

[What Rudy Believes](#)

From the May print issue: Gun control? Welcoming immigrants? A woman's right to choose? Never mind his past positions. The only -ism that Rudy Giuliani believes in is sadism.

By [Michael Tomasky](#)

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Conservatives who admire Rudolph Giuliani for his association with the date September 11, 2001, may wish to consult Google on the question of the mayor's behavior on May 10, 2000. The Rudy of that date should give them, and everyone, reason to stop and think about the great hero's moral architecture.

The weeks leading up to the date had been surreal. Giuliani was running for a U.S. Senate seat against Hillary Clinton. The traditional Senate campaign in New York consists of swings upstate to discuss economic development and airfares, day trips out to Long Island to curse sprawl and pledge devotion to oysters, and occasional high-minded speeches in the city at places like the Council on Foreign Relations -- Clinton's tedious, but quite effective, course. Rudy's, however: Rudy's campaign since March had consisted of vicious attacks on a police-shooting victim named Patrick Dorismond; an announcement by his estranged wife, Donna Hanover, that she would appear in *The Vagina Monologues* ("GYNO-MITE!" ran the headline in the *New York Post*); and the exposure, at long last, of Rudy's extramarital relationship, with a woman named Judith Nathan. In the middle of it all, he'd been diagnosed with prostate cancer, but even that sympathetic note seemed strange enough as to be somehow part of his willed unraveling.

A full week had now passed since the Nathan story broke, and Giuliani, in the face of a frenzied media circus, had said nothing publicly about his marriage. A photo, indelibly etched in my memory, from Cardinal John O'Connor's May 8 funeral service -- he had died the same night Nathan hit the papers -- summed up the weirdness better than any words could: There in the front pews sat the Clintons, the Gores, the Bushes, the Patakis, and, all by himself, Giuliani. And so the papers, that morning of May 10, carried livid admonitions from Republicans like state Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno for the mayor to return to planet Earth, to address his situation, and to *run a campaign*. As fate would have it, I had lunch that day on Union Square with Juleanna Glover Weiss, Giuliani's just-hired press secretary who later went on to a certain kind of fame as one of "Cheney's Angels" (the vice president's loyal and secretive spokeswomen). So I missed the press conference -- as did she, more importantly -- at the New York Public Library at which *The New York Times'* Elisabeth Bumiller asked Giuliani, "Do you have any reaction to Mr. Bruno's comments yesterday ... about your marriage?"

(Let's stop here and contextualize. At that point, Giuliani had been mayor -- "Hizzoner," in tabloid-speak -- for six years. He had, with his able first police commissioner, William Bratton, cleaned up the city. He'd won the gratitude of the city's moneyed class -- the

finance, insurance, and real-estate sectors that are known, in municipal parlance, by the somewhat disconcerting acronym FIRE. He'd converted thousands of white liberals into Giuliani Democrats -- I remember a *Newsday* article about a woman the paper had found on election day 1993 in a Barnes & Noble on the Upper West Side (!) wearing an "I Believe Anita Hill" button (!!) who admitted that she'd voted ... for Giuliani!!! He'd shown, at repeated junctures, his disdain for black political leaders, and black New York detested him. He'd squired his communications director, Cristyne Lategano, around town in a way that suggested a relationship that was something more than professional, and been spotted on one occasion helping her pick out a dress. He entered the Senate race halfheartedly at best -- interested in the acclaim that would accompany beating Clinton, but not at all interested in the work of actually being a senator. And his behavior lately had been erratic; and with regard to Dorismond -- whose "crime" had been to refuse to buy pot from undercover cops [who ended up killing him], Giuliani trashed him on national television and illegally released his sealed juvenile records -- appalling. And now, Bruno, the third-most-important Republican in the state after him and Governor George Pataki, was excoriating him in the most public way possible.)

"I do," Giuliani said to Bumiller. "It was very, very painful. For quite some time, it's probably been apparent that Donna and I" -- his New York accent, never thick, was real enough that "Donna and I" always came out "Donner and I," making it sound like he was talking about a reindeer -- "lead, in many ways, independent and separate lives. It's been a very painful road, and I'm hopeful that we'll be able to formalize that in an agreement that protects our children ..."

Sounds reasonable, right? Indeed, it sounds even open, honest, and painful -- and for those reasons admirable, especially for a politician. But there was one huge catch: He hadn't told Donna that he was announcing this. Today, as Giuliani seeks the presidency, journalistic shorthand typically refers to his "messy divorce," or uses other phrases like that. Barbara Walters assembled a report for *20/20* in late March that was focused squarely on the question of the Giuliani-Nathan relationship -- this was the Giuliani campaign's spectacularly unsuccessful attempt to render Nathan a sympathetic figure -- but even then, Walters glossed over the sordid details. Reports like Walters' avoid describing what really happened: that he used his *own* philandering as a ploy to elicit public sympathy in a battle that *he* started against the mother of his two children, then ages 10 and 14.

That May afternoon, "Donner" emerged from Gracie Mansion and announced that she'd tried to keep her marriage together, referring to an attempted reconciliation the previous summer, but that "it was difficult to participate in Rudy's public life because of his relationship with one staff member" (both Giuliani and Lategano have always denied a dalliance). Two nights later, while Donna and the kids were on a plane to Los Angeles to spend the weekend -- Mother's Day weekend, no less! -- with her parents, Rudy took Judy out for a stroll up Second Avenue, permitting the newspaper photographers to snap pictures all along the way. They were on the cover -- the "wood," in the argot -- of the tabloids the next day, as Giuliani undoubtedly knew they would be. That, I thought, was

an interesting way to "protect" his children, which he had vowed so solemnly to do just 48 hours previous.

Bill Clinton may have embarrassed his family, but Rudy Giuliani humiliated his. That previous summer to which Donna referred, when she thought she and her husband were reconciling? He was dashing out to the Hamptons to spend weekends at Judy's condo! This was not mere irresponsibility, the kind of "mistake" we "learn from," as he has taken to saying on the stump. This was sadism. And he didn't act this way only toward his wife and kids, which might render this a private matter. No -- this was how the man dealt with enemies private and public.

Conservatives may think they're supporting the September 11 Rudy. But I covered the man for 15 years, and I can guarantee them they'll be getting the May 10 Rudy as part of the bargain. If they actually nominate him, they will eventually learn this the hard way, just like poor Donna did.

For those of us who've been reading "Democrats in disarray" stories since around the time disco records were burned in Comiskey Park, the presidential campaign season so far has brought something approaching a hallucination. The *Democrats* are the party with three strong candidates (I'd say four, tossing in the underrated Bill Richardson), each of whom represents a plausible strain of Democratic thought and aspiration? And the *Republicans* are the ones facing the Hobson's choices? It hasn't been like this, so cleanly and unambiguously like this, since John F. Kennedy.

This wasn't supposed to happen. George Allen was supposed to be the man -- kosher to both the anti-tax right and the Christian right, he was the subject of preseason, groundwork-laying paeans like Rich Lowry's November 2005 profile in *National Review*, which came complete with a socialist-realist cover photo of Allen engaging in the leaderly (to conservatives) pastime of throwing a football. But the first-string quarterback fractured his femur when he stepped in some *macaca*, so the job of Republican front-runner is wide open.

Conservative leaders are panicked. The loss of Congress last fall -- one can't overestimate the *shock* Republicans felt upon seeing that they'd lost the Senate as well as the House -- only intensifies the condition. Democrats have a good shot at retaining control of both chambers (21 GOP senators face re-election, and just 12 Democrats). And if they claim the White House -- well, just think of it. A mere two years ago, Karl Rove could still speak of building his permanent conservative majority. But if this scenario plays out, the GOP could be a neutered minority party for eight years.

This lightning-fast change, says conservative writer and Republican observer James P. Pinkerton, has driven conservatives to conclude that they *must* win the White House at all costs. And that's where Giuliani comes in. Of course 9-11 remains the wellspring of his appeal, and the fact that movement conservatives viscerally loathe John McCain helps

him enormously. But he also benefits handsomely from conservatives' desperation, which makes them more likely to accept someone they disagree with on certain issues. "Giuliani is the kind of candidate a party nominates after it's lost a bunch of elections," Pinkerton says. "You know: 'He's not from the base, but we're desperate to win.'"

In this sense, Pinkerton compares Giuliani to Clinton and Dwight Eisenhower -- candidates who might not have been acceptable to the base in fatter times but who were embraced because people made the assessment that they could win. The analogies seem odd at first blush, because the GOP is still in power; but things happen faster nowadays, and after last fall's elections, and with President Bush effectively finished as a leader, Republicans don't *feel* like they're in power. "The '06 elections were stinging enough that maybe what oftentimes takes a couple of elections to happen has already insinuated itself into Republican politics," says Pinkerton.

Pinkerton's words took me back to the fall of 1991, when I was calling around to liberal party activists in New York about Bill Clinton. Yes, they'd say, he's dodgy on labor and this and that, but he's progressive on such-and-such and he's very charismatic and goddammit, we have to win this time. This is just how some conservatives talk about Giuliani today. So the analogy is very apt as far as it goes.

But I think it doesn't go very far. By 1991, Clinton already had a well-developed national profile. He'd been president of the Democratic Leadership Council. He'd taken substantive positions on national issues. One knew where he stood and the basic thrust of the policies he would pursue if elected. One also knew, well before he announced his candidacy in October 1991 -- in other words, by about this time in the cycle -- that Clinton was bent on challenging some key party orthodoxies.

With Giuliani, we don't know any of this. The only positions he's taken on national issues in the last year or two have, far from challenging any orthodoxies, consisted of praising George W. Bush and sucking up to the right as much as humanly possible. He supports the war and the surge. He said he'd appoint judges in the mold of John Roberts and Samuel Alito. Accepting the endorsement of Steve Forbes, he embraced Forbes' regressive flat tax, which 11 years ago he'd branded a "disaster." He hired a Texas-based consulting firm, Olsen & Shuvalov, that grew out of Karl Rove's old firm. He hired Ted Olson, the former solicitor general and guru for the "Arkansas Project" (the right's campaign to dig up or fabricate dirt on Bill Clinton), to advise him on legal issues. He even said, in 2005, that he backed Bush and Bill Frist in the Terri Schiavo case, and that he would have signed legislation to keep her feeding tube in. Most tellingly of all, this former U.S. attorney, who has a keen understanding of the freedom that prosecutors need from political pressure to do their jobs properly, said not a single word about the firings of the eight U.S. attorneys by the Justice Department for weeks after the scandal became public. And when he finally spoke, on March 21, it was merely to offer a defense of Alberto Gonzales as a "decent man" who deserved "the benefit of the doubt." This was

after the release of e-mails showing that Gonzales was more involved in the firings than he had acknowledged.

Giuliani is doing this sort of thing, obviously, to make amends for his liberal record on social issues. That record will haunt him; it might even haunt him out of the race. Certainly, a video clip that surfaced on YouTube in mid-March -- showing him saying in 1989 that he supported federal funding for abortions for poor women -- heightened social conservatives' anxiety considerably. What the video didn't catch is that he went on to complain that David Dinkins, his opponent in that year's mayoral race, was distorting "my pro-choice stance," and that Dinkins' ads were false: "That's a damn lie. I'm pro-choice, and he knows it."

Sounds like conviction-speak, doesn't it? But here's where conservatives might, oddly, take comfort (and where liberals might be especially concerned). When Giuliani was mayor, did he really believe in abortion rights and gay rights and strict gun-control laws and very liberal immigration policy? "That's a very, very tough question," says David Garth, the legendary New York political consultant who handled Giuliani's 1993 and '97 mayoral races. "My feeling was, the positions he took, he felt them. Whether he *really* felt them, if you know what I mean ... I don't know."

Mitchell Moss, the New York University professor and longtime municipal politics savant (and occasional adviser to Mayor Mike Bloomberg), paused when I asked him the question and delivered almost the exact same answer: "That's a very interesting question." Moss sensed that of the four issues mentioned above, immigration was the one Giuliani believed in more than the others. Indeed, his position was one that many Democrats, let alone Republicans, would have trouble with: He prevented city employees from contacting the federal government when they turned up immigrants with no legal documentation, and he fought for his position in federal court.

That's two veteran Rudy-watchers, neither of whom can say for sure that he meant it. I'm a third, and I can say it more bluntly: He did what he needed to do to attain and maintain power. New York City is 5-to-1 Democratic. Early in his first race, in 1989, Giuliani tried to say that abortion was irrelevant to the mayoralty. This was technically true but emotionally dissatisfying to a liberal electorate that was suspicious of him, so after that didn't work, he threw in with the pro-choicers. And since he does things in only one gear -- overdrive -- it could *appear* to the casual observer that he was the most principled supporter of abortion rights on the planet.

This isn't to say he didn't believe his positions at the time, or think they were right for the city. Garth's calibration seems to me correct. But it is to say this: He did what he needed to do politically then, and he'll do what he needs to do politically now. It's entirely possible that if he does become president, he could be *more* anti-choice than Bush and do *more* to appease his party's anti-immigrant wing -- certainly he'll have more to prove to the people who nominated and elected him than Bush did. He'll flip on guns in an instant.

Gay rights? That's more complicated. Part of his support for gay rights comes from his knowing and being comfortable around openly gay people -- that is to say, from being a Manhattanite down to the soles of his shoes. How many men move in with a gay couple after their wife throws them out, as Rudy did? It's harder to picture him reversing course on that one. I could easily see him, as president, saying that homosexuality is a matter of biology, thus inducing stunned apoplexy within the Christian right. As I said earlier, he'll find ways to make them pay for voting for him. It's his way.

So far, conservatives seem -- for the most part; there are definitely exceptions -- willing to look beyond the record. Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform says it's important, when pondering conservative motivation, to distinguish between "vote-moving issues" and "tongue-moving issues." Vote-moving issues are taxes, guns, homeschooling, judges, Christian schools, condoms, and "leave me alone." Everything else, in Norquist's taxonomy, is second-rank. If he's correct, the only socially liberal Giuliani position that might really cost him is gun control, which Norquist acknowledges "will be one of the tougher ones."

Norquist isn't primarily a social conservative, though, and what social conservatives think will differ from his assessment. After the YouTube video surfaced, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council went on *Hardball* and lambasted Giuliani for asking taxpayers to foot the bill for poor women's abortions. He seems unlikely to be a Giuliani partisan. Paul Weyrich is reportedly tending toward former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee. David Keene of the American Conservative Union (ACU) is said to be fairly anti-Giuliani.

Keene didn't return my calls, but I did talk with one ACU board member whose knowledge of Giuliani is particularly sharp. Mike Long is the chairman of the New York State Conservative Party (New York has more political parties than the typical state). His history with Giuliani is mostly contentious. In 1993, because Giuliani ran with the backing of the state's Liberal Party, Long and the Conservatives refused him their ballot line and ran someone against him (the smaller parties in New York can cross-endorse major candidates or select their own, and a candidate is permitted to run on as many ballot lines as he or she can amass). By 1999, in the early phase of Giuliani's abortive Senate run, Long was dangling the Conservative line in front of Giuliani's nose, with two conditions: 1) Giuliani could not also accept Liberal backing, and 2) Giuliani had to renounce his support for so-called partial-birth abortion.

Giuliani didn't budge (though recently, he did a partial flip-flop on the question). Back then, Long spoke very directly about his anger toward Giuliani; today, however, Long is open to backing him. "Our relationship improved after 9-11," Long told me, adding that he even offered Giuliani his party's backing in 2001 to do a last-minute ballot shuffle so that the mayor could run for a third term.

New York mayors are limited to two terms, so the end run didn't go anywhere. But the Long-Giuliani détente is crucial and perhaps emblematic, and it is built, unsurprisingly, around 9-11. "If terrorism is a very, very severe issue come this time next year, that really helps him overcome his problems," Long says.

Under normal circumstances a Giuliani victory in the Republican presidential primary contest would be completely impossible. But these circumstances are pretty abnormal, and in them, Giuliani just might emerge as the least-bad choice.

Conservatives across the country still don't really know Giuliani -- they know only the good things, and, on Pinkertonian logic, they may not even want to know very much about the bad things. And their desire not to know feeds perfectly into what is undoubtedly Giuliani's greatest political skill: his plainspoken persuasiveness, his ability to invest everything he says with immense authority and common sense. I've seen it a thousand times. Even when I knew for a fact that he was lying through his teeth, I also knew that he looked to the uninitiated like he was telling the absolute truth of God. He did this so convincingly that it was almost impossible for the criticisms to gain traction.

The liabilities that should make him an impossible choice for genuine conservatives are real. He was cold as ice to his wife and children. He is personally irreligious, as far as anyone knows. (Veteran New York investigative journalist Wayne Barrett has reported that he was almost never known to attend Mass; centrist Democratic blogger Ed Kilgore has wondered whether Giuliani can even be called a Catholic anymore; and it seems clearly true that, according to Church principles reiterated by Pope Benedict XVI on March 14, he can't, as a divorcee, even take communion. Matters are further complicated by the fact that his nuptials to his current wife were civil.) For the important job of homeland-security chief, he pushed Bernard Kerik, a man he almost certainly knew to have had ties to organized crime.

Most of all, he actually *botched* 9-11 -- failing to equip the Fire Department of New York with the proper radios and arrogantly (and perhaps corruptly, according to Barrett and Dan Collins in their book, *The Grand Illusion*) putting his "bunker" in the only building complex in the city that had been the target of a previous terrorist attack, the World Trade Center.

But it all somehow washes off him. "It's something about his personality," says Garth. "His real personality, whatever it is, does not go counter to what you see in a campaign." Even after what he did to Donna, his standing in the polls didn't drop. When he strolled with Judy up Second Avenue, some people pumped their fists in the air and yelled, "Yo, Rudy!" A combination of the 9-11 mythology and the conservatives' own desperation may have the right doing the same for the next several months.

And as a general-election candidate? Let's not kid ourselves: Giuliani would be formidable. McCain has spent the past year trying, in increasingly desperate fashion, to hold on to his appeal among independent voters while assuaging the right. He has flopped. But there is evidence that Giuliani could pull this off.

We know from many a poll that he's won conservatives over in the early stages. As to independents, a March 7 survey by the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute shows the potential of his appeal. The survey matched the presidential heavyweights against one another in various permutations in the three crucial states of Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. In other words, nine possible matchups pitted Giuliani against the three leading Democrats -- Clinton, Barack Obama, and John Edwards -- in all three states. Among independents, Giuliani won all nine of those matchups, seven of them by double digits. By contrast, McCain led in just six of those matchups, all by feeble single digits, and Romney trailed in all nine, many by 20 points or more. Yes, it's just a snapshot, but as snapshots go, it's an ominous one.

Accurately or not -- because as I said, who knows what Rudy truly believes? -- a Giuliani nomination will signal to your average, not-very-political American that the Republican Party has changed course and become less right wing. This in turn will deprive the Democrats of a piece of artillery that they used to great effect last fall and are hoping to use again in 2008. Giuliani will be to the Democrats as a junk pitcher is to power hitters - he'll throw them off their game.

Maybe conservatives, in their desperation, will want a man who supports policies utterly anathema to them (imagine the Democrats nominating an anti-choice, anti-civil-union, pro-border-fence candidate) and whose personal morality has been so aggressively at odds with the way they tell the rest of us we should live. They love their authority figures, and Giuliani is certainly that. But if this is the choice they make, we'll know that modern conservatism has ceased to become an ideology based on any kind of principle and has instead morphed, in the age of terrorism, into something not dramatically far removed in spirit from a hero-worshipping cult. And if they want to know what life with Rudy is really like? Well, they should just ask Donna.

Michael Tomasky is editor-at-large of the Prospect.