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At Last, a Hall of Shame - er, Fame

This is an important weekend for Americans: The Baseball Hall of Fame will induct a new member at its annual ritual in Cooperstown, N.Y. The success of the Baseball Hall of Fame has inspired a growth industry: Halls of Fame.

Honoring the heroes of sports, music and entertainment is serious business. Cleveland recently started building the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; Springfield, Mass., has the Basketball Hall of Fame, and the Pro Football Hall of Fame is located in Canton, Ohio. It is, of course, no accident that the hall of fame business thrives: Baby-boomers are aging horses - too old for singles tennis and too young for shuffleboard. With a hall, one can relive one's youth before memory loss sets in.

But rather than celebrate the achievements of athletes or musicians. New York should recognize its special homegrown heroes, the politicians who have tried to run this city. The New York Political Hall of Fame would be a local adaptation of the one in Cooperstown. Only politicians out of office for five years or more could be considered. Instead of baseball writers, the selection process would be controlled by the Inner Circle, the talented singers and dancers who also report on New York City government and politics.

The New York Political Hall of Fame would be housed in the Coliseum at Columbus Circle, a public building easily accessible by mass transit and currently contributing to the decline in the city's quality of life by standing empty and unused. Each floor of the Coliseum would be organized thematically. On the first floor, there would be plaques for those politicians who died in office: former Congressmen Ted Weiss, William Fitz Ryan, Allard Lowenstein and Benjamin Rosenthal, Queens Borough President Donald Manes, and, of course, William Gaynor, the only mayor of the City of New York to be assassinated.

Since political influence in New York is often a blend of personality and position, an entire floor would be reserved for the non-elected, permanent government of union, spiritual and financial leaders and party bosses, such as Cardinal Spellman, Ramon Velez, Mike Quill, Barry Feinstein, Carmine DeSapio, Ed Flynn, Meade Esposito, J. Raymond Jones and Felix Rohatyn.

We should not forget the brave souls who believed in themselves even if the voters didn't. Just as Nolan Ryan, Gregg Jefferies and Lenny Dykstra blossomed after leaving New York, the talented mayoral candidates who couldn't make it in New York would surely have succeeded in a kinder, gentler political climate: Vito Battista (the local forerunner of Ross Perot), Edward Costikyan, Bella Abzug, Richard Ravitch, Percy Sutton, Carol Bellamy and Andrew Stein.

Some of our most gifted politicians are often distracted by the gifts of others, interrupting what otherwise would have been distinguished careers. But unlike major league baseball, which banished Pete Rose, we can still honor those who have fallen from grace through persecution or prosecution: former Congressmen Mario Biaggi, Eugene Keough, Adam Clayton Powell, Robert Garcia, John Murphy and John Rooney, as well as Consumer Affairs Commissioner and Senatorial candidate Bess Myerson.

In the age of virtual reality, no hall of fame would be complete without a computer-based simulation of our former mayors at their best: Jimmy Walker dancing, Fiorello LaGuardia reading the comics, William O'Dwyer resigning, Robert Wagner deciding, Lindsay charming, Beame counting, Koch arguing.

Sometimes, New Yorkers overlook the acres of diamonds in their midst. The New York Political Hall of Fame is ready to go. We have the building, the talent, and a proven financing technique: moral obligation bonds underwritten by the sale of cards with politicians' pictures on one side and their campaign or criminal records on the back

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