

Lest We Forget: Rudy's Feet of Clay

By Conn Nugent

Poor Andrew. The Younger Cuomo attempted to penetrate the mesmerizing force field that surrounds any election involving Gov. George "you-are-getting-very-very-sleepy" Pataki and succeeded only in shortening the odds for an insomniac's dream of a November showdown between Pataki and the electrifying H. Carl McCall.

That Andrew self-inflicted is unsurprising. More remarkable was his choice of weapon: blasting George Pataki for not being Rudy Giuliani. Sept. 11, said Cuomo, revealed the mayor as a great leader ("Cream rises to the top") and the governor as his valet ("He held the leader's coat"). The strength of this movement to canonize Giuliani is probably more meaningful than an attempt by a buzz-hungry candidate to exploit it.

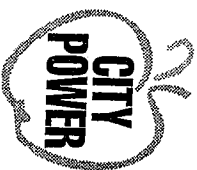
Let's face it: It is hard to write about Giuliani without praising him. First and last, he played a key role in the decline of New York street crime, probably the most important local story over the past 20 years. It's true that other large cities cut their crime rates over the same period. Some, like Boston, were even more successful than New York. And it's true that Mayor David Dinkins was the one who hired more cops, and that Ray Bratton was the chief architect of a more effective NYPD. But Giuliani was indispensable, for part of the overall strategy was to communicate a tough message from the top. Everybody heard that message.

Whatever the statistics, New York seemed

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safer. And that perception made the city a more attractive place to work in, live in and visit. Tax revenues climbed.

Which brings us to Big Rudy Failing No. 1: During a period of fiscal well-being, Rudy Giuliani made few significant additions to the capital stock of the city. Two bush-league ballfields don't count. Transit, parks, schools, housing, waterfront — nothing new to speak of. He did little with assets over which he had sole authority, and his control-freakness meant that any time he had to share authority — with the governor or the Board of Ed or the Port Authority or the MTA —



nothing ever happened. Did you notice how quickly Mike Bloomberg and George Pataki were able to strike a deal over Governors Island? (And did you remember that Giuliani wanted to build a casino there?) Watch as other Giuliani-blocked projects, like an expanded Javits Center, now fall easily into place. Thank the planning gods for keeping Giuliani out of Lower Manhattan redevelopment.

Big Rudy Failing No. 2: Rudy Giuliani ran a secretive, paranoid, patronage-heavy administration. Take L'Affaire Harding. Thanks to the Village Voice and Bloomberg appointees, we recently learned that Russell Harding — whose appointment by Giuliani as head of the New York City Housing Development Corp. had nothing (absolutely nothing, nothing whatsoever, and, frankly, you should be very, very ashamed to insinuate otherwise) to do with his father, Ray Harding, Liberal Party mogul, or his brother, Robert Harding, director of the City Office of Management and the Budget — admitted that he "may have" spent

about \$250,000 of taxpayer money on resorts, meals and sundry indulgences.

Young Harding's case brings to mind Howard Safir's trip to the Oscars, or Human Resources Commissioner Jason Turner's sweetheart contracts, or the ousting of bothersome whistle-blowers in the Department of Buildings, or the scores of other insider arrangements less notorious but well documented by the Conflict of Interest Board, the Independent Budget Office and various watchdog groups.

In general, Giuliani was flexible in his approach to constitutional government. You probably remember his suggestion that the state Legislature keep him in office a few months after his term expired. You may have forgotten those hasty summertime "charter-reform" hearings in which the mayor tried to push through City Charter amendments to: (a) keep the City Council out of baseball stadium decisions; (b) to revoke the right of the public advocate (Mark Green) to succeed the mayor in case of death or resignation; and (c) to gut the Campaign Finance Board.

Big Rudy Failing No. 3: Rudy Giuliani was just too darn rude, and he thereby lowered the tone of civil society. He was rude to reporters, of course, but at least they weren't public figures. Why did he have to badmouth David Dinkins, for example, or belittle City Comptroller Alan Hevesi? Why did he so frequently question other officeholders' intelligence and morals? By last summer, you may remember, all that mean-spiritedness had gotten pretty old.

But if not everything, timing sure is something. Catastrophe struck in September, and Rudy Giuliani rose from the off-ridiculous to the frequently sublime. He surely did, and blessings upon him and all the best for him and Judith Nathan. But if he ever runs for office again...