

"[The book has] juicy revelations which speak volumes about how the political game is played in New York." —*New York Daily News*

# Eyes on City Hall

A Young Man's Education in New York City Political Warfare



**Evan J. Mandery**  
Foreword by Fran Reiter

# **Eyes on City Hall**

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*A Young Man's  
Education in New York  
Political Warfare*

**Evan J. Mandery**

*with fifteen original illustrations  
by Rob Shepperson and  
four political cartoons  
by R. J. Matson*



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# Foreword

BY FRAN REITER

**A**t the beginning of 1997, Evan Mandery was a young, practicing attorney with very limited political experience and a yen to jump into a real campaign. I, on the other hand, was a seasoned *pol*, the former State Chair of New York's Liberal Party, and a former, some-time campaign operative who had found nirvana in government service as one of NYC Mayor Rudy Giuliani's Deputy Mayors. Unlike Evan, I had no desire to jump into any campaign. So I didn't jump. I was, however, nudged. Shortly after Evan voluntarily joined Manhattan Borough President and Democratic mayoral candidate Ruth Messinger's campaign as Research Director, Mayor Giuliani *asked* me to leave his government and serve as his re-election campaign manager. To the uninformed, this might sound like a great honor. Suffice it to say that when asked by a sitting Mayor, who also happens to be your boss, to do something, you tend to say yes. By mid-March 1997, I was an ex-Deputy Mayor sitting virtually alone in an office that would eventually house a typically chaotic campaign headquarters.

Despite the fact that Evan was a willing participant in Campaign '97 and I somewhat less so, and while the positions we held in our respective campaigns were very different, and finally, while we worked for candidates diametrically opposed to one another, Evan is, in many respects, a kindred spirit and, ultimately, a survivor who lived to tell his tale. And it is a tale of all campaign workers, irrespective of party or ideology.

Many books have been written about political campaigns, usually by professional political operatives or strategists, candidates, members of the media, or academics. These works are either overly theoretical (the academic approach) or self-indulgent, self-aggrandizing tomes, burdened with the enormous cynicism that eventually afflicts all political professionals. To my knowledge, *Eyes on City Hall* is the first of this genre to be written by a virtual political neophyte and, therefore, provides an important and interesting perspective. It is an honest, inside look at a major political contest,

without any of the aforementioned baggage. This is both refreshing and enlightening—and something for which we should be grateful.

On a personal note, while reading the book two years after the campaign ended, I was able finally to think and talk about my own experience without my own emotional and cynical baggage (well, at least not as much) and to enjoy and learn from an account of the overall experience from the opponent's perspective.

But *Eyes on City Hall* is not a book simply to be enjoyed by those of us who were personally involved. On both a micro and macro level, it is a serious and important work that leads to greater understanding of the dynamics, strategies, and personalities of modern-day, big-money campaigns.

Campaigns are lived at the extremes, and the adrenaline pumps 24/7. The highs are very high and the lows very low—particularly since every event is played out in the media spotlight. (There is no right to privacy in a political campaign.) While successes along the way can be euphoric, small mistakes, errors in judgment, miscalculations, or a misspoken word often have enormous, negative ramifications, both for the effort and the individual perpetrator. As you will read, Evan and I both had such moments during the campaign.

Most staffers, not to mention volunteers, are true believers. They have to be, or they'd never put up with the crazy hours, no sleep, low (if any) pay, and miserable food—not to mention the candidate who, no matter how otherwise charming, inspirational, or statesmanlike, will periodically transform from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. (or Ms.) Hyde.

The diary format of *Eyes on City Hall* is a wonderful day-by-day illustration of a challenger versus incumbent campaign. It was widely believed by the professionals and the public that, barring an unforeseen catastrophe or scandal, Rudy Giuliani was a shoe-in for re-election. Therefore, of particular interest is the level of belief by the Messinger campaign's staff, not to mention the candidate herself, that the election was winnable, even at its lowest moments. Having served on winning and losing campaigns, I can attest to the fact that this is not unusual. Staffers always think their candidate can win. Such delusional behavior is necessary in order to maintain the energy level that campaigns demand. As you'll read, examples of self-deception abound, making it clear that this is not an environment for the mentally stable.

On a more macro level, there is the ever-present and much-debated issue of political fundraising: the need to raise millions of dollars in a relatively short period of time from an increasingly apathetic public and a business sector whose motives are always viewed with suspicion; the lengths a campaign will

go to in raising the maximum, legal, allowable amount; and the role money (or the lack of money) plays in the political decision-making process.

Perhaps most interesting is the reliance of the Messinger campaign on a *gun for hire*, one of those very senior, well-paid campaign professionals who go from state to state, campaign to campaign, selling their services with little or no regard for who the candidate is, other than their political party affiliation, and not always that. Most, if not all, modern campaigns (Giuliani's included) hire professional media gurus, pollsters, and to a lesser extent, opposition researchers (Mandery, while paid as Research Director, was not in this category). Messinger, as is increasingly the case in today's campaigns, brought in a *gun for hire* as her campaign manager/chief political strategist. In my own experience through three Giuliani campaigns (losing in 1989 and winning in 1993 and 1997), only in the first months of the 1989 campaign was there reliance on paid, professional outsiders for campaign management, and in my opinion, the campaign never recovered from the experience. Thereafter, Giuliani relied on trusted close friends and associates for day-to-day management and most of the strategizing. I leave it to the reader to decide, irrespective of the fact that she lost, if Messinger's approach worked to her benefit.

Mandery treats me very fairly in his book, despite the fact that I refused to cooperate when he called me soon after the campaign was over, seeking an interview. I confess that, upon purchasing the book, I immediately looked up all references to me in the index and read those first. (I may be out of politics, but my ego and paranoia remain intact.) I finished the book by the next day, swallowed my embarrassment, called Evan, and confessed how much I had enjoyed it. After all that, to be asked to write this foreword for the paperback edition is indeed an honor and a vivid illustration of the bond we share.

For those not yet so cynical that they have given up all interest in politics and political contests, not to mention political *groupies*, *Eyes on City Hall* is an entertaining and informative work that goes beyond its obvious account of a major mayoral campaign, raising serious questions about the state of politics in America today. One last note: While, after twenty years of political activity and direct and indirect involvement in numerous campaigns, I have vowed never again to work on a campaign, they provided me with the greatest *highs* I have ever known and led to a short but wonderful career in public service. I'll never regret the experience. I don't believe Evan Mandery will either.

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# Preface

I VOLUNTEERED ON MY first political campaign in 1994. Mario Cuomo, running for governor of New York for a fourth time, was facing a tough race against George Pataki, a Republican state senator who, unlike Cuomo, favored the death penalty. I called the Cuomo campaign and expressed my desire to help, explaining that I had a better than average education in the hope that I would be given an interesting assignment. My offer was enthusiastically received. I was asked to report to an office in Garden City, Long Island, near where I was working as a lawyer at the time.

There I was locked in a small room to seal envelopes and make telephone calls. No one could have been less suited for the task than I. Even with a script provided by the campaign, my phone manner was extraordinarily bad. I began each call with a string of profuse apologies for bothering people at home. People often hung up before I could state the reason for my call. I wasn't very good at sealing envelopes either.

My colleagues were passionate and vibrant and all over seventy years old. They fed me constantly. Pizza. Cookies. Chips. I hardly had time to be hung up on before someone offered me more food. After work we would go out to a diner where my new friends would feed me more. They liked that I was Jewish. Mostly, I think, they liked that I was less than seventy. It felt much more like visiting my grandparents in Florida than working on a political campaign. I know now that I was part of a systematic process to stimulate voter turnout—a pull operation to be precise—but the work had only slightly more appeal to me than the game of mah-jongg to which my colleagues retired after dinner. I left the Cuomo campaign disenchanted. I had imagined politics to be so much more.

My second political experience was vastly different. As the research director on Ruth Messinger's 1997 New York City mayoral campaign against Rudy Giuliani, I was part of a universe of consultants and advisers who sat in think tanks and plotted strategic courses through the labyrinth of politics. They ate lots of food too, but in every other respect this world was everything the other was not. It was vibrant, fast-paced, and filled with