

New York mayoral candidates hold final debate before June 22 Democratic primary

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Eight candidates for the Democratic Party nomination for New York City mayor held their final debate on June 16, six days before the primary election for the nomination to succeed Bill de Blasio as mayor of the largest city in the US. With the Republican contest in the June 22 primaries involving two backers of ex-President Donald Trump, widely hated in the city, the Democratic nominee is virtually certain to win the mayoral election that is still almost five months away.

The two-hour debate featured presumed front-runner Eric Adams, current Brooklyn Borough president, and his three main challengers: Maya Wiley, the former counsel to de Blasio as mayor, who has been anointed the “progressive” candidate in the race; Kathryn Garcia, the former sanitation commissioner, who has been endorsed by both the *New York Times* and the *Daily News*; and Andrew Yang, the businessman and former candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination.

For all the noisy exchanges between these and the remaining four candidates, the debate only illustrated more than ever the role of the Democrats in disenfranchising the working class and sidelining all opposition to Wall Street and big business.

To the extent the contenders spoke of problems such as homelessness, these were posed without even hinting at the responsibility of the financial aristocracy for the misery of millions of workers. All of the candidates, from the most “moderate” to the most “left,” said nothing about challenging the stranglehold of the ruling elite on social and economic life. In the city of Wall Street, they all evaded the question of who should pay for the crisis of the profit system.

Remarkably, the election campaign has unfolded with virtually no discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has so far claimed the lives of more than 33,000

New York City residents.

The Democratic Party and the bourgeois media have used the primary campaign to shift the axis of city politics sharply to the right. De Blasio won his first election in 2013 campaigning against the “tale of two cities,” one rich and one poor. But the current campaign has dropped any reference to social inequality, which grew steadily during de Blasio’s eight years in office, accelerating enormously in the course of the past 15 months.

Instead, the Democrats and the media have made “public safety” the watchword, with the candidates grilled on how they will deal with the uptick of shootings and violent crime in the course of the pandemic. This has inevitably strengthened Adams, an ex-cop who has postured both as an advocate of law and order and an opponent of police misconduct (despite the obvious incompatibility of those positions), and who has been endorsed by the Murdoch-owned, pro-Trump *New York Post*.

Adams is currently leading in some pre-election polling, but the large number of candidates, the expected low voter turnout and the introduction of a ranked-choice voting system for the first time all mean that the polls are even less predictive than usual.

Yang, who originally presented himself as the “optimistic” candidate and led in some polls based mostly on name recognition from his presidential campaign, has now staked out a position as the most right-wing of the four main candidates, boasting of his endorsement from the Captains Endowment Association within the New York Police Department, and inveighing against the homeless and their alleged threat to the quality of life.

The other major “issue” in the phony electoral jousting between the candidates has been the advocacy

of identity politics: the claim that capitalist society can be made more tolerable to the masses by putting black or female politicians in charge.

Four of the eight candidates participating in the final debate are black: Adams and Wiley, as well as ex-banker Raymond McGuire and former nonprofit executive Dianne Morales, two of the four presumed also-rans.

A main feature of the campaign has thus been breathless media speculation as to whether the outcome will lead to the city's second black mayor (Adams or McGuire, following David Dinkins), its first female mayor (Garcia, who is Hispanic only by marriage), or its first mayor who is both black and a woman (Wiley or Morales). Yang, of course, would be the first Asian mayor.

Only two of the candidates, Scott Stringer and Shaun Donovan, are white males, and they are expected to disappear early in the ranked-choice voting, which eliminates candidates starting from the lowest vote-getter, redistributing their votes to the voters' next selection on the multi-choice ballot until one candidate accumulates a majority.

The emphasis on race is all the more reactionary when one considers the history of the last 50 years, with African American and women mayors in virtually every major city presiding over a social counterrevolution which has condemned millions to mass incarceration, poverty and the threat of homelessness. These bitter experiences have demonstrated that the fundamental issue is that of class, not race, and the need for a socialist program that targets the source of the attacks on the working class.

In this respect, the role of Maya Wiley is particularly significant. She has attracted attention after her endorsement about two weeks ago by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the leading "progressive" in Congress. While the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) announced several months ago that it would not be endorsing a mayoral candidate this year, DSA member Ocasio-Cortez has anointed Maya Wiley as the choice of the "left."

Wiley has also won the backing of Elizabeth Warren, newly-elected "progressive" Congressman Jamaal Bowman and New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams.

While Wiley has emphasized such issues as

affordable housing and child care and called for the "defunding" of the police by transferring \$1 billion from the NYPD budget to social spending, there is no reason to believe that her demagogic promises are any more meaningful than those made by Bill de Blasio, in whose administration she served.

Wiley has highlighted her gender and race as though they were actual credentials for office. In an interview with *Essence* magazine, she said that "being a Black woman also makes for a better mayor. Black women get stuff done because they know how to walk in the shoes of others and bring empathy, courage and clarity to their work. My lived experiences give me great insight into the varied challenges all Black and brown New Yorkers are facing."

For the two decades before de Blasio was elected, New York City was governed by Republican mayors Rudy Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg (although Bloomberg eventually changed his party registration over the course of his terms in office). De Blasio, however, ran as a self-proclaimed "progressive," declaring he would slash homelessness and pour money into the schools and colleges. At the end of his eight years in office, homelessness has never been higher, while inequality and everything associated with it has reached new heights.

None of the 2021 Democrats bother to explain this contradiction, nor does the media bother to ask. For all de Blasio's posturing during his election campaign, when he entered City Hall he quickly demonstrated that he was the servant of Wall Street. Whoever wins the primary vote on June 22 will likely run City Hall next year, and will govern in the interests of the super-rich. But the next mayor will also be forced to confront an eruption of the class struggle, as workers respond to growing attacks on their living standards and democratic rights.



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