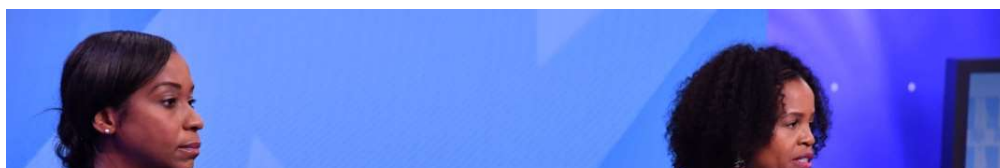


OPINION > OPINION COLUMNISTS

# Rivers & Peterson: Why Boston won't have a Black mayor in 2021



NEEDHAM, MA – SEPTEMBER 8: Boston mayoral candidates Andrea Campbell (L) and Kim Janey participate in a debate moderated by Shannon Mulaire at the NBC Universal Boston Media Center September 8, 2021 in Needham, Massachusetts. (Staff Photo By Chris Christo/MediaNews Group/Boston Herald)

By **EUGENE F. RIVERS, III AND KEVIN C. PETERSON** |  
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Harvard philosopher George Santayana famously observed that “Those who cannot learn from history are condemned to repeat it.” This truth explains much of the behavior of our local Black political class. It is the refusal of this class to learn from the past the basic lessons regarding the necessary political and organizational discipline that has again cost the Black community victory in the electoral arena.

While the lessons of history played an important role, there were other factors that influenced the outcome of the preliminary mayoral race. In the case of Acting Mayor Kim Janey, the difficult truth is that the Black community was in some instances poorly served by her “Black girl magic” performance as acting mayor. And her poorly managed campaign cannot be overlooked. Similarly, in the case of Andrea Campbell, there was a failure to focus on addressing some of the most pressing problems confronting the Black poor in our city.

Unfortunately, neither Campbell nor Janey articulated anything resembling a coherent public safety policy agenda to serve the poorest and most violent neighborhoods in our city. As Black women who both claimed to identify with the needs of the inner city, they exhibited no comprehension of the violence that overwhelms the lives of countless Black and brown youths. For this, they must be held accountable. Given several recent instances of explosions of gunfire in the

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a preliminary mayoral election. King galvanized voters to rally around his vision of a rainbow coalition, a vision of inclusion and left of center economic democracy. He ran a brilliant, disciplined, highly organized campaign. He inspired countless numbers of young Black and brown people across the city. His campaign potentially laid the groundwork for subsequent bids for the office of mayor by Black candidates. Unfortunately, King failed to immediately expand his base outside the Black community, which would have consolidated the enthusiasm generated by the campaign.

Rather, in 1985 King ran against Joe P. Kennedy II for Congress. He would have had a better chance running against Jesus in heaven than against the son of Robert F. Kennedy in Massachusetts. The Kennedys were friends of the Black community. The campaign alienated the Kennedy base of support, having the opposite effect from building King’s electoral appeal.



The mayoral candidacy of Charlotte Golar Richie in 2013, was another missed opportunity. Unlike Janey, Golar Richie brought a certain intellectual sophistication and a very congenial temperament to the electoral contest. She was highly qualified for the position, having served as state representative and as the chief of housing and neighborhood development for the city of Boston. Her campaign however was hobbled by more than the customary in-fighting among the staff. The dysfunction cost her invaluable national financial support and access to expertise in campaigning.

An even more relevant impediment to Golar Richie's success was the fact that three other candidates of color were in the race and split the Black vote. No mechanism existed to maximize the chance of success for the candidate who would have most ably represented the Black community. Golar Richie missed becoming one of the two candidates in the general election by a narrow margin.

Once again, in the most recent preliminary election, three Black candidates divided the votes of the Black community. The final race for second place was extremely close. Had Janey or Campbell judged it better to serve the interests of the Black community rather than their own political career, Boston might have had the opportunity to elect its first Black mayor. This is a calculus no white male candidate ever has to make. Life is not fair; candidates who represent the Black

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sad reflection on Janey that she could not use her historic incumbency to excite her base. But it is just as tragic that Black people did not seize the opportunity to vote in a groundbreaking election. While Michelle Wu is a woman of color and Annissa Essaibi George lays claim to the same distinction, neither has the lived experience of Black mothers raising sons by themselves. Or of brothers or fathers who are victims of mass incarceration. If anyone doubts the importance of that lived experience, let us remind them of the outstanding work of Rep. Ayanna Pressley.

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