



*"This notion that somehow to be compassionate you have to be lawless is something I don't buy, and I think most Hispanics don't buy*

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK PETERSON

# THE OPPORTUNIST

*Marco Rubio's political dexterity.*

BY EVAN OSNOS

On the morning of October 10th, Marco Rubio, Florida's junior senator, mounted a small stage at the Elks Lodge in Boulder City, Nevada, a popular retirement spot near Las Vegas. In his twenties, as an obscure Republican state legislator, Rubio exhibited such innate political skill that Dan Gelber, the Democratic leader of the Florida House, warned his colleagues, "When Marco Rubio speaks, young women swoon, old women faint, and toilets flush themselves." Now that he was a Presidential candidate, Rubio was trying to speak to as many different audiences as possible. The Elks Lodge was decorated modestly, with just a few campaign banners hoisted amid the taxidermy—a demonstration of thrift intended to contrast with the front-runner for the Republican Presidential nomination, the billionaire Donald Trump, and to counter claims that Rubio occasionally spends more money than he should.

The attendees were predominantly older white couples, who were seeing Rubio in person for the first time. The son of Cuban immigrants, he grew up mostly in Miami, but he lived in Las Vegas from 1979 until 1985, when he left, after eighth grade. "I love coming back to southern Nevada, because it's a place where I actually learned so much about the American Dream," he said. "My father was a bartender at Sam's Town—an Old West-style casino, seven miles off the Strip. My mother was a maid at what was then called the Imperial Palace." He went on, "They used to have a show called 'Legends in Concert.' We saw that show, like, ten times. I met 'Elvis' and 'Marilyn Monroe.' You know you're getting old when the Legends in Concert are people you used to listen to in high school." Big laugh. Adam Hasner, a friend who served with Rubio in the Florida

House, told me, "When you're running for office in Miami-Dade County, you're spending a lot of time in senior centers."

At the age of forty-four, Rubio has lively dark eyes, soft cheeks, and downy brown hair affixed in a perfect part. He sometimes asks crowds to see him in the tradition of a "young President who said, 'Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.'" (J.F.K. was forty-three when he entered the White House.) Senator Ted Cruz, of Texas, is only five months older than Rubio, but nobody calls him boyish.

If the Democrats nominate Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders, the Party will be offering the oldest candidate that it has ever run in a general election, and Rubio has taken to saying, "Never in the modern history of this country has the political class in both parties been more out of touch with our country than it is right now." But in policy terms Rubio can appear older than his years. His opposition to same-sex marriage, to raising the minimum wage, and to restoring diplomatic relations with Cuba puts him out of step with most American Latinos. In the Spanish-language media, he is sometimes described as *un joven viejo*—a young fogey.

After a summer submerged in a raucous primary field, Rubio had recently climbed into third place. He was ahead of Jeb Bush, his former mentor, and far behind Trump and Ben Carson. Trump's campaign marched to the sound of a dirge—"The American Dream is dead," he told crowds—and Rubio presented himself as a sunny alternative, a way out of Trump's sulfurous moment. "We're very blessed to have so many good people running for President," he said earnestly to the crowd in Boulder City.

I had seen Rubio at half a dozen



REDUX

*it," Rubio says.*



# FURIES 2.0



events—in Iowa, New York, Nevada—and his speeches were blemished only by a tic: he occasionally slips into a singsong cadence, turning his story into a breathy schoolboy lullaby about the “new American century.” On the whole, he is impressively consistent. Rubio in Dubuque in October was nearly indistinguishable from Rubio in Miami in April, the political equivalent of a well-managed restaurant chain: “Repeal and replace Obamacare,” scrap President Obama’s nuclear deal with Iran “on Day One,” create the “most affordable business taxes in the world”—all the while heeding the populist frustrations of the moment. Vowing to remake higher education, he said, “When I’m President, before you take on student loans you’re going to know how much people make when they graduate from that school with that degree. You’re going to know that the market for philosophers has tightened over the last two thousand years.” In 2012, Mitt Romney, the Republican nominee, spoke worshipfully of “job creators.” Rubio rarely mentions them. He returns, over and over, to his central task: how to make

helping the poor and the middle class a Republican issue. He tells crowds, “We can no longer allow big government to be used as a tool of crony capitalism.”

But, at bottom, his campaign is only partly about policy. In a contest against a real-estate tycoon and the son and brother of former Presidents, Rubio is campaigning on the vision of a country where “the son of a bartender and a maid” can reach the White House. “It’s not just my story—it is literally *our* story,” he told the Boulder City crowd. “In this nation, we are all but a generation or two removed from someone who made our future the very purpose of their lives. Whether or not we remain a special country will be determined by whether or not that journey is still possible for the people trying to make it now.”

The applause was long and loud, and as Rubio climbed down from the stage to pose for selfies I asked the first couple I saw what they made of him. Cornelia Wallace, a retired nurse from the Chicago suburbs, said, “Well, I’ve got tears welled up in my eyes.” She laughed at her own reaction. “It touched my

heart,” she said, and shrugged. “I get a passion from him that I don’t get from the others.”

In Las Vegas, Rubio was staying at the Bellagio. We met in a suite appointed in the Vegas Italianate style—leather, chrome, photos of fountains. When I stopped by one morning, the windows were shrouded by heavy burgundy drapes, and Rubio was worried about his voice. “I’ve been coming down with something,” he said, crossing the conference room to retrieve a bottle of water. “My throat is always feeling dry.” Doctors had told him it was an allergic reaction. “I said, ‘How come I’ve never had allergies before, and now, suddenly, the last four years I’ve developed allergies?’ And the answer the doctor gave me was: ‘Well, because you’re travelling to places that you never used to travel to before.’”

He had made his first impression on many people outside Florida in 2013, when he gave the rebuttal to the State of the Union and leaned awkwardly offscreen to guzzle from a Poland Spring bottle—a moment that took flight on Twitter as #watergate. Trump, as the Party’s schoolyard bully, carps on the habit constantly, and recently mailed Rubio a case of Trump-branded water.

Rubio, who was spending three days in Nevada, had scheduled both public and closed-door activities. On the first night, he met with Sheldon Adelson, the billionaire casino magnate and donor. In April, Politico had published a story headlined “RUBIO TAKES LEAD IN SHELDON ADELSON PRIMARY,” which reported that Rubio had been calling Adelson every two weeks. I asked Rubio about it, and he said, “I don’t know about every couple of weeks, but I talk to him quite a bit.” Adelson spent about ninety-eight million dollars in connection with the 2012 campaign, including twenty million on the campaign of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich. He has yet to commit to a candidate in 2016. Rubio described Adelson and himself as natural allies. “The only thing Sheldon Adelson has talked to me about policy-wise is Israel,” he said. “And he doesn’t have to convince me on that, because I’m pro-Israel with or without Sheldon’s support.”

Rubio’s campaign had invited donors

from around the country to join him at the Bellagio, for a football-themed retreat. The guests attended a “breakfast and team talk” and a strategy session called “Quarterbacking Victory.” One afternoon, they played flag football at a nearby sports complex, and Rubio was the quarterback on both teams. Over the years, he has developed the ability to disarm jaded donors. Bob List, the former governor of Nevada, told me about watching Rubio work a roomful of prosperous Las Vegas businessmen. At one point, Rubio was asked where his inspiration for politics originated. “He said, ‘I remember one day my father took me in the car, and we drove over to the neighborhood where Liberace’s house was.’” List noted, “And *everybody* knew where Liberace’s house was.” He went on, “He said, ‘We would drive around that neighborhood, and he’d show me where all the rich people lived, and he’d say, ‘Son, if you want to live like these people, you can do it.’”” List shook his head and said, “He’s *good-good*.”

Rubio, who has entered six elections and never lost, is alert to the appearance of overweening ambition. “All my life I’ve been in a hurry to get to my future,” he wrote in his memoir, “An American Son,” published in 2012, his second year in the Senate. In conversation, he sometimes answers so quickly that his friend Dennis Baxley, a Republican in the Florida House, once gave him a piece of advice. “I said, ‘Marco, don’t change anything you’re saying, but just wait, like, three seconds before you say it, and you’ll look so pensive.’” When things go wrong, Rubio’s impatience can suggest a man climbing too fast for his own good. In Washington foreign-policy circles, people remember a moment at the Brookings Institution, in April, 2012, when Rubio was delivering a major foreign-policy speech. Reaching the final page, he discovered that it had been removed accidentally from the lectern. Some politicians might have improvised; Rubio stopped awkwardly, in mid-sentence, and asked for the page to be returned.

For Republican strategists, the loss of the 2012 Presidential election contained signals that spoke to the Party’s future. Latinos are the largest minority group in America, but in 2012 “there

was more talk about electrified fences than there was about higher education and tuition,” Peter Wehner, a Republican speechwriter and strategist who served in the past three Republican Administrations, told me. “You can’t win elections when you do that.” Romney, who had called for the “self-deportation” of immigrants, received just twenty-seven per cent of the Latino vote—seventeen points less than what George W. Bush received in 2004. For years, Republicans have believed that they should be faring better with Hispanic voters. Ronald Reagan liked to say that Latinos are Republicans but “just don’t know it yet.” Lionel Sosa, a Texas adman who was hired to run Reagan’s outreach program to Latinos, recalled, “Ronald Reagan told me, back in the 1980 race, ‘Latinos are conservative people. As Republicans, we share the same basic conservative values. We believe in hard work. We believe in family.’”

For Wehner and other reform-minded conservatives, the lessons of 2012 were also economic. “The middle class felt vulnerable and nervous, because of stagnant wages for twenty-five years and skyrocketing costs in health care and higher education,” Wehner told me. “The Party needed an agenda, and it was out of touch with middle-class concerns.” The reformers urged the Party to get over same-sex marriage (a “losing battle”), focus on economic anxiety, and, above all, identify a leader who could articulate a vision that reached beyond Party orthodoxy. As Wehner put it, “You need a figure like a Bill Clinton or a Tony Blair, who can reassure the base and inspire them, but also to signal to people who are not voting for you, ‘We get it.’”

Whit Ayres, a leading Republican analyst who has been Rubio’s pollster for the past five years, drew a somewhat different lesson. He agreed about the demographic reality. “Unfortunately for Republicans, the math is only going to get worse,” he wrote in an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*. “Groups that form the core of G.O.P. support—older whites, blue-collar whites, married people and rural residents—are declining as a proportion of the electorate. Groups that

lean Democratic—minorities, young people and single women—are growing.” He calculated that, in order to win, a Republican Presidential candidate would need at least forty per cent of the Latino vote. But in “2016 and Beyond: How Republicans Can Elect a President in the New America,” published earlier this year, Ayres made a subtle distinction between style and substance. He wrote that polls have found “no evidence that America has shifted to the left.” In his view, America remains a center-right country, the Party’s core ideas are sound, and the problem lies in finding “the right candidate, the right message, and the right tone.” He tested a range of ways of presenting core Republican ideas and composed a list of dos and don’ts. Don’t say we have to reform entitlements or “we will never balance the budget.” Do say that entitlement reform is “the only way to save popular programs.”

The Party’s plans to change its tone did not last long. In the 2014 midterm elections, conservative candidates seized on reports of a surge of unaccompanied minors crossing the Mexican border, spurred largely by gang- and drug-related violence in Central America, and proclaimed an immigration crisis. Though the number of undocumented immigrants apprehended at the border was at its lowest level in decades, voters who were anxious about jobs and opportunity responded to increasingly militant language. When Trump announced his candidacy, this summer, he said of Mexicans, “They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists.” Mel Martínez, the former Florida senator (the chamber’s first Cuban-American) and a former head of the Republican National Committee, told me, “Republicans say, ‘Mel, what do we have to do to get the Hispanic vote?’ And one thing I would say is, ‘First of all, stop offending Hispanics!’” He urged the parties not to regard a diverse range of voters as a single bloc. “The bottom line is that we are not ‘Hispanics.’ We’re Cuban-Americans, we’re Mexican-Americans, and so forth.” Cuban-Americans represent only about four per cent of the Latino population, and



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their votes and interests are not always in accord with those of other Latinos. For one thing, many Latinos resent the accelerated path to citizenship that Congress bestowed on Cuban arrivals during the Cold War, a privilege not granted to Colombians, Guatemalans, and others who have faced repression.

"There are persuaders and there are crusaders, and I think Rubio is a persuader," Wehner told me. "When you're losing Presidential elections on a consistent basis, you've got to nominate somebody who is a persuader." A conservative Super PAC ranked Rubio as the ninth most conservative member of the 114th Congress, but, unlike Ted Cruz, who amplifies confrontation, he excels at rounding off the corners of conventional conservative prescriptions. "I want to be the world leader in renewables," he tells crowds. "But we better also be the world leader in oil and natural gas."

At times, Rubio's desire to embrace competing views becomes unworkable. In January, he voted for a Senate resolution affirming that climate change is real, but he often voices doubts about the role of humans in it. I mentioned that this puts him at odds with the young generation that he wants to represent. He said, "People who are passionate about climate change come to us and say, 'The environment is changing because of human activity. The scientists say so.' And then they say, 'And here's what we want you to do.' And so they present me with this idea, and I look at this idea, and I ask them, 'Well, if I pass this, how many inches or feet of sea rise will it prevent?' And they'll say, 'Well, it won't prevent any.' I say O.K. Then I turn to the economists and say, 'What impact will this law have on the economy?' And they say, 'It will increase the cost of living, it will cost jobs, it will make America less competitive economically.' And so I say, 'So you're asking me to pass something that's bad economically and does nothing for the environment other than lead the way by example? I think that's a bad trade-off. I'm not supporting those laws.'" (Ken Caldeira, a senior scientist at the Carnegie Institution for Science's Department of Global Ecology, at Stanford, told me, "If Senator Rubio is talking to scientists who say that avoiding greenhouse-gas

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They say you may have caught  
tuberculosis from the peasants  
who came to Melikhovo

to be seen by you. Hearing them  
coughing in the hall you put down  
your pen and rose from your desk.

Short of breath, they had travelled  
all night to arrive by dawn, drawn  
by rumors of your kindness.

While you warmed the stethoscope  
in your hands and the old farmer  
bared his chest, your character

stood patiently on the doorstep,  
holding a letter of introduction  
you had yet to write. The longer

you spent away from the story  
the harder it would be to finish it,  
but the hall was long, the line

out the door, and you would turn  
none away, knowing how far  
they had come for the comfort

of having someone  
listen to their lungs and say it  
sounded better than it sounded

while you stood breathing  
in their sighs of relief,  
saying, softly, "Next."

—Austin Smith

emissions won't help avoid sea-level rise, he is talking to the wrong scientists.")

Rubio's inclusiveness can invite caricature. He considers himself a Catholic, but he attends two churches—an evangelical Protestant service on Saturdays and a Roman Catholic Mass on Sundays. He used to proclaim his love of nineties-era hip-hop—particularly Tupac Shakur—but recently he has also taken to praising cross-genre artists, such as Drake and the Weeknd, who blend electronic dance music with hip-hop, rap, and R.&B. "It's a twenty-first-century ability to take music and use it in a way that motivates people,"

he said last month on CNN, mirroring his campaign rhetoric. "Some of it is blended with other sounds that are sampled from recordings that others have had in the past, and you see traditional artists being brought in and their voices used on an electronic soundtrack."

Rubio's ecumenism is one reason that prominent Democrats consider him the most worrisome contender. David Axelrod, Obama's former chief strategist, told me that Rubio "seems to be able to build bridges between the two factions of the Republican Party." He said, "There is a real civil war going on between populist anti-government



Republicans and the establishment conservatives, and Rubio has thus far been able to escape that divide." Axelrod added, "But it's going to be harder as time goes on, and he is probably going to have to plant his feet in one place or another."

I asked Rubio if it concerned him that Republicans often appear to be at war with themselves. A day earlier, the House Majority Leader, Kevin McCarthy, facing intense criticism by conservative members of his party, had abandoned plans to run for Speaker. "If the alternative was they all went into a smoke-filled room and cut a deal outside the limelight, everyone would say, 'Oh, then it's a done deal, it's a stagnant process,'" Rubio said. The turmoil might offer "a new opportunity that elevates a new generation of leadership."

**M**arco Antonio Rubio was born in Miami in 1971, the third of four children. (The oldest, Mario, became an Army Green Beret and, later, a city official in Jacksonville; Rubio's sisters, Barbara and Veronica, live in Miami.) For years, he described himself, in political terms, as the "son of Cuban exiles." "Nothing against immigrants, but my parents are exiles," he said during his Senate campaign. "Folks that are exiles are people that have lost their country." But in October, 2011, the *Washington Post* and the *St. Petersburg Times* reported that, according to immigration records, his family had left Cuba voluntarily, as émigrés, aboard a commercial flight, in May, 1956, more than two and a half years before Fidel Castro took power. Like many other immigrants, Rubio's parents, Oriaes and Mario, left in pursuit of jobs and opportunity. (Mario, the bartender, died in 2010.) The *Post* suggested that Rubio had embellished his story to gain cachet with political refugees, some of whom regard pre-Castro migrants with suspicion. Rubio called that suggestion "outrageous," saying that he had relied on his family's "oral history."

Rubio's allies have defended his misstatements as an innocent error, but Guillermo Grenier, a sociologist at Florida International University, who studies the political attitudes of Cuban-Americans, told me that the explanation left many people unconvinced. "I think the dominant view is that he was

misrepresenting his life story to make it more like the community he was trying to represent," Grenier said. In a speech to the Hispanic Leadership Network, in January, 2012, Rubio said that the controversy had turned into "a blessing in disguise." He explained, "It made me do something that we don't do enough of. And that's go back and discover who our parents were when they were our age."

Because the Rubios had relatives in the United States, they gained a path to citizenship. Marco, or Tony, as he was known at home, was a strong-willed child. When the family moved to Nevada, he immersed himself in Mormon reading, and joined the Mormon Church, along with his mother and one of his sisters. A few years later, they reëmbarked Catholicism, "mostly at my instigation," he wrote in "An American Son." He also recalled that he was an "inattentive and undisciplined student."

The autobiography of a sitting senator is a carefully manicured history. "I wrote a paper in the fifth grade praising President Reagan for restoring the U.S. military after it had been demoralized and allowed to decay in the years before his presidency," he notes. But he writes vividly about the most influential figure in his childhood—his maternal grandfather, Pedro Víctor García, whom he calls "my closest boyhood friend." According to Rubio's biographer Manuel Roig-Franzia, in 1962 García arrived from Cuba without a visa and was eventually ordered to be deported. He stayed anyway, becoming an undocumented immigrant. The Cuban missile crisis saved him; commercial air travel to Cuba was suspended, and, eventually, he was granted permanent residency. In Rubio's recollection, his grandfather spent much of his retirement in an aluminum chair on the front porch of his daughter's home, smoking cigars and advising Marco on the alleged perfidy of Jimmy Carter:

He was weak, he said, and other countries preyed on his weakness. . . . Ronald Reagan would restore our strength, he assured me. . . . Reagan's election and my grandfather's allegiance to him were defining influences on me politically. I've been a Republican ever since.

Actually, Rubio's politics were not quite so fixed. His father was a mem-

ber of the Culinary Workers Union, and in 1984 it went on strike at Sam's Town, the casino where he worked. Marco became an ardent supporter—making signs, blocking management's cameras. But when the family ran low on money his father crossed the picket line. "I accused him of selling out and called him a scab," Rubio wrote later. "It hurt him, and I'm ashamed of it."

I asked Rubio what he took from that experience, and he replied, "That a thirteen-year-old has the luxury of being a hundred-per-cent idealistic. A fifty-year-old has to pay the bills and provide for the family, and it was a tough choice for my dad."

Today, he keeps his distance from the labor movement, and contends that workers now have advantages that his father's generation did not. "The difference is, of course, that today, in Las Vegas and around the country, people have a lot more mobility," he said. "In essence, if you don't like what they are paying you at Sam's Town, you can go work at, you know, the Venetian, or you can go work at Palace Station, or you can go work at the Wynn." He went on, "I'm not anti-union. For example, I think we can work with blue-collar unions on a lot of issues. But I also don't think that we can allow unions to destroy industries their workers are in."

Yvanna Cancela, the political director of Local 226, of which Rubio's father was a member, described Rubio's image of workers' options as unrealistic. "Rather than imagine an economy where workers have to leave a job to get a better life," she said, "Senator Rubio should focus on how workers, like his father, have fought to create a standard so they don't have to."

In Marco's junior year of high school, his sister Barbara's husband, Orlando Cicilia, was arrested for his role in a drug-trafficking ring. Sentenced to twenty-five years in prison, he was paroled in 2000. (The connection to Rubio went unreported until 2012, when *Univision* revealed it, over the protests of Rubio's aides.) The arrest added to the strain on the family. Rubio's grade-point average at the end of his senior year was 2.1; he was allowed to graduate after attending summer school. He went on to a small college in Missouri, transferred



*"We can't pull the plug. We're all still on her insurance."*

to a community college, and ultimately graduated from the University of Florida, in 1993.

Rubio was already in politics by then. After his sophomore year, he had called a local congressional office and got a summer internship, and then, in 1996, while in law school at the University of Miami, he was hired to run the local branch of Bob Dole's Presidential campaign. On and off since high school, Rubio had been dating Jeanette Dousdebès, a Colombian-American who became a Miami Dolphins cheerleader. In 1998, they married, and they have four children, ranging in age from eight to fifteen.

Jeanette never moved to Washington, preferring to stay in Florida with the children. "She's not a political person," Rubio told me. "She doesn't have any political ambitions for me or for herself." She does not enjoy politicking; she once told an interviewer, "If I have to do it, of course I'll do it. But in general I am shy." She works part time for the family foundation of Norman Braman, a billionaire auto dealer and former owner of the Philadelphia Eagles, who has been an unusually supportive patron of the Rubio family. Over the years, he has donated repeatedly to Rubio's campaigns, hired him as a lawyer, and made contributions to a public-policy center at Florida International Uni-

versity, where Rubio was an instructor.

Unlike most modern Presidential candidates, Rubio began his life in elected office at the lowest rung. (Jeb Bush's first campaign was for governor.) Rubio was twenty-six and living at home with his parents when, in April, 1998, he won a seat on the five-member city commission in West Miami, a Cuban enclave with fewer than six thousand people. He weighed questions about the location of bus benches and the snacks in vending machines, all the while courting local political bosses.

Raúl Martínez was the mayor of blue-collar Hialeah, and he greeted Rubio warily. "In my office, we meet, and you know what? He's a very personable person," Martínez told me. But over time he was put off by Rubio's ambition. "Marco was the prince—he was the chosen," Martínez said. "You can see him deciding, 'Where's my next move up the ladder?'" Nevertheless, Rubio accumulated mentors, including Governor Jeb Bush, who noticed him during his first race, for the West Miami commission, and called to congratulate him on Election Night. They became friends, and Rubio took every chance to praise Bush: "He's practically Cuban, just taller," he told reporters, and later said that, whenever he confronted a difficult problem in the Senate, he asked, "W.W.J.D.?"—What would Jeb do?

Within two years, in 1999, Rubio

spotted an open seat in the state legislature. He didn't live in that district, but he won a special election and moved his residency in time for the swearing-in. He arrived at an auspicious moment: newly installed term limits, inspired by a bonanza of corruption cases, were driving out senior lawmakers. He was sometimes mistaken for a clerk, but he embraced conservative doctrine—he read Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged" twice in his first term—and attracted allies. Nine months later, he was the majority whip; two years later, he was the majority leader; and a year after that he was in line to be the youngest Speaker in Florida history, a post that he assumed in 2006.

At his swearing-in, Jeb Bush presented him with a faux-precious sword from a "mystical warrior." (The inscription, "Unleash Chiang," had been a rallying cry in the nineteen-fifties for right-wingers who wanted to arm Chiang Kai-shek's government in Taiwan, so that it could attack mainland China. In the Bush family, however, the slogan was a tennis-court joke that George H. W. Bush used when he was preparing to serve.) Jeb told the audience, "I can't think back on a time when I've ever been prouder to be a Republican, Marco." Rubio displayed the sword on a wall of his office.

For the work of political arm-twisting, he relied on two fellow-representatives, David Rivera and Ralph Arza—or "Boris and Natasha," as Dan Gelber, the minority leader, nicknamed them, after the "Rocky and Bullwinkle" villains. "I said it jokingly, but there was a little bit of truth," he told me. "Something would pop up in a bill, and I'd wonder how the hell it got there. Then I'd look at them and they'd smile." Rubio's lieutenants proved to be problematic. Arza was forced to resign from the legislature in 2006, after he used the word "nigger" in a drunken message left on a colleague's voice mail. He pleaded guilty to intimidating a witness and agreed to undergo alcohol and anger counselling. Rivera (who had bought a house with Rubio in Tallahassee, to use when the legislature was in session) went on to Congress but has been the target of state and federal investigations into his income and into his alleged role in supporting a shadow candidate to undercut his rival in the 2012 campaign.

He has denied wrongdoing and has not been charged. The Bush campaign, in a slide presentation to donors, has cited the friendship with the “scandal-tarred” Rivera as evidence that Rubio is a “risky bet.” Rubio aides tell reporters that the candidate rarely sees Rivera anymore, but Rivera and Arza were among Rubio’s supporters at the Republican debate in Cleveland.

Rubio has struggled to manage his personal and professional finances. On several occasions, he used a Republican Party American Express card to charge personal expenses—\$3,765 for landscaping stones at his house, ten thousand dollars for a family reunion in Georgia, a hundred and thirty-four dollars in a hair salon. In each case, he made good on the charge before it was publicly reported and explained it as a mixup. A state ethics commission investigated the incidents and cleared him, but that hasn’t stopped his opponents from bringing them up.

His income has fluctuated dramatically. In 2000, his first year in the legislature, he was still saddled with student debt. As he ascended in the House leadership, he was hired by Broad & Cassel, a prominent law and lobbying firm, and his annual income grew to more than four hundred thousand dollars. In 2012, he received a contract for his memoir, worth at least eight hundred thousand dollars, and yet, even with his rising income, he cashed out sixty-eight thousand dollars from a retirement account, paying a heavy tax penalty. When reporters asked about it, he said, “My refrigerator broke down.” Political rivals wondered if he had a gambling problem, and searched for evidence but found none. Indeed, Rubio has incorporated the questions about his financial dealings into his self-narrative. “Here’s the truth,” he said, flanked by prosperous rivals, during the third Republican debate, in Boulder, Colorado. “I didn’t inherit any money.” He added, “But I’m not worried about my finances. I’m worried about the finances of everyday Americans.”

After Rubio finished at the Elks Lodge in Boulder City, he drove to North Las Vegas, a blue-collar suburb where he and his family once lived in a two-bedroom cinder-block house.

The city has a large Hispanic population, and bus shelters advertise lawyers who specialize in *inmigración*. He was scheduled to speak at an event organized by the LIBRE Initiative, a non-profit group funded in part by the Koch brothers. The logo on the backdrop declared, “Limited Government, Unlimited Opportunities.”

To fulfill Reagan’s prophesy that Latino voters will become Republicans, the Party will need to make its economic case in places like Nevada. Between 1994 and 2012, the Latino share of Nevada’s electorate tripled, from five per cent to fifteen per cent. So far, Latinos have been voting mainly for Democrats. Senator Harry Reid won a tight reelection fight in 2010 largely because he received ninety-four per cent of the Latino vote. By the end of this decade, non-Hispanic whites will likely be a minority in Nevada.

The event was held at St. Christopher Catholic School, which Rubio attended briefly as a child. (After lobbying his parents to find a way to cover the tuition, he arrived to find that he hated the uniforms, the extra schoolwork, and the distance from his friends, and he pleaded to go back to public school. “I made life unbearable in our house, and within a week, my parents had relented,” he writes. “I cringe today when I remember how selfishly I behaved.”)

Drawing on the ideas of reform-minded conservatives, Rubio told the audience, “We have government policies that, quite frankly, have not allowed this economy to grow fast enough and create better-paying jobs.” He went on, “These are the impediments to upward mobility: an economy that isn’t creating better-paying jobs and a higher-education system that’s too expensive or inaccessible. And the result is we are leaving people behind.”

The crux of Rubio’s economic argument is that the poor and the middle class are facing different problems from those his parents faced. He opposes raising the minimum wage, arguing that it will lead to automation and outsourcing. He wants a greater share of young people to consider trade schools and apprenticeships instead of incurring the debts of a four-year education. “You’re going to have eighteen-year-olds in this country making fifty thousand dollars

a year making cars, making seventy thousand dollars a year as a welder!” he says. (His rhapsodies about welding have been ridiculed, because the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the median wage for welders is less than thirty-eight thousand dollars.)

Rubio told the audience that the notion that “big government is good for the people who are trying to make it” is a “lie.” He said, “When the government dominates the economy, the people that can afford to influence the government—they win. And everybody else is stuck.” He went on, “They know that you can’t start a business out of the spare bedroom of your home if you have to fill out fifteen permits and hire lawyers and lobbyists, and they love it because that means they have no competition.”

At one point while Rubio was in the Florida House, he and David Rivera visited Washington and got in touch with Mel Martínez, who was then in the Senate. “I walked him around the Capitol, and he was like a kid with his eyes popping out, you know? ‘Oh, my gosh, this is so cool. Oh, my gosh,’” Martínez recalled. Within a few years, Rubio was back, with a purpose. “I invited him to lunch in the Senate dining room, and I got the definite impression that he was kind of fishing around as to if I was going to run for reelection or not,” Martínez said. “I thought it was a bit premature to be talking about that.”

After term limits forced Rubio out of the Florida House, in 2008, he worked as a consultant for hospitals, a television pundit, and a college instructor, but by 2009 he was antsy. Martínez had announced his retirement, and Rubio wanted to challenge Charlie Crist, the former Republican governor, for the vacant Senate seat, but Party leaders had chosen Crist, and they told Rubio that they would oppose him with money and endorsements. Rubio’s friend Dennis Baxley received a text message from him: “I can’t quit thinking about U.S. Senate. They want me to do Attorney General of Florida instead, but what do you think?” Baxley said, “I texted him back. I said, ‘What does your wife think?’ She’s the spiritual depth gauge.” Jeanette approved.

Rubio began more than thirty points behind, and almost dropped out. But



he sensed that Crist was vulnerable on the right. Small, far-right rallies were gathering steam around the state; they eventually became the Tea Party. Driving around Florida in an F-150 pickup, Rubio went to rallies, and he portrayed Crist as an ally of Obama. He accentuated new priorities. Previously, progressive immigration activists had considered him an ally, because he supported tuition assistance for the children of undocumented workers and used his power to bury hard-line anti-immigration bills. But now he renounced the tuition program; he made use of the phrase “illegal aliens,” and condemned the Dream Act, which would have protected undocumented young people, as a step toward “a blanket amnesty.”

He said that he would have supported a controversial Arizona measure that critics called the “Show me your papers” law. (Before his campaign, he had said that the law would be akin to creating a “police state.”) He also received help from Jeb Bush, who introduced him to top donors and helped him secure endorsements. He got the nomination, and won the general election by nearly twenty points. At his victory party, Bush introduced him. The *Weekly Standard* hailed Rubio as “the most important freshman senator.” In the Senate, Rubio maintained his opposition to the Dream Act. Presente, an online Latino activist group, ran a campaign with the tagline “No Somos Rubios”—“We’re not Rubios.”

In 2012, Mitt Romney considered Rubio as a possible running mate. Democratic researchers had assembled and released an opposition-research file that focussed on Rubio’s relationship with Rivera and on the financial errors, portraying them as evidence of ineptness or profiteering. In the end, Romney chose the Wisconsin congressman Paul Ryan. In materials shared with donors and reporters, the Bush campaign has alleged that Rubio was rejected because of concerns about his background. But Beth Myers, the Romney adviser who oversaw the Vice-Presidential search, told Politico last month that that is “simply wrong,” and went on, “I can say that Senator Rubio ‘passed’ our vetting and we found nothing that disqualified him from serving as VP.”

After Romney lost, the G.O.P.’s official autopsy concluded that the Party had

## PARIS, 3 A.M. BY MARK POWER



MAGNUM

Flowers left outside La Casa Nostra restaurant a few days after several people were killed





there by terrorist gunfire, in one of six attacks on the city. More photographs can be seen at [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com).

to “embrace and champion comprehensive immigration reform.” A small group of Republicans and Democrats in the Senate were organizing the first push for a bill that could satisfy both the left and the right, by combining a path to citizenship for eleven million undocumented immigrants with border-control measures. The group coveted Rubio’s participation, because he had both Tea Party support and Latino heritage. In December, Senator Dick Durbin, of Illinois, the No. 2 leader in the Democratic majority, encountered Rubio in the Senate gym and recruited him to what became known as the Gang of Eight. *Time* put him on the cover with the tagline “The Republican Savior.” He blitzed conservative media and white Evangelical audiences, arguing that border security and citizenship had to be “interwoven” in the bill. “It’s literally impossible to do one part without doing the other,” he said.

But his staff was ambivalent: his political strategists worried that it would cost him conservative support. After Rubio signed on to the bill, Glenn Beck declared, “What a piece of garbage this guy is.” But Rubio stayed with it, and when the bill reached the Senate floor, on June 27, 2013, he delivered the most powerful speech of his career, recalling that the first words that his father learned in English were “I am looking for work.” He quoted from the inscription on the Statue of Liberty, and said, “Here in America, generations of unfulfilled dreams will finally come to pass.”

The bill passed the Senate, but Rubio’s poll numbers were dropping, and he was having second thoughts. He was the only one of the eight senators who did not attend a news conference after the vote. In the weeks ahead, he walked away from the immigration bill. He told Sean Hannity, of Fox News, that repealing Obamacare was “more important” than his legislation. In October, he dismissed the bill as something “the Democrats in the Senate are demanding.” He stopped talking about immigration almost entirely. Matt Viser, of the *Boston Globe*, searched the *Congressional Record* and found that Rubio referred to immigration a hundred and thirty-five times on the Senate floor in 2013. In the next

two years, he mentioned it twice. (The House never brought the bill up for a vote, and it died.)

Rubio had come to Washington with ambitions to cut the debt, reduce spending, and curb E.P.A. rules in Florida, but none of those plans succeeded. In his first year, his only successful bill was a measure that designated Septem-



ber as National Spinal Cord Injury Awareness Month. He began losing enthusiasm for the Senate. The failure of the immigration bill hastened the process.

Rubio had talked about running for President, but in Florida political circles few people imagined that he would run in 2016 if Bush did. “I didn’t conceive of them both deciding to compete, because the relationship goes so far back,” Baxley said. One of Rubio’s friends said he told him, “I’m not afraid of running too soon. I’m afraid of waiting too long.”

For those with strong ties to both Rubio and Bush, Rubio’s decision was discomfiting. The Miami Republican operative Al Cardenas, who gave Rubio his first job out of law school (and attended his wedding), and pushed for him to be a Vice-Presidential candidate in 2012, told Fox Latino, “I had hoped he would stay in the Senate,” adding, “It’s like running against your uncle for the president of the company.” When Rubio was asked why he did not defer to his mentor, he replied, “I didn’t know there was a line.” Asked about the sword that Bush gave him, Rubio told reporters, “I have it somewhere at home. I have young kids. I don’t want them running around with a sword.”

Rubio announced his campaign on April 13th, at Miami’s Freedom Tower, a former newspaper building that the federal government had used in the sixties and early seventies as a Cuban-refugee center. It was nicknamed the Ellis Island of the South. Flanked by enormous American flags, he told the crowd,

in a message that pointed at both Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush, “Yesterday is over.” At the announcement, demonstrators from Latino advocacy groups carried signs declaring “El Sueño de Rubio Es Nuestra Pesadilla” (“Rubio’s Dream Is Our Nightmare”). On “Despierta América,” the morning newscast on Univision, the host Satcha Pretto noted the presence of the protesters, and said, “Many immigrants are already asking themselves, ‘Does he want to support us or deport us?’”

After Rubio finished a speech one night in Las Vegas, I visited a community organizer named Leo Murrieta, who founded the Center for Latino Prosperity, a nonpartisan nonprofit that conducts research and advocacy. Barrel-chested and bearded, he wore a cardigan and rectangular glasses. Murrieta, who is twenty-nine, has heard Rubio tell his story over the years; he flashed a smile and said of himself, “My dad was a dishwasher and my mom was a housekeeper.”

He was born in Mexico while his parents and three siblings were en route to the United States. A church helped them get green cards and allowed them to sleep in the pews for three years until they had saved enough for an apartment in a poor section of Las Vegas. “My parents would go without food. I don’t remember buying new shoes when I was a kid. But I think a lot of people go through that, in different ways.” He learned English from “Sesame Street.” “So I was the family translator until I was eight.” His older brother found work bagging groceries, and the family moved to West Las Vegas, another troubled part of town.

Murrieta became a naturalized citizen in 2010—“my American birthday,” he calls it. “It was the most beautiful moment of my life. And I registered to vote literally the moment after that, because all I ever wanted to do was vote.” In 2013, he worked nationally on immigration reform and labor issues. “I was blessed to be able to be in a lot of the rooms where policy was being discussed.” He said that Latinos would be receptive to a Republican message, but he thinks that the LIBRE Initiative promotes the interests of big business rather than the interests of the community.



I asked what he made of Rubio's work on immigration reform. "He was for it before he was against it," he said. "I'm an immigrant kid from the poorest parts of Vegas, and my family is touched by every form of immigration." His brother-in-law and sister-in-law are undocumented. "This bill would have saved my family a lot of fear. You know, we still live in fear that our family is going to be torn apart." He went on, "I've seen Marco Rubio give us lip service. I've seen him and his staff say that they support us. But then, when the spotlight is put on them, they don't have the muscle to stand. And that's not what we need in a President. We need someone who can stand up and stay true to what he's said." He added, "One of us has forgotten where we came from."

The more we talked, the more dispirited Murrieta became about the state of the immigration debate in America. The Obama Administration's executive actions, announced in 2014, would have shielded members of his family against the threat of deportation, but then a court ruling blocked that protection. His mother called him in panic. "She asked me, '*Qué quiere decir?*'—'What does it mean?'"

Janet Murguía, the president and C.E.O. of the national council of La Raza, the largest Latino civil-rights and advocacy organization, told me, "People would underestimate the Latino community to think that they want to see a Hispanic President so badly that they'll discard their positions on the issues. That's ludicrous." Of Rubio, she said, "He walked away from comprehensive immigration reform." She added, "A measure of his viability is in how he is able to reconcile both his party's demands and his natural inclinations."

The Reverend Samuel Rodriguez is the president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, which represents more than forty thousand evangelical congregations. He gave a benediction at the last Republican National Convention. He told me, "Let me really take the filters off: Marco Rubio's de-facto one-eighty on immigration after the Gang of Eight failed was nothing other than a mistake. It was a serious mistake, and, I would

argue, an ethical miscalculation." Since then, however, Rodriguez has decided to give Rubio another chance. "I believe Senator Marco Rubio learned his lesson," he said.

A Gallup poll released in August found that among Hispanic voters Bush has a net favorability rating of eleven points; Rubio trails him, with five points. Clinton's net favorability with Hispanics is forty points. But when I asked Lionel Sosa, Reagan's Latino outreach director, how he thought Rubio would do with Hispanics in a general election, he said that although he had heard the criticisms, he thought they would fade. "The first Latino that has a chance to become President? All bets are off. I would say that he could easily capture sixty to sixty-five per cent of the Latino vote."

It was, perhaps, inevitable that Marco Rubio would open the deepest cut in the troubled campaign of Jeb Bush. For days before the third Republican debate, the Bush campaign had been criticizing Rubio for missing Senate votes this year. During the debate, Bush sensed an opportunity and turned to face his former protégé. "Marco, when

you signed up for this, this was a six-year term, and you should be showing up to work," Bush said. "I mean, literally, the Senate—what is it, like, a French work week?" He delivered the line awkwardly, like a principal making a cameo appearance in a school play.

Rubio stared at him evenly. "I don't remember you ever complaining about John McCain's vote record," he said, and added, pityingly, "The only reason why you're doing it now is because we're running for the same position, and someone has convinced you that attacking me is going to help you." Applause rose from the audience. The phrase "Someone has convinced you" was lethal. Bush—suddenly in the role of the misled, desperate old pol—smiled wanly and tried to speak, but Rubio turned to face the camera. "My campaign is going to be about the future of America—it's not going to be about attacking anyone else on this stage," he said. "I will continue to have tremendous admiration and respect for Governor Bush." It sounded like a eulogy.

The next day, Rubio appeared on six network- and cable-news shows and attracted three-quarters of a million



*"You'd better come up with something that will sell—or else. I hope that was helpful."*

# If Rick Had Been a Building Contractor



*"Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life."*

dollars in donations online. Then came the mother lode. On October 30th, Paul Singer, the hedge-fund billionaire, who donated more money to Republican candidates and causes last year than anyone else in America, sent a letter to dozens of donors, encouraging them to help raise money for Rubio, calling him "perfect for this moment" and the best choice to "navigate this complex primary process, and still be in a position to defeat Secretary Clinton in November 2016." Rubio had been courting Singer for weeks.

A few days later, I met Rubio for breakfast in New York, at a restaurant in the Hyatt in Times Square. He arrived at seven-thirty, with two staff members, and slid into the booth. He ordered a cappuccino, and then called after the waitress, "Can I get a double shot of espresso in it?" He looked tired. He was trying to maintain a semblance of a routine: six hours of sleep, a gym visit for "anything that gets your heart rate up for thirty minutes," a morning call to his kids on the way to school, and an uninterrupted block of time at home with his family on Sundays.

Half an hour earlier, Rubio had been

on "Good Morning America," talking about his finances, but the story seemed to be dying down—there weren't many Americans who cared.

I suspected he might have more difficulty defusing concern that he is becoming indebted to powerful donors—some of the very same "people that can afford to influence the government," whom he disparaged in his speech at St. Christopher. More than four in five Americans—an equal share of Republicans and Democrats—believe that money plays too large a role in political campaigns, according to a New York Times/CBS News poll released in June. While Rubio was getting help from Singer, and perhaps Adelson, a nonprofit group called the Conservative Solutions Project—which, by law, can conceal the identities of its donors—was running millions of dollars' worth of ads promoting him, more than any similar group devoted to a Presidential candidate.

I asked Rubio if he thinks Americans will worry that he is beholden to big backers. He shook his head, and said, "I've never had a single donor come to me and say, 'I'll support you, but only if you support this initiative.'"

I said that sounded like a false standard, an unrealistic description of political influence. He continued, "People may not believe this, but the vast majority of big donors in America don't really ask a lot of government—at least on our side of the aisle. What they really, largely, want is to be treated fairly and be left alone." He added, "I've never changed any item on my agenda in search of a supporter."

On several issues, Rubio has taken a position that suits the faithful in the primaries but is guaranteed to repel voters in a general election. His most obvious vulnerability is on abortion. In the first Republican debate, Rubio said that his opposition to abortion extends to cases of rape or incest—a position at odds with that of more than three-quarters of Americans. Axelrod told me, "No exceptions is a position so extreme that no Republican candidate has ever held it. Presidential races are defined by moments. Maybe he will try to amend that position, but in the age of video it's hard to extinguish a declarative statement like that." When I asked Rubio about it, he said, somewhat confusingly, "Look, I personally believe that all life is worthy of protection, and therefore I don't ever require, nor have I ever advocated, that I won't support a law unless it has exceptions." After some more twists and turns, I sensed that we had reached the line he plans to use in a general election: "My goal is to save as many lives as possible, and I'll support anything that does that. Even if it has exceptions."

During the third debate, he had said that it was time to end an immigration system based largely on family ties. "That's the way my parents came, legally, in 1956, but in 2015 we have a very different economy. Our legal-immigration system from now on has to be merit-based." I told him that people have said that he is, in effect, pulling up the ladder after his family has reached safety.

"I understand the argument," he said, but he thought it was unfair. "In 1956, two people with barely any command of English, who had no formal education of any sort, were able to find jobs. In the twenty-first century, those jobs are scarce. . . . So I don't think, for the country, it makes sense

to continue to allow people to immigrate here in large numbers who we know do not have the skills or the education they need to succeed economically. It's just a change based on new economic reality."

I asked what he thought would have happened to his parents if they had faced the system he is proposing. "It's not clear what would have happened to them," he said. "We can all get into hypotheticals about what would have happened two hundred years ago, or one hundred years ago, or fifty years ago, when somebody's relatives came, but the world changes, and our policy has to keep pace with that." He seemed dissatisfied with that answer, and went on, "Unlike most of the other people running, I live surrounded by immigration. My family are all immigrants. My kids go to school with kids who are immigrants. So this is not a theoretical issue for me. I live it personally. And it is hard. You know the stories of people that are here illegally, but it's heartbreaking, because they came because they don't want their daughter to be abducted by a drug gang in Central America. But the flip side of it is, every country in the world has immigration laws. And America has to have immigration laws, and if you don't enforce them you don't have laws. So this notion that somehow to be compassionate you have to be lawless is something I don't buy, and I think most Hispanics don't buy it."

Rubio's campaign faces a range of tactical questions—Does he have the organization to win an early state? Will he lose his home state to Trump? Could Cruz win with only conservative and evangelical voters?—but the larger question will be harder to solve: Rubio has succeeded in politics by straddling as many positions as possible. He is the Catholic at the Protestant church, the quarterback of both teams, the *joven viejo*. But it isn't clear that he can continue to do that and also be as bold as he would need to be to alter the Presidential prospects of the Republican Party in a changing country.

Since entering the primary, he had redoubled his language about enforcement. In October, he co-sponsored a bill that would punish "sanctuary" cities—localities that have objected to

enforcing federal immigration laws. Democrats dubbed it the Trump-Rubio Sanctuary Cities Bill.

If Rubio makes it to the general election, some of his positions are unlikely to budge. Hillary Clinton favors an activist American foreign policy, and Rubio mentioned to me that he was rereading "The Last Lion," by William Manchester. He said, "It's this book about Churchill. It's really long. Only because I'm just so fascinated by the leadership he provided." He went on, "Churchill was a guy who was largely ignored through much of the thirties as a warmonger, and a guy that was crying wolf, and Chamberlain was this heroic figure that was going to achieve peace in our time by diplomacy. And I think, in many cases, we're kind of at a similar moment, where many of us, including myself, are warning about dangers that are percolating around the world and what they could turn into. Whether it's Iran, Russia, China, North Korea, or radical Islam."

**I**n retrospect, those were the final moments of a phase in the Presidential campaign: when Islamic State militants assaulted Paris on November 13th, the candidates lurched away from talk of taxes and Wall Street regulations to face questions of national security. Jeb Bush, after straining, for months, to distance himself from his brother's invasion of Iraq, said, "We should declare war" on the Islamic State, and called for the deployment of American troops "without their hands tied." In a Democratic debate on the day after the attacks, Clinton said that the Islamic State "cannot be contained—it must be defeated." She declined to identify the threat as "radical Islam," saying that the term was "painting with too broad a brush" and risked alienating allies in the Muslim world.

Rubio held up that point as a flawed gesture of diplomacy. "I don't understand it," he said on ABC's "This Week," the next day. "That would be like saying we weren't at war with Nazis, because we were afraid to offend some Germans who may have been members of the Nazi Party but weren't violent themselves." It was a shrewd reply—the cool placement of safety over diplomacy—that nevertheless

avoided Bush's sharp turn toward war.

But in reaching for a broad rhetorical vision Rubio presaged an instinct for aggressive intervention. "This is a clash of civilizations," he told ABC. "There is no middle ground on this. Either they win or we win." It was the politics of absolutes, a vocabulary that harks back to the with-us-or-against-us logic of an earlier era. Even George W. Bush disavowed the clash-of-civilizations argument. Rubio stopped short of specifying how many troops he wants to send to the Middle East, but he left no doubt that he believes such action is unavoidable. In an article that Rubio wrote for *Politico*, he said that the United States should "provide direct military support to Sunnis and the Kurds if Baghdad fails to support them." He also called for no-fly zones in Syria, for grounding Bashar al-Assad's Air Force, and for the establishment of "safe zones" to "stem the flow of refugees and provide a place to train and arm rebel fighters." He said that he would "oppose Russia and Iran" in their efforts to buttress Assad's regime.

In one of our conversations, I asked Rubio if his instinct for intervention was out of step with a generation that is exhausted by war and confrontation, young men and women who have come of age in the years since September 11th. He responded instantly: "We're not Luxembourg. We're the United States of America—the highest-profile, most important, most influential country in the world." He went on, "And we may ignore problems that exist far away, but those problems don't ignore us. America, in the world today, is the only nation capable of convening collective action."

Barely two months before the first Iowa caucus, the debates about national security and immigration were converging in ways that Rubio seemed well positioned to exploit. In the days after the Paris attacks, more than thirty governors said that their states would resist the resettlement of Syrian refugees. Rubio, as he so often does, found a way to embrace two sides of a painful question, expressing both empathy and tough-mindedness. He said of the refugees, "It's not that we don't want to—it's that we can't." ♦