

POINT OF VIEW

Our View

It's not where you from,
it's where you're at

With New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani bowing out of the race for the New York Senate seat, it appeared First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton would have smooth sailing to the seat. Now enter Bill Lazio. A Boy-Scout likable Long Island Mets-cheering suburbanite, Lazio is the antithesis of Giuliani - a hotheaded, quick-with-the-tongue Yankees fans who doesn't spare feelings or pull punches.

The Jekyll-and-Hyde difference between the two Republicans would seem to favor Clinton. Some viewed Giuliani as vulnerable to a White House broadside because of his reaction to several high-profile incidents involving the New York Police Department - including the shooting of unarmed West African immigrant Amadou Diallo and the assault and sodomy of Abner Louima, just to name a few. Giuliani offered little in the way of conciliation to the victims or their families, prompting a rash of bad publicity in local media and press nationwide. Problems with cancer and a pending divorce colluded to force Giuliani from the race. (It was probably the best thing for him, given his gruff demeanor and affinity for foot-in-mouth retorts).

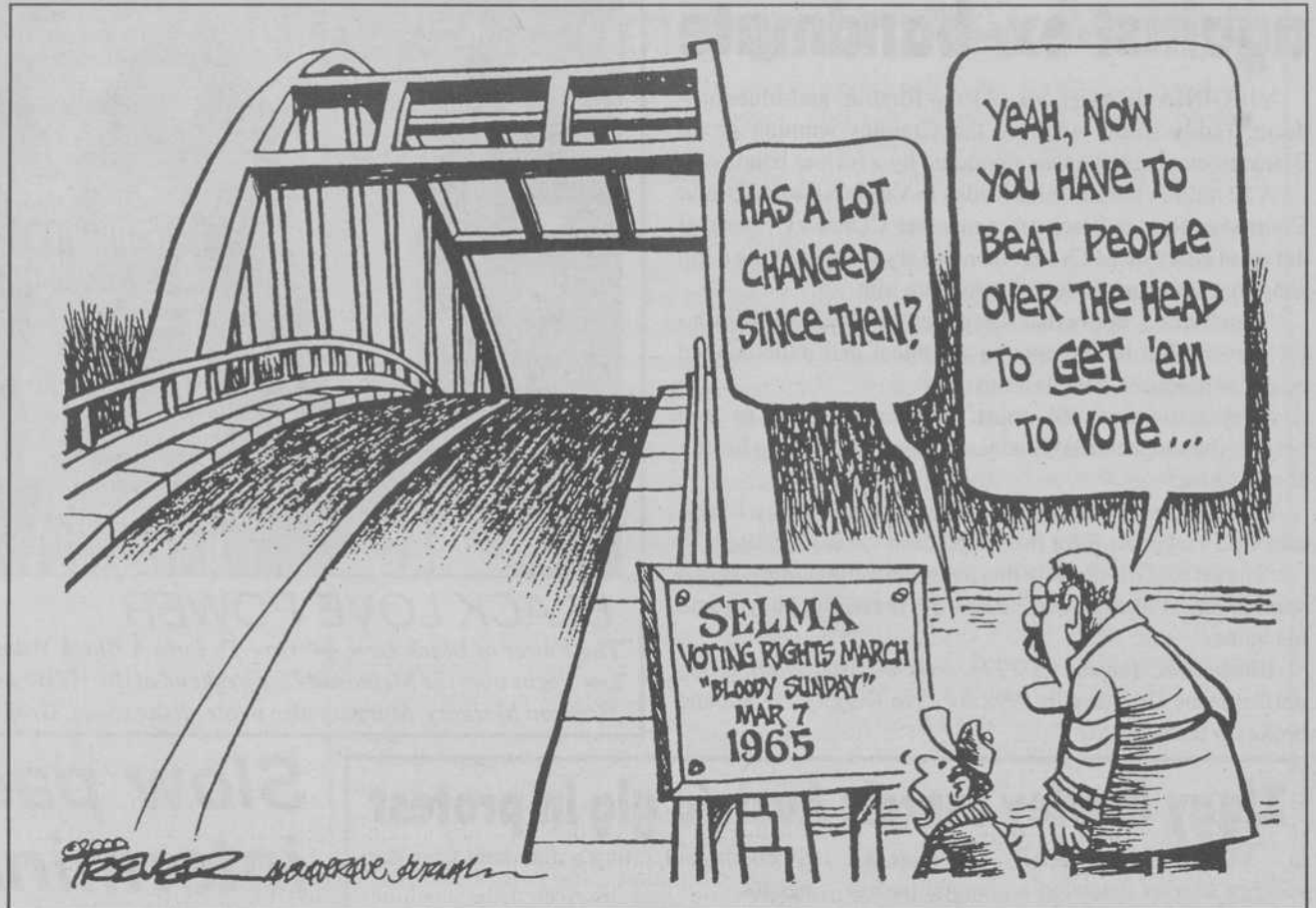
Enter Lazio. The four-term congressman, liked by most everybody, would seem to be little more than a speed bump on Clinton's fast track to office.

But you don't get to serve four terms without guile and gumption. To prove he won't be a pushover, Lazio has ratcheted up the campaign launched by Giuliani to highlight Clinton's outsider status: She's not a New Yorker and who else but a New Yorker should handle New York affairs. In essence, the message to Clinton, you can't be New York undercover.

If applied to a broader spectrum, the Giuliani-Lazio think tank would throw the world in a tizzy: you'd have to be from that place to represent that place. (That's not to say that having hometown ilk represent home isn't a good thing. It certainly can be and in many situations is, given that locals have a keener sense of the goings-on around their own stomping grounds). But in many cases - such as the New York Senate race - hometown lineage means little. The issue shouldn't be whether or not Clinton is a New Yorker, but what she can do to improve life for all New Yorkers. (People seem to forget that if she represents New York, she'll also have to live there. The fate of one is tied to the fates of all). Hewing to their logic, a Nevadan shouldn't run for a California congressional seat or vice versa. Could Blacks run for office in majority-white cities? Could Hispanic liberals not challenge for the presidency of conservative white groups.

Could a Muslim not run for the town board in Puritan country? Where would it stop?

Lazio should quickly put an end to the nonsense Giuliani started. It doesn't matter where you're from (in most cases), it's where you're at (mentally) and what you can do.



Business of black leadership proving lucrative

Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The headline in a leading Los Angeles black newspaper gloated "Community Leaders Support New Historic Driving While Black Bill."

There were two things wrong with this.

The bill by Black Democratic State Senator Kevin Murray that purported to attack the problem of racial profiling of minorities by law enforcement agencies in California was neither new nor historic. It was a terribly compromised bill that ripped the provision out of an earlier Murray bill mandating police compile racial stats on unwarranted traffic stops. Most experts agree that this is the only way to tell if police profile black and Latino motorists.

But the bigger thing wrong with the headline was that it presumed that the handful of black organizations pictured beneath the headline—with names such as Zulu Men, Mothers in Action, African-American Unity Center, Black Agenda, and Black Ministers Conference—could speak for all blacks.

There was no indication of who these groups represent and their programs.

The arrogance of a handful of amorphous groups claiming to be the exclusive voice for Blacks is the big reason many Blacks ask, "Where are the black leaders?" "What are they doing for the community?"

They are talking about Black leaders such as these as well as the NAACP, SCLC, Urban League, CORE, the Brotherhood Crusade, Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH, Black Democratic politicians, Black ministers and celebrity activists.

Many of these leaders are mostly middle-class business and professional persons. Their agenda and top-down style of leadership is remote, distant, and often wildly out of step with the needs of poor and working class Blacks.

They often approach tough public policy issues—the astronomical Black imprisonment rates, the dreary plight of poor Black women, Black homelessness, Black-on-Black crime and violence, the drug crisis, gang warfare, and school vouchers — with a strange blend of caution, uncertainty, and wariness.

They keep counsel only with those Black ministers, politicians, and professional and business leaders they consider respectable and legitimate and will blindly march in lockstep with their program.

Worst of all, they horribly disfigure Black leadership by turning it into a corporate-style competitive business in which success is measured by piling up political favors and corporate dollars.

The sad thing is that it wasn't always this way. For decades, mainstream Black organizations such as the NAACP relied on the nickels and dimes of poor and work-

ing class Blacks for their support. This gave them complete independence and a solid constituency to mount powerful campaigns for jobs, better housing, quality schools, and against police violence and lynching.

The profound shift in the method and style of Black leadership began in the 1970s. With the murders of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, the collapse of the traditional civil rights organizations, the destruction and co-optation of militant activist groups, mainstream black leaders, politicians and ministers did a sharp volte face.

They quickly defined the Black agenda as: starting more and better businesses, grabbing more spots in corporations, universities and the professions, electing more Democrats, buying bigger and more expensive homes, taking more luxury vacations, and gaining admission into more country clubs.

They launched a frenzied campaign to establish them-

selves as the leaders of record for African-Americans. Their reward was more business and construction contracts, foundation grants, corporate contributions to their fundraising campaigns, dinners, banquets, scholarship funds and training programs. To keep the corporate dollars and political favors flowing smoothly, mainstream Black leaders had to do several things. They include:

- Monopolize leadership. They hold endless meetings, planning sessions, conferences, and confabs in which they back pat and self-stroke themselves with awards, plaques, tributes and testimonials. This enables them to cut better front- and backroom deals, broker legislation and hatch schemes with politicians and business leaders not on behalf of Black communities, but for personal gain.

- Pick low-risk, high-profile glitter issues. The NAACP's fight over the Con-

(See Business, Page 13)

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