

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2001

JOYCE PURNICK

Metro Matters

2 Candidates Debating 2 New Yorks

IF Fernando Ferrer is mayor, the city will be revived, education will improve, downtown Manhattan will recover (with federal and state help), racial profiling will be forbidden, and unity will prevail.

The other New York, the theme on which Mr. Ferrer, the Bronx borough president, ran before Sept. 11? Gone.

Now to Mark Green. What if Mark Green is mayor? Ditto on all counts, except, remember, he never spoke of the other New York.

In a curious debate last night that revised a bit of recent political dialogue, the two Democratic candidates for mayor worked to appear restrained, even unified. For stretches of their 90 minutes together, it was hard to tell them apart (except for Mr. Green's liberal employ of the first person singular and Mr. Ferrer's unusually subdued tones).

Then they got to that two New Yorks thing, and for a few seconds it was politics as usual. It started when Mr. Ferrer — who was so adamantly the candidate of "the other New York" until, well, yesterday — pulled back a political mile and said of the events of Sept. 11: "After that attack we all live in that other New York. We all will be called upon to sacrifice. We all will be called upon to do without."

That was too much for Mr. Green, who has been pointedly emphasizing that he is the candidate of one New York. "I ran on a campaign of bringing the city together," he said last night. When Mr. Ferrer said Mr. Green "denigrated" his positions, Mr. Green said, "You can't change the facts," and the two glared at each other.

The questioning moved on, but the tension hung in the air as they discussed fiscal matters, education, security, whether a

**A restrained dialogue,
save for a few seconds
of politics as usual.**

new financial center should be built downtown (Mr. Green's position) or decentralized and in the boroughs, at least at first (Mr. Ferrer's position). Both agreed that education, parks and other essential services would still be priorities, though goals set before Sept. 11 would now have to be reached later, the two also agreed.

On the sensitive issue of whether Mr. Ferrer would take advice from the Rev. Al Sharpton about naming a police commissioner, the borough president introduced an effective little surprise: Mr. Ferrer would appoint a panel of criminal justice experts to propose candidates, leaving Mr. Sharpton with no role, Mr. Ferrer insisted.

Although Mr. Green is supported by William J. Bratton, the popular former police commissioner, he seemed outflanked. Same with the mini-debate about "the other New York," which is odd since Mr. Ferrer is the one who flip-flopped.

FACT is, Mr. Ferrer took lots of heat for pushing that concept throughout the primary. But times have changed, so he was changing, too. Mr. Ferrer seemed to be saying. The tactic left Mr. Green all but sputtering in frustration.

The moment was emblematic of a discernible shift in the campaign, one that began when Mr. Ferrer rejected Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's effort to extend his term, while Mr. Green accepted it. The borough president grabbed the moral high ground, putting Mr. Green on the defensive.

Nobody could be foolish enough to predict who will win next Thursday, based on a few days of campaigning and one debate. Mr. Ferrer only won 7 percent of the white vote in the primary, so he has a long way to go to get a majority. But his voters seem energized. Are Mr. Green's?

There are likely to be many more twists in this telescoped, awkward campaign that was rammed off the tracks on Sept. 11. Since Mr. Ferrer and Mr. Green qualified for the runoff, it has been hard to tell who has been more distracted, the candidates or the public.

First came the Giuliani-forever boomlet, then the endorsement parade and the unofficial competition for who uttered the most stupid remark of the day. (The unofficial winner: Mr. Sharpton, for saying the city would have come together even if "Bozo" had been mayor.)

Substance? Of that there has been some, and most of it was debated last night, everything from education to union wages. Mr. Ferrer's promise of a 30 percent raise for teachers? He backed off that a bit, even as Mr. Green admonished him for citing a "fantastical" number.

It is fantastical, so unrealistic that even the head of the teachers' union distanced herself from it, just as some Ferrer supporters distanced themselves from his concept of another New York.

But reality changes quickly in politics, almost as quickly as perception, and by the end of last night's 90-minute exercise, both hinted that the Democratic race was now another campaign.

CITY_21MC100_011830653