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How Bloomy Bloomed

Blunders, Billions, and Backstabbing Beat Green

BY **WAYNE BARRETT**

MIKE BLOOMBERG'S 5-1 SPENDING ADVANTAGE AND MARK GREEN'S 5-1 REGISTRATION EDGE ROUGHLY CANCELED EACH OTHER OUT, MEANING THAT BLOOMBERG'S CLOSEST-EVER MARGIN OF MAYORAL TRIUMPH LAST WEEK WAS DETERMINED, AS IS OFTEN THE RULE, BY WHICH WANNABE WAS WISER. LONG ONE OF THE SMARTEST POLS ON THE CITY SCENE, GREEN HAS NONETHELESS NEVER UNDERSTOOD THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTELLIGENCE



RICHARD B. LEVINE

BLOOMBERG AT U.S. KING'S VICTORY PARTY: PORK BUN HORS D'OEUVRES, PLASTIC NECKTUBES, CHANTS OF "U.S.A.!, U.S.A.!," AND AN ABSOLUTELY DIDDY GIULIANI

and judgment. So he surrounded himself, in his campaign and Public Advocate's office, with many younger versions of—guess who?—himself, each one able to move with the speed of a sound bite from nimble to clueless at the first sign of crisis.

Here are the three critical campaign decisions in which either seasoned wisdom (abetted by money) prevailed, or the absence of it sunk Green:

• David Garth, the 71-year-old campaign consultant who's won seven of the last 10 mayoral elections, reached an agreement to run the Green campaign in the summer of 2000. According to Garth and Green sources, the "parameters of a contract were set." Then Green decided to change the terms of the deal, suggesting that Garth get the same total fee in the end, but that the schedule of payments be adjusted so that he got more in the general election than in the primary, back-loading the payout.

Already reluctant about doing Green, Garth let the belated switch convince him to drop out. He'd already flirted with Fernando Ferrer and Peter Vallone, ultimately passing on them as well. He then began a long dance with Bloomberg that ended in February 2001, when he went on the campaign tab at a rate that would rise to $150,000 a month. Garth agreed to a more limited role with Bloomberg than he had with John Lindsay, Ed Koch, and Rudy Giuliani, playing a general strategist role while Washington-based Bill Knapp actually produced the jointly crafted commercials. But subtract Garth from Bloomberg and add him to the experience-starved Green team, and as surely as Green must now regret this blunder, the result changes.

Green wound up hiring Steve McMahon to do his commercials, pollster Mark Mellman, and strategist Hank Sheinkopf. None had ever won a seriously contested citywide general election; indeed, neither had Green, his respected campaign manager Rich Schrader, nor anyone else on the key staff. Even their successful citywide primary experience was scant. McMahon—who's from Nebraska, is based in Virginia, and has never lived in New York—produced ads for the race against Bloomberg that either had no zing ("Green Shares Your Priorities") or too much (the shrill "Kill it! Kill it!" commercial of the final hours). Sheinkopf, who guided Eliot Spitzer's 1998 win and Comptroller-elect Bill Thompson's race this year, was shunted aside.

As strategic as Green was in the runoff, overcoming a floundering Ferrer in the last week with tough ads and message, he had no overarching theme or convincing commercials in the final, unraveling days.

The Bloomberg commercials, on the other hand, created their own Garth-inspired reality, exploiting the Giuliani endorsement so persuasively that Schrader says, "Bloomberg morphed into post–World Trade Center Rudy, almost as if we would get a third Giuliani term if Bloomberg was elected." Schrader says the negative ads piled atop one another "like snow on a roof," until Green's lead collapsed, with particular damage done by the one that simply quoted a smug Green declaring he could've "done better" than Giuliani on and after September 11. Schrader also believes that the ad that cobbled together quotes from leading Democrats criticizing Green—utterly misconstruing Senator Chuck Schumer's comments, which weren't even about Green—contributed to driving Green's unfavorables to nearly three times their runoff level.

At 56, and with only two easy wins under his belt, Green was the senior manager of his own panicked team, unable to turn to anyone who'd achieved what he was trying to do. Bill Lynch, the "rumpled genius" of David Dinkins's 1989 campaign, who despite his ties to Ferrer told Schrader he was willing to advise or help, was at home waiting for a personal phone call from Green that never came.

On the other side of the street were combat veterans like Bill Cunningham, the former Moynihan campaign manager and state Democratic Party director, Maureen Connelly, the ex-Koch strategist who's also won statewide races, and Doug Schoen, who became Clinton's pollster after winning New York's mayoralty three times.

• While most of the post-electoral analysis has focused on Green's failings with blacks and Latinos, it may well have been his unwillingness to compete for a vote Garth always covets—white Catholics—that cost him the contest. With exit polls ranking white Catholics behind only blacks in their share of last week's turnout (20 percent), Schrader concedes that Green never even sought the endorsement of Senator Moynihan or aired a commercial with police and fire union leaders and members that was already shot. As prominently as Bill Bratton and Mario Cuomo's endorsements were featured in the primary and runoff, they, too, disappeared from the screen during the general-election campaign.

Obviously the Giuliani ads were pushing many Catholics to Bloomberg, but Green wasn't using the heavy artillery available to him, especially the 18 endorsing law enforcement unions that are as much the heroes of the Western world as Rudy. Green wound up getting numbers only slightly better than David Dinkins did among white Catholics, but Dinkins was running against one of their own. Pitted against another Jewish candidate, Green never seized this outcome-changing opportunity to shift just a slice of the Catholic vote, perhaps because no one at the highest levels of his campaign came from or understood that community.

The other major media gaffe was Green's inexplicable decision not to buy any time on Hispanic television, and just a little on Hispanic radio, to counter the millions that Bloomberg had been pouring into both since the inception of the campaign. The emphasis on black and Hispanic ads was, according to Maureen Connelly, as much a product of Bloomberg's own understanding of the media business as it was the advice of Garth and other consultants. Combined with the Ferrer fallout, this blitz of targeted ads produced the highest percentage of minority votes for a Republican since Lindsay.

Faced with financial constraints that made it impossible to offset with

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