgment."

"Hey," whispered a contributor with impeccable liberal credentials, "stay awake, stay awake."

Duking it out: As has been widely pointed out by now, Dinkins, New York City's highest elected black official—who last week declared his candidacy for mayor of New York—is no Jesse Jackson. Unfortunately for his supporters, though, he's not even a Michael Dukakis. True, he's bland, colorless and boring like the governor of Massachusetts. But whereas the Duke could still lay claim this time last year to administrative competence (before the Massachusetts economy began falling apart last summer, that is), Dinkins, due to a personal lapse some years back, can't even do that. From 1969 to 1972 he forgot to pay his income taxes, an issue that began weighing heavily on his campaign before it had even gotten off the ground. So far, the more he's tried to say what happened, the more belabored his explanations.

"I procrastinated...I neglected it...I changed my law offices, I changed jobs," he told *New York* magazine's Joe Klein. "I haven't committed a crime. What I did was fail to comply with the law." When someone asked at a recent forum hosted by the New Democratic Coalition how he would respond to a Koch-style frontal assault on the issue, Dinkins responded with a plaintive cry for help. "If you're talking about 60-second sound bites, you have to get some of those special media experts to tell me how to do that," he said, according to the *New York Times*.

So there he is, this year's great liberal hope to topple Ed Koch. But if Dinkins isn't exciting, effective or inspiring, what is he? The possibilities at this point are:

A. a weak candidate who may nonetheless prevail against an even weaker Ed Koch;

B. a way of harassing the mayor from the left until former U.S. Attorney Rudolph Giu-



Koch's Democratic challenger David Dinkins: few credentials, no charisma.

Mayoral candidate David Dinkins—I lull New York

liani, the likely Republican candidate, can finish him off from the right; or

C. an example of the lemming-like impulse of New York City liberals to throw themselves into the sea every four years over the mayoral race.

The answer? Probably not A, unless Koch fouls up outrageously in the Democratic pri-

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mary and all but hands Dinkins a victory on a silver platter. As for B and C, however, odds at this point are that both are right. After a dozen years of railing against Koch, New York's liberal Democrats have damaged the mayor a bit while hurting themselves a whole lot more. So marginal have they become as a political force that they've reduced themselves to serving as standard-bearers for the GOP. At the February 1 Dinkins fund-raiser, the sentiment among many was summed up by the initials ABK, anyone but Koch, even if it's Rudi the Ruthless.

Speak softly and carry no stick: How did liberals arrive at this impasse? In a word, race. In a racially diverse, highly charged town like New York, a black running for city-wide office has several recourses. He can try to soar over the minefield by appealing to ideology or common class interests that supersede racial divisions. Or he can try to tiptoe through it, treading as lightly and carefully as he can, trusting to God and his campaign strategists.

As a big-city politician with modest ambitions and no discernible overriding political beliefs, Dinkins has opted for the latter. His strategy has been to speak softly and diplomatically on all occasions so that no one can take offense. Nonetheless, he's made a few blunders along the way.

In February 1985, for instance, he was part of a cabal of black politicians that spiked a promising mayoral bid by Herman Badillo, New York's best-known Puerto Rican politician, by throwing their support behind

Denny Farrell, a little-known Democratic clubhouse politician who happened to be black. The consequences were disastrous. Hispanics cried racism and voted en masse for Koch, while Farrell was all but laughed out of the race. Four years later, Badillo got his revenge when, on the eve of Dinkins' big night at Tavern on the Green, he allowed a group of supporters to announce that they were starting a movement to draft Badillo for mayor. For Dinkins, it was a rude reminder of many Latinos' smoldering resentment.

Dinkins has done somewhat better with Jewish voters. In October 1985 he issued a clear and unequivocal denunciation of Louis Farrakhan, a gesture of no small courage considering that the upshot was a thinly veiled death threat delivered before a screaming crowd of 25,000. ("When the leader sells out to people, he should pay a price for that—don't you think so? Do you think the leader should sell out and then live?" Farrakhan asked at a rally in Madison Square Garden to screams of "No!")

A few months later, however, in a speech at an East Side synagogue, Dinkins noted that "security for Israel, the Palestinian homeland, apartheid in South Africa, affirmative action and quotas" were some of the areas where Jews and blacks would have to disagree—leaving some members of the congregation shaking their heads as to what had led Dinkins to conclude that Jews per se were tolerant of racial segregation in South Africa.

Toward New York's burgeoning Asian population, Dinkins' record has been similarly mixed. He helped broker an agreement ending a black boycott of Korean shopkeepers in 1985. But when black nationalists launched a similar racist drive against Korean merchants in Brooklyn last summer, he remained silent when a bit of moral leadership might have helped. During last year's bizarre Tawana Brawley episode, he kept silent for months before finally volunteering that Brawley's advisers were not helping

matters by making "wild charges, unsubstantiated and, I am confident, untrue." Considering that Al Sharpton had already compared the state attorney general to Hitler, and Vernon Mason had accused him of masturbating to hospital photos of the alleged kidnap victim, this judgment was measured, to say the least.

On the more purely political question of how to reform New York's unusual Board of Estimate, a quasi-senate in which each of New York's five boroughs has an equal say, Dinkins has emerged as an unexpected defender of a system in which votes in mostly white Staten Island are counted eight times as heavily as votes in more racially mixed Manhattan—unexpected, that is, until one realizes that, as Manhattan borough president, Dinkins now has a seat on the board and therefore a vested interest in the status quo. On the explosive issue of Mayor Koch's pilot program to distribute clean needles to intravenous drug users, he has lined up with the rest of the black political establishment in opposing it on the grounds that it will encourage drug use, even though it is the only effective measure to halt the AIDS epidemic now racing through the ghettos.

In sum, Dinkins is a play-it-safe pol of no particular beliefs and no discernible strategy for standing up to the economic and political forces that control New York. He's a man of exceedingly temperate nature who will do anything to avoid a fight—one who believes that problems are there to be finessed, evaded and ignored until they go away, rather than met head-on.

Mr. Bland meets Mr. Brawl: Ed Koch, of course, is the exact opposite, a political brawler, a street fighter, a man of a thousand opinions, many of them crackpot (e.g., charging rent for residents of homeless shelters, labor camps for drug offenders, etc.). Where Dinkins has been silent about Gov. Mario Cuomo's latest round of budget cuts, the mayor has gone on the warpath, comparing the guy to an "800-pound gorilla" who must be stopped. But where people once found rhetoric like this amusing, lately the act seems to have worn thin.

Since his brutal assault on Jesse Jackson in last April's Democratic primary, the media has grown notably less friendly to Koch. While the semiofficial opinion-makers are grateful to him for blocking Jackson's candidacy, they're disturbed that he seemed to enjoy it so thoroughly. Did he have to look so gleeful as he went in for the kill? In the current kinder, gentler climate, Koch stands in violation of this newfound sense of politesse.

Nonetheless, Koch continues to enjoy certain strengths. Despite his recent stroke, he's still effective on the campaign trail, as quick-witted, knowledgeable and humorous as Dinkins is dull. His strong suit continues to be his management of the city's fiscal affairs, and he is one of the few politicians in America who can earn points with the voters by imposing a program of fiscal austerity. The more he cuts, the more people seem to believe that his brand of financial discipline is the only thing standing between them and another fiscal crisis like the one in 1975.

Koch may be crazy, but the average voter seems to think that only someone a little wacko can hold a city like New York together. Dave Dinkins has yet to convince them that they're wrong. Given his mediocre record, it's unlikely that he will. □

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By Danny Duncan Collum

BOSTON

WE ARE HERE TO WITNESS AN EVENT never before beheld by the eyes of humankind." Those were the words of Rev. Paul Washington, retired rector of the Episcopal Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, as he preached to a capacity crowd of 8,000 in Boston's Hynes Auditorium on February 11.

For once in this hype-ridden age, the words rang true. The occasion for Washington's sermon was the consecration of the Right Reverend Barbara Clementine Harris as suffragan bishop of the diocese of Massachusetts. This made Harris the first woman priest to be elected a bishop in the Episcopal

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Church, which is the U.S. affiliate of the worldwide Anglican Communion. A woman bishop in the Anglican Rite is a new thing under the sun.

Harris' consecration service had a distinctly un-Anglican tone. It was held under the steel beams and exposed heating ducts of a city convention center because no Boston church could accommodate all those who wanted to attend. Alongside the traditional fugues and anthems, the service also moved to the frequent strains of African-American gospel music. It was repeatedly interrupted by roaring cheers and applause.

The event's tone was appropriate for the elevation of one who, as Gerald Porter, provost of the Boston Cathedral, put it, "breaks all stereotypes of an Episcopal bishop." Not only is the 58-year-old Harris a woman, but she is a black woman with a strong track record of grass-roots activity who never attended a seminary or won a college degree.

A lifelong Philadelphian and third-generation Episcopalian, Harris was ordained in 1980. She entered the ministry after a secular career of three decades that found her earning her keep in the public relations business and her spurs as an active member of the civil rights, church and community movements. In lieu of seminary training she completed a program of independent studies designed for professionals entering the priesthood in later life.

Since her ordination, Harris served as a pastor and prison chaplain. Most recently she was interim rector at the Church of the Advocate in Philadelphia, a predominately black congregation with a well-earned activist reputation. In the '60s the Church of the Advocate hosted the programs of the Black Panther Party. In 1974 it was the site of the "illegal" ordination of 11 Episcopal women by three retired bishops.

That act of ecclesiastical disobedience paved the way for the official ordination of women priests three years later and focused worldwide attention on the seriousness of women's demands for equality. Coincidentally or not, the cross at the front of the procession in that ordination service was borne by Barbara Harris.

Beginning in 1984, Harris gained a national profile in church circles as executive director of the Episcopal Church Publishing Company. The company produces *The Witness*, a monthly magazine that is the leading voice of left Episcopalians. Until her election, she contributed a monthly column to *The Witness* titled "A Luta Continua—The Struggle Continues," after a slogan used by the Frelimo guerrillas in Mozambique.

Engendering opposition: The leftist views expressed in those columns were



The 58-year-old Harris has never attended seminary or won a college degree. She has a strong record in grass-roots activities.

It took 2,000 years for this job to open up

widely cited by church opponents of her election. Rev. Jerome Politzer of the arch-conservative Prayerbook Society accused her of supporting "members of terrorist groups" and standing up "for anti-American regimes." Borrowing a line from his co-communicant George Herbert Walker Bush, Politzer said that Harris "could not represent the mainstream position of the church." *The Witness* issued a statement calling the political attacks "a McCarthyite smear campaign" against it and Harris.

While her race, class background and politics may irk conservative Episcopalians, most public debate has focused on her gender. Harris' consecration, as her mentor Rev. Washington pointed out, made her the first female bishop "not just in the 450 years of the Anglican Church, but in the 2,000-year history of the Catholic Church." Here "Catholic" refers to those churches (Roman, Eastern Orthodox and Anglican) whose bishops lay claim to an unbroken line of succession dating back to the original 12 apostles chosen by Jesus. These churches encompass the vast majority of the world's Christians.

Debate about "apostolic succession" may seem arcane and medieval to most modern ears. But this was in large part the issue that turned Barbara Harris' elevation to the bishopric into front-page news and ignited a firestorm of church controversy. The Episcopal Church has been ordaining women priests for 12 years. But as a female bishop, Harris herself will have the authority to ordain priests.

To feminists, the entrance of a woman into the apostolic succession is a breach of the innermost bulwark of patriarchal authority. The reality of a woman assuming the bishop's staff and mitre challenges patriarchy at its heart.

Among conservatives a woman bishop

amounts to the pollution of Anglicanism's bloodlines. Their argument against admitting women to the clergy is that the priest represents Christ. He was a man, so were his apostles, and so should be their successors. The theological debate hinges on whether the patriarchal culture of Jesus' time was part of the divine plan or simply a consequence of human injustice and evil.

Many Anglican Communion, including the mother church in Great Britain, hold to the traditionalist view and refuse—as do the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches—to ordain women. Harris' election as bishop forces the issue of women's equality onto the church's agenda. There is

Barbara Clementine Harris made history by becoming the Episcopal Church's first woman bishop.

talk of a traditionalist schism within American Episcopalianism, though previous attempts at founding a new church have ended in disarray.

The theological debate on the validity of female priests and bishops continued to the moment of Harris' inauguration. The rite of consecration has a place, like that in the marriage ceremony, in which anyone with an objection is invited to speak. Two male traditionalists, a minister from New York City and a layperson from Chicago, rose to voice the by-now familiar denunciations.

Edmund Browning, presiding bishop of the national Episcopal Church, noted the objections, remarked that they had been "broadly ventilated" during the selection process, and

concluded, to a standing ovation, that "we will proceed." In a startling show of hierarchical force, 55 bishops from throughout the country participated in the service, demonstrating to all doubters that this was no fringe phenomenon.

Bishop Harris has a solid base of support in her generally liberal diocese, which comprises Boston and most of eastern Massachusetts. Some have called her selection "the real Massachusetts miracle."

The convention last September to elect a new bishop was presented with six candidates, including a white woman and a black man. Harris was nominated by Rev. Mary Glasspool, a Boston pastor who had previously served with her in the Philadelphia diocese. She called Harris a woman who "may at times make us uncomfortable about the way things are—but that is precisely what Jesus did." The delegates seemed reluctant to court such divine discomfort. It took most of the day and eight ballots to assemble a majority for Harris.

Writ large: Her election had to win the approval of a majority of the bishops and their advisory standing committees nationwide. It was during this process that the conservative countercampaign became especially vehement. Eventually Massachusetts Bishop David Johnson sent a letter to all of the bishops and committees, answering charges about Harris' qualifications and complaining that she was the object of a campaign of "written and verbal character assassinations." The election was not approved until January 24, barely in time for the previously scheduled consecration date.

In her first sermon as bishop, delivered at St. Paul's Cathedral in Boston, Harris catalogued the litany of injustices to be confronted, including "church hierarchies who act the same as secular hierarchies." The words rolled easily off her tongue. No doubt she's said them before. They drew "amens" from the congregation. But their irony was unmistakable, because now Barbara Harris is part of the hierarchy.

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