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NEW YORK OBSERVER, OCTOBER 1, 2001

# The Heartland Loves New York

Before Sept. 11, America regarded New York as an outcast, the stepchild of the country. While other great cities such as London, Paris and Rome were the pride of their nations, enjoying the patronage and full support of their citizens and governments, Americans looked at New York with a mixture of fascination and distaste. Rather than claim New York as one of its star attractions, the country curiously preferred to keep the city at arm's length, as a black sheep and convenient whipping boy. America's unease with New York arose partly because of the city's concentration of power and wealth, as well as our outsized public figures, our ethnic diversity and our easy embrace of the outer edges of art and culture.

Since the horrific events of Sept. 11, as New Yorkers try to dig their way out of grief and pray for peace, many have been startled to find that the city has become the darling of the country, an emblem of patriotism and pride, the most American of all cities. It's ironic that it took a disaster of worldwide proportions to bring President George W. Bush to New York and to elevate Mayor Rudolph Giuliani to mythic status. Just a few weeks ago, the President gave no indication that he would ever care to set foot here, going about his business as if the city were part of Europe, ranking up there with Budapest or Marseilles as claims on his attention. Meanwhile, Mr. Giuliani was a lame-duck Mayor, squabbling publicly with his estranged wife and causing mischief in the Democratic Mayoral primary. Now the President has cast off his national image as an amateur and is riding a surge of popularity, largely because of his eloquent concern for New York and the victims of the attack, capped by his appearance with rescue workers atop the rubble. And Mr. Giuliani is, as Oprah Winfrey dubbed him, "America's mayor." If a Presidential election were held next week, there is little doubt that Rudolph Giuliani would be carried into the White House.

The city's new place in the heart of the nation's heartland also became clear when the New York Mets took the field in Pittsburgh almost a week after the atrocity downtown. The scoreboard proclaimed: "We Are All New Yorkers." The message was the same elsewhere. A delegation of city firefighters received a standing ovation before the Jets-Patriots game in Foxboro, Mass., while in

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Kansas City, the Giants received hearty applause from local Chiefs fans who normally could be expected to lustily boo the visitors.

Much has been made about how much the events of Sept. 11 have changed and will continue to change the culture. Several commentators have noted that the bravery of New York's firefighters, police and other emergency workers have given the country new heroes—real heroes—who will serve as inspirations in the difficult days ahead. These courageous New Yorkers changed in an instant the public's idea of what kind of person lives and works in the country's greatest city.

Of course, New Yorkers didn't need to be told that ours is a great city, or that Mr. Giuliani is a vividly effective leader. It's worth noting that the idea of the "new" Rudy Giuliani is a myth: Since his election in 1993, he has always shown a passionate loyalty and commitment to the well-being of New Yorkers. Indeed, his anti-crime policies have saved thousands of lives every year. Yet prior to the World Trade Center attack, New York's virtues failed to magnetize the country. The city was associated with decadence and self-absorption, instead of the courage and selflessness that was so much on display after the calamity. Quite simply, New York was misunderstood and suffered as a result. Cities such as Paris or Rome benefit from substantial national funding for infrastructure needs such as transportation, sanitation and security. Their governments understand that a country is only as great as its showcase cities. Meanwhile, New York has had to fight for money from Washington.

How long will America's current embrace of New York last? Will it translate into financial support equal to what the city deserves? Has there been a permanent shift in the relationship? There is no way to know. Certainly the outpouring of national and international support has been a crucial part of the city's healing, and the contributions to the various disaster-relief funds from around the country will play a critical role as the city rebuilds and establishes some version of normalcy. For the moment, America stands enchanted by New York, and on the brink of perhaps finally understanding why New Yorkers have put up with so much over the years, never more so than in the past two weeks: There is simply no other city like it.



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