

The Cuomo Lineage

The New Year has arrived and with it fresh faces are appearing in state offices across New York's capital region. In the second floor offices of the State Capitol, the Prima Facie belongs to New York's 56th Governor, Andrew Cuomo.

Change has come to New York's once proud corps of newspaper staff cartoonists as well. Over the past four years, declining circulation and budget cutbacks have forced many cartoonists to live in other states (the state of sardonic despair, the state of torpidity and Florida, to name three). The few remaining cartoonists, and anyone who hopes to refill the ranks—once the economy picks up and people get tired of getting their news free online—are busy these days familiarizing themselves with the new executive physiognomy.

Here are a few pointers on what to look for (and what to watch out for) when caricaturing our new governor:

Avoid the obvious traps.

Do not be fooled by the voice. Those trademark Cuomo rounded tones and the sentences that rise gracefully like herons, soar like eagles and return to earth like fat hens are unmistakable (even as the new governor has voluntarily cut his father's famous ten-dollar words to about \$8.35 in response to the fiscal mess). All the same, simply recycling old Mario Cuomo caricatures and adding Greg Brady hair will not pass as a real caricature (fig. a).

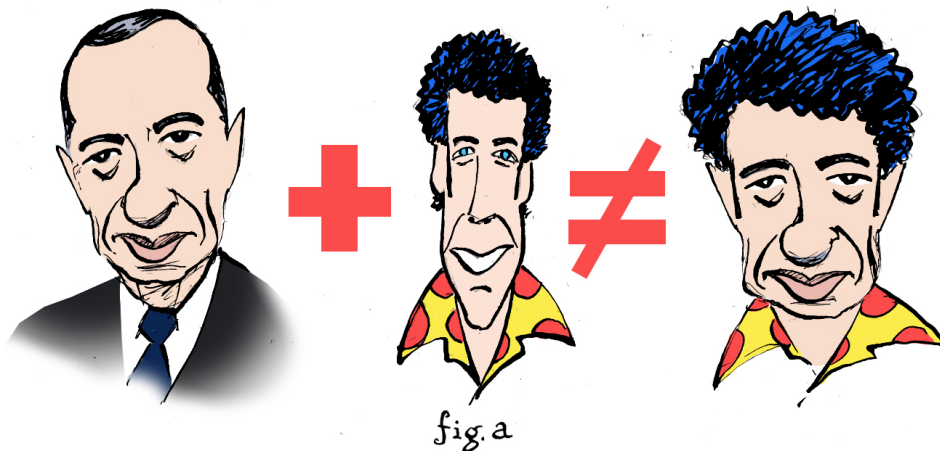


fig. a

To be perfectly honest, Andrew Cuomo's creased visage bears a stronger resemblance to an orator/politician of an earlier era, Abraham Lincoln. There is also something in his features reminiscent of old-time movie stars: Humphrey Bogart, or Harpo Marx depending on the gubernatorial mood (fig. b).



fig. b

As with any good caricature the key to success is finding your subject’s most prominent feature. Here you must exercise restraint and not get carried away with the hair. While Andrew Cuomo can easily claim the highest flop of hair to cast its shadow across the executive desk since Reuben Fenton (fig. c) left office in 1868, hair as an anchor to your subject’s identity does have its drawbacks. Particularly, its tendency to turn white and get pulled out in frustration during extended budget negotiations with Assembly Speaker Silver.



fig. c

In the case of Andrew Cuomo it might be best to concentrate lower down the face. Start with the unavoidable spots of his deep-set otter eyes, and their slightly closer-spaced echos at the bottom of the ramp of his nose, his flared nostrils. These landmarks lead you directly to Governor’s most pronounced, most changeable and certainly most problematic feature, his mouth. With a dynamic range that extends from a smile every bit as welcoming and warm and stretched out as Long Island’s North Shore in August, to the full, Adirondack-sized gape which he uses for pronouncing words with flat “A”s (like “Adirondack”), to a frown as deep as Watkins Glen, Cuomo’s mouth is nothing less than geographic in scale. (fig. d).



fig. d

Ultimately though, the characteristic many cartoonists may find most useful in Governor Cuomo’s face is its utter lack of vacant real estate. Areas unoccupied by facial features are well and deeply delineated and as easy to follow as a map. From the topographic contours spanning his forehead, to the peaks and valleys of his brow ridge, to the potholes beneath each eye, to the multiple parentheses and brackets caging his mouth, all the way to the chin dimple, Governor Cuomo’s countenance is an ideal training ground for the aspiring cartoonist, or the seasoned professional updating his portfolio between barista shifts at Starbucks.

Andrew Cuomo is not the Empire State’s youngest governor (Daniel D. Tompkins 1807), but barring any unexpected injections of collagen and Botox, he might well be remembered—at least in caricature—as her grooviest.

