

Young's candidacy to put new formula to test

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WASHINGTON -- Looking back, black political analysts see two threads linking the major victories of 1989 -- seasoned candidates who came up the Democratic ladder the methodical, old-fashioned way, and campaign themes that de-emphasized race in favor of broader, mainstream issues.

Looking ahead, they see Andrew Young.

The two-term mayor of Atlanta will test that strategy next year, a black candidate in quest of white votes to become governor of Georgia.

A month after the elections in which Virginia chose a black governor, and black mayors were elected for the first time in New York and three other cities with white voter majorities, the Joint Center for Political Studies sponsored a forum on what those contests may tell future candidates.

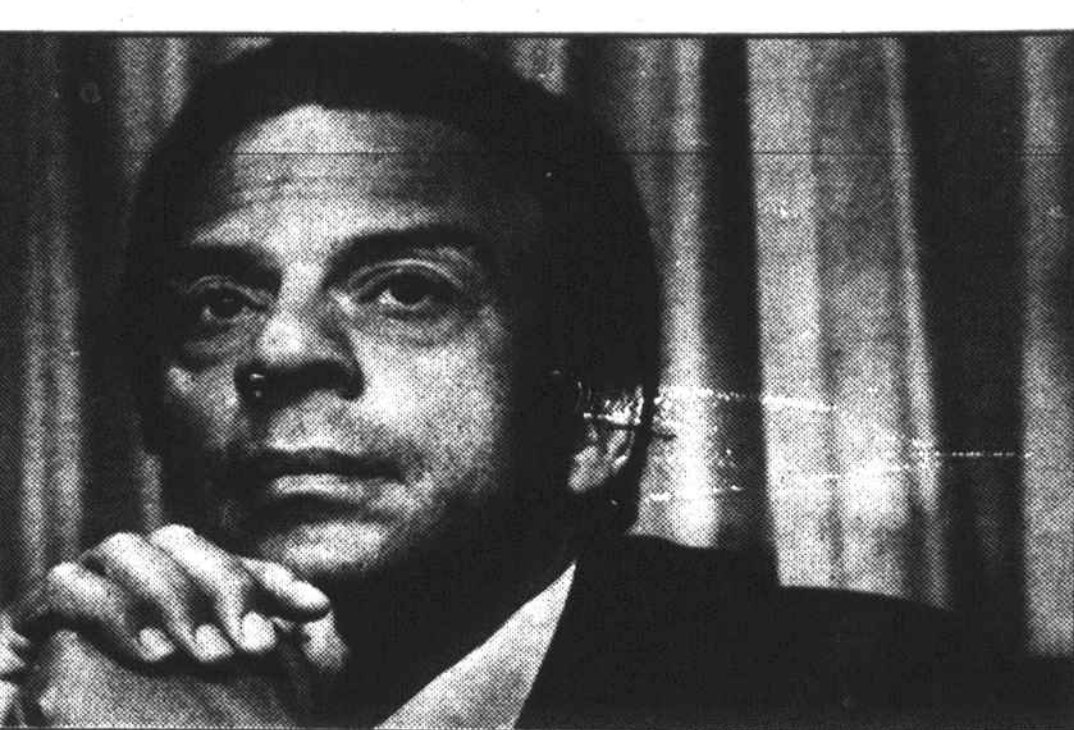
"The next test is going to be Andy Young," said political scientist Joseph P. McCormick II of Howard University.

Young's style and strategy reflect some of the winning ways shown by L. Douglas Wilder in Virginia and David Dinkins in New York this

year. But political campaigns are not portable, and there are major differences, too. Young plays down the comparison, saying that except for the fact that all three of them went to Howard, "and we all happen to have the same skin color, there isn't a lot we have in common."

One thing they have in common is a record to run on, political apprenticeships the Joint Center analysts saw as vital ingredients in the black victories of 1989. Wilder has been in Virginia politics for 19 years; Dinkins has a 23-year record in New York. Among other black mayors elected last month, two were incumbents, two were state senators, two had long experience on city councils.

"In their political experience and their coalition approach, Wilder and Dinkins represent a growing trend among black politicians," said Dr. Cheryl Miller, a visiting scholar at the Joint Center. "An increasing number of them are becoming viable candidates for top positions



File Photo

Mayor Andrew Young's style and strategy reflect some of the winning ways shown by Wilder of Virginia and Dinkins in New York.

by climbing the conventional political ladder."

Young came to politics from the civil rights movement after serving as an aide to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. He was elected to Congress, became U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, and has served two terms as mayor of Atlanta.

Another thread is the course the analysts called "de-racialization," playing down what are seen as black issues in favor of themes that appeal to a broader constituency.

Dr. Charles Jones of Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va., said

the Wilder campaign was designed around issues without racial implications. He ran as a centrist, gaining vital votes for his support of abortion rights while at the same time advocating a balanced budget, supporting the death penalty and backing Virginia's right to work law.

For Dinkins, the issues were different but the style was similar, campaign aide Hulbert James said.

Both candidates kept their distance from Jesse Jackson during the fall campaign, although James said the political structure and cadre built for Jackson's 1988 presidential primary campaign was essential to the Dinkins organization.

James, who also worked for Jackson, counseled against de-emphasizing the black vote in the process of reaching out to white voters.

That's a challenge for any politician trying to broaden his base by reaching out for new supporters without ignoring or offending old ones, especially for a black candidate seeking a breakthrough to white voters.

In his effort to turn out black voters in Virginia, Wilder appeared each Sunday in seven to 10 black churches, campaign visits he made with as little fanfare as possible, Jones said.

As Young begins his race for governor of Georgia, there are parallels in both issues and strategy. Race obviously will be a factor, but it won't be an issue in the Young campaign; he is telling voters he can bring to Georgia the kind of progress in economic development Atlanta has seen in the past eight years. His emphasis is on experience, qualifications and his record in office.

Young boasts of his support in the Atlanta business community. His campaign chairman is Griffin Bell, the former attorney general, a white, conservative Democrat. Hobby Stripling, the former mayor of Vienna, Ga., once president of the Georgia Municipal Association, is to manage his campaign.

Young promises to go anywhere and talk to anyone to get his message across. As if to demonstrate, he dined one night last month at a red-neck cafe in Marietta; for the occasion, the owner -- a supporter -- took two racist records off the jukebox.

Young's recognition and approval ratings give him an early edge in what is likely to be a five-way Democratic primary next year. But he faces a major obstacle that did not confront Wilder, the likelihood of a runoff primary.

Just under a quarter of Georgia's voting age population is black. Young is a skilled and attractive campaigner. There's a good chance he will get more votes than any other Democrat in the primary, but the crowded ballot would make it unlikely any candidate could gain the 50 percent-plus that is needed for nomination without a runoff. And in a two-way Deep South race against a white candidate, the odds would be tougher. Win that, and he'd have to do it again next November against a white Republican.

And if a centrist black candidate loses next time?

Howard University's McCormick had an answer.

"One thing that's going to happen is Jesse Jackson's going to say 'I told you so.'"

EDITOR'S NOTE -- Walter R. Mears, vice president and columnist for The Associated Press, has reported on Washington and national politics for more than 25 years.

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