

Rudy puts color-blind spotlight on racism

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Speaking to the mostly black board of directors of the Urban League on Thursday, Mayor Giuliani shed some light on how he thinks his government should respond to racism.

That he acknowledged the problem seemed news in itself. "I don't have a special message for any group," he has said before. "People in this city . . . need more of certain general things — safety, education, jobs."

That puts him on one side of the national debate between proponents of color-blind politics — his side — and champions of race-specific remedies. African-Americans' experience of involuntary immigration, servitude and cultural dispossession is unique. Yet Giuliani doesn't think he should treat them uniquely. Looking past race is his way of healing.

At the league meeting, board member Dolly Christian told the mayor that "racism, the attack on black males, is a prime concern." She asked if he'd not just "speak out" against that, but also "focus more narrowly and specifically" on it.

Giuliani at first seemed to duck the heart of her question. "It's a big issue," he said. "It's a lot of different issues rolled into one — societal violence, police violence, the perception of black males and crime."

"On crime, I believe very strongly that the crime bill is a paradigm . . . offering not just more police and prisons, but more hope and prevention. Beacon schools and athletic leagues give kids opportunities to see other ways of life . . ."

"But prevention programs could take years to help the African-American community. So, in the short term, we need continued investment in law enforcement." Drops in crime "are largest in parts of the city that need them most, the poorer areas. . . . Equitable police deployment has created a somewhat safer condition."

Giuliani didn't really answer the warm-toned query about racist violence until he said: "On the problem of color-blindness, we need to be more aware of it."



more diverse police force."

Noting that most civilian-review complaints aren't about brutality but about bad language, he said that more police diversity would help "cops to think more about how they should relate to people."

Urban League President Dennis Walcott pressed a bit, asking how to get past mayoral sound bites on violent incidents. "We hope people see a balanced response," Giuliani said, citing his mediations of Crown Heights disputes over Labor Day and Rosh Hashanah celebrations.

Giuliani added that when an Arab killed a Jewish youth on the Brooklyn Bridge, he didn't just comfort Jews; he cautioned against blaming all Arabs and sponsored Arab-Jewish reconciliation meetings.

Surprisingly, he didn't mention his personal mediations in the Sayon case or his moving remarks at the funeral of a Flatbush boy killed by a cop who'd thought a toy gun was real. Perhaps Giuliani didn't want to pander to this audience. "You can't do everything each side wants," he said, "but you want them to know you've been fair."

Giuliani asked his listeners not to look for mayoral rhetoric or gestures keyed to race or racism, but to judge his "hard work" to improve safety, schools and jobs. His message was that true color-blindness does more than color-consciousness to curb the dogs of racism.

With his heart work, maybe it can. The Urban League board seemed uncertain. But it applauded Giuliani as he departed.