Bobby Jindal, All American (Esquire Article)

Esquire ^ | September 19, 2008 | Mike Sager

Posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 1:44:12 AM** by **nickcarraway**

Being the youngest governor in the country, the first Indian-American governor in history, and the first nonwhite governor in Louisiana since Reconstruction are the least of the things that make Piyush Jindal different.

The thirty-seven-year-old Republican governor of Louisiana walked across the set of The Tonight Show with the bashful aplomb of a spelling-bee champion. The longish, spidery fingers of his right hand, often employed to tick off the points of a complex answer or multipart plan, were extended in anticipation of his first televised meeting with Jay Leno. Bobby Jindal's left hand was buried instinctively in the pants pocket of his navy-blue suit, waist 28, one size up from the boys' department, a delicate physiognomy inherited, along with his elfin ears and prominent nose, from his mother, Raj Gupta Jindal, a native of Punjab in northern India.

Raj was the daughter of a bank manager. She first came to America on a scholarship to study for her doctorate in nuclear physics at Louisiana State University. She brought along her husband, a love match named Amar Jindal, himself the son of a shopkeep from the bania caste, the only one of the nine children in his family to attend school past fifth grade. At the time the couple immigrated, Raj was three months pregnant with their first son, Piyush. Though the university health plan denied coverage for the birth (it was ruled a "preexisting condition"), the one-month paid maternity leave was awarded as promised--that was the perk that had tipped the scales for Amar, who'd been hesitant to leave home, having worked his way up through the ranks to the respected position of assistant professor of engineering at Punjab University in Chandigarh, the newly dedicated capital city of their home state. At the age of four, according to family lore, precocious little Piyush Jindal would announce to his teacher and all of his friends in school in Baton Rouge--a town of politics and industry on the banks of the muddy Mississippi River--that he would heretofore be known as Bobby, after his favorite character on The Brady Bunch.

Illuminated by a bright follow-spot, accompanied by The Tonight Show band's funky rendition of Sly Stone's "Everyday People," the young governor made his way toward Leno. Jindal (pronounced Gin-dul) was nearing his one hundredth day as the first nonwhite governor of Louisiana since Reconstruction--the first-ever Asian Indian governor of any state. (That's the U. S. Census term for the 2.7 million descendants of the Indian subcontinent living in this country; those who were born in America call themselves South Asians or, more familiarly, desis.) After a mercurial first decade in public service, spent mostly beneath the radar--secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals at age twenty-four, high-level George W. Bush appointee at twenty-nine, U. S. congressman and House assistant majority whip at thirty-three--Jindal had lately been cast as a Republican answer to Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama. Dark skinned, highly intelligent, a harbinger of change, Jindal had been mentioned as a possible running mate for Republican presidential candidate John McCain--the reason for this visit to The Tonight Show.

Known variously as a "wunderkind technocrat," a "speed-talking policy wonk," a "problem solver, not a

politician," a "credit to all South Asian--Americans," "the next Ronald Reagan" (Rush Limbaugh), a "guy who looks in the mirror and sees a white man," and a "scary, ultraconservative religious fanatic in cahoots with the Christian Right," Jindal in his first act as governor called two special sessions of Louisiana's part-time legislature. During those three heady weeks, Jindal fulfilled many of his campaign promises by pushing through dozens of new bills, including an overhaul of ethics laws, tax breaks designed to make the hurricane-ravaged state more attractive to businesses, and an income-tax deduction for parents whose children attend private schools. Crowed an editorial in the New Orleans Times-Picayune: He is "a youthful rising star who generates genuine excitement in a party that's been feeling awfully old and tired lately."

Jindal shook hands warmly with Leno and then turned around in his place before the guest chair and issued the fey little wave customary to politics. His rubbery lips formed a crooked smile, exposing his slightly bucked teeth, which seemed brilliant against the contrast of his skin. To use the argot of the Old South, Jindal's complexion is darker than a brown paper bag. At times--riding with him in his SUV on the way to a press conference in New Orleans to tout his new mental-health-care initiative; or in his helicopter, Pelican One, on the way to a press conference in Shreveport to tout a new workforce-training initiative; or behind his desk in his office in the breathtaking state capitol building, a thirty-four-story art deco monument built by Jindal's distant predecessor, Huey Long, the great populist and iconic corrupt politician whose body lies buried beneath a tall statue of himself in the gardens opposite the Mayan-temple-like entrance--I could have sworn that Jindal was wearing some kind of cover-up or cosmetic to soften his razor shadow, which is very dark, as if an artist had rendered his stubble in charcoal. Oddly, that did not seem to be the case tonight on Leno, as if Jindal had, for some reason, refused the customary television cosmetics, lending to his countenance a somewhat unfortunate Nixonesque swarthiness. Jindal's press secretary, Melissa Sellers, twenty-five, a blond-streaked journalism major from the University of Texas, denied that Jindal uses cover-up. A solid woman in high heels, quick on the draw with both her smile and her middle finger, Sellers had been recently derided by reporters for blocking access to her boss--literally--having performed a sort of perfectly executed moving pick that put the kibosh on any chance for spontaneous questions about the veep talk.

As it was, the state and local media had been complaining about lack of access ever since Jindal took office. For a time, the Baton Rouge Advocate was keeping a printed tally of the number of its requests for interviews he'd turned down. The honeymoon with the legislature was also waning. In the past, Louisiana governors had been more than accessible. That's how it worked in Baton Rouge, a town of hidden staircases and secret tunnels built by a politician who once boasted that he bought other pols like sacks of potatoes. The part-time legislators--who can often be seen dressed in seersucker suits--are housed together for the duration of the session in a historic, pentagon-shaped barracks; as you would expect, the cookouts in the courtyard are legend. (There are actually only four sides to the Pentagon Barracks, built in the early 1800s. The fifth had to be torn down due to construction flaws attributed by some to graft.)

Though Jindal had courted the legislators with ardor during the special sessions, once the regular session started, in late March, he'd stopped answering calls. If you wanted him, you could find him on the news: Speaking at the National Press Club in Washington, D. C., and at the National Rifle Association's Celebration of American Values Banquet in Louisville, Kentucky. Dining at Commander's Palace in New Orleans with President Bush and LSU football coach Les Miles. Visiting McCain's Sedona ranch with the other vice-presidential hopefuls and their wives.

Bobby's wife, Supriya Jolly Jindal, was born in India. They went to the same high school for a period; she once turned him down for a date. She has an undergraduate degree in chemical engineering and an MBA from Tulane; she has also completed all the coursework for a Ph.D. in marketing from LSU. For fun, she said in an interview in the mansion, she does calculus problems. They have three children--

Selia, six, Shaan, four, and Slade, two. Shaan was born with a heart defect and had surgery as an infant. Slade was born precipitously at home in 2006, and Bobby delivered the eight-pound, 2.5-ounce boy himself before the EMTs could arrive; a nurse assisted by telephone.

Now here was Bobby Jindal on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, the glad-handing Mayor of America. "Tell us about your background," Leno said. "First-generation American, correct?"

"Born and raised in Baton Rouge," Jindal said with a distinct drawl. He launched into the story of his parents' journey to LSU. "[My dad] walked uphill going to school . . . and coming back from school," Jindal joked.

"So your parents have an accent?" Leno asked.

The young governor winced, like a bookish kid who's just realized he's wandered into the wrong area of the playground. He looked down into his spidery hands, arranged at the moment as if they were holding an invisible bowl. He searched inside the bowl for the answer to Leno's question.

"My dad more than my mom," Jindal said of the accent. "But my dad, you know . . . none of his brothers or sisters got past the fifth grade. . . . He went all the way to college. That's pretty amazing."

"When you were born . . . did he say--" Leno bobbled his large head, playing to the studio audience. He put on a corny, over-the-top, Apu-from-The-Simpsons accent: "We will name him Bobby!"

The crowd roared.

"Nooooo," Jindal protested, faint though distinct, his chin drooping to his chest, clearly mortified. His hands knit together protectively and fell into his lap. The first time he ran for governor, in 2003--his very first attempt at public office of any kind--Jindal lost in a runoff to Kathleen Blanco (the governor during Hurricane Katrina, which hit in 2005). Four days before the runoff, polls showed Jindal with a comfortable 10-point lead. Then Blanco's campaign started running a television ad featuring a picture of a young, very dark-appearing Jindal with his hair disheveled and sticking up. "Wake up, Louisiana! Before it's too late!" viewers were urged.

By Election Day, Jindal was trailing Blanco by 3 points. He did especially poorly in what they call Bubba Country, the northern part of the state, usually a Republican stronghold. Over the course of the next four years--during which time he successfully ran for a seat in the House of Representatives, raising so much money in the process that he was able to donate to other GOP candidates around the country, ensuring his election as president of the incoming freshman class of congressmen--Jindal visited northern Louisiana, by his own count, more than seventy-seven times. Many of those visits took place on Sundays at small evangelical churches, where he gave testimony about his conversion from a Hindu to a Roman Catholic. Some churchgoers noted that they had never before heard a Roman testify in quite the way Jindal did, casting his own experience in terms similar to that of a born-again fundamentalist. Reporters noted that Jindal had taken to wearing cowboy boots.

In 2007, running in the primary against twelve other candidates (Blanco did not seek reelection), Jindal won with 54 percent of the vote--the first candidate to win an open gubernatorial seat outright since Louisiana adopted its nonpartisan primary system in 1975. This time Jindal carried Bubba Country by a considerable margin. There was even a group called Bubbas for Bobby.

Now Jindal put on a huge, embarrassed smile. Speaking into the reformed bowl of his hands, he bravely

told the story Leno wanted--how he'd taken his name from the youngest of television's three Brady brothers, who lived in a blended family with three blond stepsisters in the idealized suburbs of the American seventies. "It could have been worse," Jindal said, hamming it up, making the best of things. "At the time, if you remember, The Brady Bunch came right before Gilligan's Island."

"You could have been Little Buddy!" Leno quipped.

"There would have been no future for me in politics," Jindal said.

"How did you get interested in politics?" Leno asked. "Dad wants you to be a doctor. And then you go and do the sleaziest profession of all."

"Well, that and Hollywood," Jindal said, not missing a beat, the bookish kid who'd just corrected the asshole teacher.

If Jindal inherited his looks from his mother, he may well have inherited his drive from his father, who reminded his sons every day how lucky they were to live in America.

Amar Jindal grew up in northern India during the chaotic years that followed the partitioning of India and Pakistan. The family lived in a remote farming community that was backward even by Indian standards--the main source of fuel for cooking and heat was dried cow dung. Amar's mother was illiterate. His father was educated to the fifth grade. In time, Amar graduated with a degree in civil engineering from Punjab University. He married a classmate's sister, Raj; she had a master's degree.

The Jindals settled into graduate-student housing near LSU. In the eyes of an immigrant, Louisiana in 1971 was paradise on earth. There were abundant oil and gas reserves, thriving industry, major ports, multiple railroads, jobs aplenty, the guarantee of schooling for all. Amar got a good job with one of the railroads; Raj switched from nuclear physics to the budding field of computer science and was hired by the state of Louisiana as one of its first IT people. (Thirty years later, she is still working in the same department. Technically, Bobby is her boss.)

Jindal remembers his parents always working hard. For a time the family had no car; they rode the bus everywhere. Amar took great pains to be home at night to read to his son before bed, something Bobby now tries to do with his own children. Supriya complains that Bobby's version of monster hide-and-seek gets the kids riled up at bedtime. (All three children sleep together in one room, right next door to the master. You get the picture of a little family camped out in only a few rooms upstairs in a huge old mansion.) After his own bus rides home from work, Amar didn't have quite so much energy. Frequently, it would be he who fell asleep during story time. Bobby would pad out and dutifully report to his mother: Dad's asleep. "I thought I was putting him to bed," Bobby recalls with a smile.

Jindal remembers his father being disappointed with A's--it had to be A-pluses. As a youngster, Bobby competed in tennis tournaments, but later he would turn entrepreneurial, starting a computer newsletter, a retail candy business, and a mail-order software company. He also worked the concessions at LSU football games, and rooting for the Tigers remains a passion to this day. Jindal has said that when he was growing up, there were "several" other Asian Indian families in the Baton Rouge area and that he was raised in a "strong Hindu culture." Because there was no temple in town, the Jindals worshipped at the homes of friends. Jindal has spoken of attending weekly pujas, reading the Vedic scriptures, and making trips back to India to visit relatives. At the same time, he said recently during a conversation in the back of his SUV as he was driven through Baton Rouge, "my parents, and my mom especially, were adamant that, 'Look, we made the decision to come to America, our kids are Americans, they should grow up

fully American.' If you look at our childhood, it was pretty typical of a whole lot of other children's childhoods."

The Jindals lived in a series of apartments for nearly seven years, until the birth of Bobby's younger brother, Nikesh. Today, Nikesh Jindal is a thirty-year-old lawyer in Washington. He went to Dartmouth and Yale--"Quite a shock for a southern boy," he said on the phone recently with a chuckle. Unlike Bobby, he has no southern accent. Nikesh remembers fondly the family's one-story, three-bedroom house in a "small little neighborhood where you knew all the people on the street." When asked if his family ever got together with other Hindu families to worship during holidays, Nikesh, who has never before been interviewed, became flustered. "I'll have to think about it and get back to you on that," he said. (All requests for an interview with Amar and Raj Jindal were declined.)

Bobby Jindal entered Baton Rouge Magnet High School at age thirteen. At the time, the school system in the city was under a controversial desegregation order; while the LSU community lent some diversity, Baton Rouge was still very much a part of the Old South. Jindal said that he never once experienced prejudice as a youth. "Before I went to college, I didn't realize not everybody grew up the way we do in south Louisiana." (The postings on popular desi Web sites often seem at odds with Jindal's own experience, especially from those raised in the South.)

The magnet school attracted the best students, and Jindal was one of the stars. "He always had his eye on, first of all, where he wanted to go, and second, how he was going to get there," said Fred Aldrich, a former teacher. "He was very--I don't want to use the word clever, because that's a cheap word. I think he was very good at analyzing what will work and then going out and doing it."

Around this time, Jindal began questioning his faith. It began when his best friend, Kent, a born-again Baptist, gave him a Bible with his name embossed on the front in gold letters. The two buddies would spend hours in serious religious debate; Jindal delved into both the Bible and the Bhagavad Gita, arming himself with scriptural ammo.

Soon Jindal began dating a girl named Kathy. Cute and blond, she was Catholic. According to Jindal's writings, their relationship began on the top floor of a downtown hotel after a high school dance. That night, in between their attempts to toss quarters into the large ornamental fountain twenty-two stories below, Kathy told Bobby that "she wanted to be a lawyer so she could serve on the Supreme Court and stop the country from killing babies." With Kathy, Jindal attended his first Roman Catholic mass. "I was probably the first teenager who ever told his parents he was going to a party so that he could sneak off to church," he wrote later, in one of a series of essays on his religious awakening he published in a Catholic magazine, the New Oxford Review. A teacher who knew both students in high school remembers that the couple's relationship ended badly due to parental concern on both sides about the differences in their cultures and religions.

By the end of high school, Kent's simple fundamentalism had won out over the saints and rituals of the Romans. The exact moment can be traced to the intermission of a religious musical Jindal attended. The youth minister showed a "crude black-and-white film" depicting the crucifixion. "Suddenly, God was tangible," Jindal wrote. "Seeing Christ's sacrifice convicted me of my sinfulness and my need for a savior. . . . I asked seriously who was I that my Lord should suffer for my sake."

Because he feared the "inevitable confrontation with my very unsympathetic Hindu parents," Bobby simply didn't tell them. He found refuge in his closet, where he studied the Bible by flashlight. In his writings, he would later compare his situation to that of the earliest Christians, worshipping in caves, "hiding from government persecution."

Bobby Jindal settled into his place in the prayer circle on the floor of a classroom at Brown University. It was finals week. An urgent call had gone out to the membership of the UCF--the University Christian Fellowship, an ecumenical group that embraced all denominations, from Pentecostal to Papist. He was carrying a double concentration in biology and public policy: the bio for his dad, who wanted him to be a doctor, the policy for himself--work that could save thousands or millions, he believed, instead of one at a time.

Though he was offered scholarships at other universities, Jindal went to Brown on his parents' dime, primarily because he was accepted into the school's unique Program in Liberal Medical Education, which guaranteed an undergraduate freshman a place in Brown's medical school. "I didn't have a car. We didn't go on vacations. I remember my father and my brother fighting over a hundred-dollar pair of Girbaud jeans. But when it came to college, my parents' attitude was, 'You just find the best school and we'll make sure you can go,' " Jindal said one morning as we drove in his SUV toward a press conference in Lake Charles, where he was touting a new statewide computerized prescription program. Because Bobby felt beholden to his father, he did the double major, twenty hours a semester. He eventually forfeited his place in the PLME program, feeling it wasn't fair to tie up a coveted slot when he was ambivalent. Nevertheless, he would still be accepted into medical school and law school at Harvard and Yale. He'd turn down both to accept a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford, where he'd study public-health policy.

At Brown, Jindal was known as an affable, somewhat nerdy guy with a brilliant mind who liked to talk policy. ("The kind of person who had the three- or five- or ten-point plan for something," recalled one friend.) He had recently converted to Roman Catholicism--the high-church ceremony had been held in Providence in the fall of 1989, his sophomore year. People mostly remember Jindal for studying a lot. He also spent a good deal of time resurrecting and leading the College Republicans--an uphill battle at liberal Brown. Having come of age in the Reagan-Bush era, in a state where the GOP was seen as the party of reform, Jindal embraced his new political identity as wholeheartedly as he had his religious one. Most likely, the conservative beliefs of his spiritual peers and mentors were an influence. So too the traditional American values embraced by his grateful immigrant parents.

On this evening during finals week, the UCF members were gathering to pray for a girl named Susan. For more than a year, Bobby and Susan had enjoyed "an intimate friendship; indeed our relationship mystified observers, who insisted on finding a romantic component where none existed," he wrote later in a remarkably personal essay for the New Oxford Review.

In time, he and Susan "succumbed to pressure from our friends and decided we should not be so emotionally interdependent without a deeper commitment. To be honest, my fears of a relationship and the constraints of a commitment had kept us apart." (Looking back, Jindal told me, it was around this time, hurting from a past breakup, that he first saw what is today his favorite movie, Casablanca. "Here's a movie where the good guy did the right thing, and he didn't get the girl at the end," he said. "I thought that was great, because that's how real life goes.")

Jindal and Susan continued to attend UCF gatherings, albeit separately. One day, Susan seemed particularly down. Jindal invited her to come along with some friends to a Christian concert on campus. Throughout the evening, Susan seemed composed. Then, in the middle of a song, she abruptly left. At a friend's urging, Jindal ran after her.

He found her sobbing uncontrollably outside the auditorium. "Since we had been very careful to avoid any form of physical contact in our friendship, I was not sure how to respond," Jindal wrote. He walked her back to her dorm room. Susan confided that she was awaiting the results of a biopsy on her scalp. The doctor feared it was skin cancer, she told him. She was scared to death.

Jindal reached out from his place in the chair across from her bed and took her hand. He "promised to stand by her forever, to be the rock against which she could lean, to accompany her to the doctor's office and the operating room," he wrote. Later, Jindal sat on the bed next to her. "We were both startled to find my arm around her shoulder, but she asked that I continue to hold her for just a few minutes longer. I happily complied and we embraced her problems away . . . the simple gesture of a hug was enough to bring peace to Susan's heart for one night."

The next day, perhaps afraid of her strong feelings, Susan avoided Bobby. Several uncomfortable weeks passed. Finally, there was a rapprochement. The pair discussed their "true feelings for each other and Susan's upcoming operation," Jindal wrote. Then the subject steered to a different path. Susan was a charismatic Christian. She'd talked before to Jindal about speaking in tongues. Now she began telling him of recent "visions" she'd been having. She described, he would later write, "various odors (which others would later ascribe to the sulfur that supposedly accompanies the devil), sounds, and appearances that both she and her roommate had witnessed."

Overwhelmed, a bit freaked out, Jindal left the room "on some flimsy pretense, made the sign of the cross in desperation, and pleaded with God for Divine assistance."

When he returned, Susan "angrily lashed out at me, telling me she never wanted to talk with me again, since I did not love her . . . I had a vague sense that her anger and tears involved both my inability to care for her and also my inability to understand her recent experiences."

The next day, Susan's older sister flew into town; the prayer meeting was hastily arranged. Despite their hectic finals schedules, many of the sober young Christians made their way to the classroom. Susan was brought in by her sister. She refused to acknowledge Jindal's presence. Songs and prayers and silent meditations were offered. "Suddenly, Susan emitted some strange guttural sounds and fell to the floor. She started thrashing about, as if in some sort of seizure. Susan's sister must have recognized what was happening, for she ordered us to gather around and place our hands on Susan's prostrate body," Jindal wrote.

Jindal tentatively approached. He "placed the edge of my fingertip on her shoulder, as if afraid of becoming infected with the disease that was ravaging her body."

And then, "in a voice I had never heard before or since," Susan yelled out, referring to herself in the third person: "Bobby, you cannot even love Susan."

Jindal withdrew his fingertip, recoiled from the group. The strange voice coming out of Susan launched into a tirade, attacking every member of the UCF by name.

Susan's sister began to chant, "Satan, I command you to leave this woman." The others followed her lead. "Demons to leave in the name of Christ," they chanted.

Jindal huddled against a wall, watching the proceedings. He "desperately wanted it all to end, but could not leave," he wrote. He felt completely stunned, unable even to pray.

Susan's sister began reading biblical passages. Susan responded with curses and profanities. "Mixed in with her vile attacks were short and desperate pleas for help. In the same breath that she attacked Christ, the Bible's authenticity, and everyone assembled in prayer, Susan would suddenly urge us to rescue her. It appeared as if we were observing a tremendous battle between the Susan we knew and loved and some strange evil force."

At last, "the momentum shifted and we now sensed that victory was at hand. . . . With an almost comical smile, Susan looked up as if awakening from a deep sleep and asked, 'Has something happened?' She did not remember any of the past few hours and was startled to find her friends breaking out in cheers and laughter, overwhelmed by sudden joy and relief."

Jindal wrote: "I eventually left the room in a stupor. As I was leaving in a crowd, Susan's sister . . . called my name and asked that I 'commit my nightlife to prayer.' I hardly understood what she meant and was startled that others continued to single me out for attention. I nodded and looked gently at Susan, who thanked me for coming."

Beneath a threatening sky, the Black Hawk assault helicopter touched down in a wheat field in Morganza, in Pointe Coupee Parish, the prop wash setting off a blizzard of Styrofoam meal boxes that had been stacked on the tailgates of pickup trucks where neighbors were offering lunch--gumbo and corn bread, beans and dirty rice; come hell or high water, you always eat well in Louisiana.

Governor Jindal, the commander in chief of the state's Air and Army National Guard, stepped into the doorway of the chopper and issued his customary wave. He wore a blue shirt with a button-down collar but no tie; his lips were molded into a thoughtful pose, at once friendly and concerned, like a minister on a house call. His coal-black hair was disheveled and sticking up; he was sporting his cowboy boots. He hopped down onto the churned earth; following closely behind was Major General Bennett Landreneau, the commander of the guard. The two men have been acquainted since they served together under Governor Mike Foster, when Jindal was the boy-wonder secretary of the Department of Health and Hospitals. (During his tenure, Jindal became well-known for trimming $400 million in Medicaid expenses; from there, he was named director of a bipartisan Medicare-reform commission in Washington, then head of the statewide University of Louisiana system, and then assistant secretary in the Department of Health and Human Services under the younger Bush.)

During the bumpy, thirty-five-mile chopper ride northwest from Baton Rouge, General Landreneau had brought Jindal up to speed on the operations at Morganza, his voice crackling through the headset intercoms. With the rains and flooding up north in Missouri and Ohio, the Mississippi River had risen past flood stage and was still rising. For the past thirty-six hours, a crew of fifty laborers--local farmers, flood-district employees, inmates from the Avoyelles Correctional Center, and National Guard troops--had worked side by side, using backhoes to fill and position hundreds of bags donated by a seed company. As it happened, this wasn't the first time the guard had been called out to help Morganza, population seven hundred. Twenty-five years earlier, they'd come on a similar mission. Some of the farmers on site today were there the last time, too, the general added.

He further explained that the four-by-four-by-four, cube-shaped sandbags being used in the operation--originally intended to transport large quantities of seed--were much larger and more effective than the traditional kind. They were being placed in two courses along a two-mile section of earthen berm, known locally as the Potato Levee, that separates the swollen river from five thousand acres of rich Delta farmland. If the river were to spill over, this low patch of land would be lost to crops for at least a year--ruinous to the families affected. The higher the water rose, the softer the ground on the other side of the levee was becoming. According to the Army Corps of Engineers, the workers needed to be out within twenty-four hours or the backhoes would become mired in the muddy liquefied soil. Complicating matters was the forecast: Rain was on the way.

Jindal climbed to the top of the levee, where a crowd was milling about. It was nearing lunchtime; you could smell the food mixing in the air with the smells of earth, river, mold, and diesel fuel. Jindal had not yet eaten today

except for drinking a mini can of Diet Coke. Jindal rarely eats lunch, or much of anything else, according to his staff, a wholesome group of twentysomethings, some Christian, some South Asian, some blond. Nor does Jindal ever seem to have to urinate. Finding a chance to stop sometimes becomes a problem for his brawny security guards, who are older than he and less stout of bladder.

A man from one of the farm families was introduced to Jindal. Fortyish, he wore a baseball cap. His blue jeans were tucked into his cowboy boots. "We appreciate all your support," the farmer said.

"What are you growing out here?" Jindal asked, nodding in the direction of the fields.

"We run 50,000 bushels of soybeans, 100,000 bushels of wheat, 280,000 pounds of cotton."

"I hear it's supposed to be a real good year--if we can stop the water," Jindal said.

"We couldn't do it without ya'll's help," the farmer's friend said. He was dressed the same as the first, but he was overweight, most of it in the gut.

"There was no hesitation," Jindal said modestly. "They say there are some folks out here that remember twenty-five years ago when this happened before."

"I was here then," the first farmer said, pleased that the governor remembered. "We were on the crew," the second farmer said proudly. "The National Guard was here and with us every step of the way."

"We'll do better this time," Jindal said, taking the tone of a grad student, his hands forming the familiar bowl, his brown eyes searching in there for the right words. "Part of the problem was that last time, they didn't have the size bags we got today. These four-by-four-by-fours are amazing."

The two farmers looked down at their diminutive brown governor with the sort of expression you might see on a couple of neighbor men when a third of their number, a brainiac with hairy forearms and a utilitarian watch, drives home one evening in an expensive new truck. This guy gets it, their ruddy faces seemed to say. Two more Bubbas for Bobby.

Jindal put his hands on his narrow hips and twisted around some to survey the swiftly flowing river. The waterline had risen twenty-five feet since yesterday, he'd been told. Bringing a hand up to shade his eyes, he panned toward the land side of the levee--the fertile earth, the backhoes, the several half-filled four-by-four-by-fours, the pickup trucks serving tailgate lunch, the panoply of uniforms and prison jumpsuits and baseball caps and ponytails. "All this brings out the best in the state, it really does," the young governor said wistfully.

"To see people helpin' one another," agreed the first farmer.

Just then, the wind picked up. Jindal squinted ominously toward the darkening sky. "Let's just hope this is the worst thing we have to deal with," he said, combing his flyaway hair back into place with his spidery fingers. "Pray for a quiet hurricane season."

"Yes, sir," the farmers chanted in unison.

On Father's Day Bobby Jindal took time out from his family to appear remotely on Face the Nation. Sitting in for host Bob Schieffer was CBS congressional correspondent Chip Reid, a handsome news-Ken in a blue-and-white patterned tie. Jindal appeared on split screen, wearing a red repp tie; as always,

the knot was a little loose, exposing the top button.

Five months into his term, Jindal was continuing his lap through the public arena. After his two effective special sessions, an unusually aggressive regular session of the state legislature was coming to an end. Among the bills that passed: A requirement that employers allow workers to bring guns onto company parking lots. An authorization to perform chemical castrations on convicted sex offenders. A renaming and restructuring of the labor department (part of Jindal's workforce-improvement plan). A "Teacher Bill of Rights," guaranteeing a safe environment in the schools (more Jindal; teachers had been leaving the state in droves). A voucher plan that allocated $10 million to pay the tuitions for inner-city children to attend private and parochial schools.

It also included a 123 percent pay raise for legislators--a bit of self-dealing that Jindal, reluctant to start a pissing match with the legislature, had promised not to veto; a week later, after a public outcry, he would reverse course and kill the raise, calling his original promise "a mistake."

And then there was the "Science Education Act." Critics said the bill, passed by both houses, opened the door for teaching creationism and intelligent design in Louisiana public schools. Jindal said he would sign it when it reached his desk.

And so it was that Jindal was facing the nation. Chip Reid gave him a glowing introduction. "[Some] Republicans say you are the future of the Republican party," Reid said.

For the next seven minutes, in response to a series of softball questions, Jindal spoke fluently in his rat-a-tat style, sounding exactly like the kind of young, brilliant, and energetic person you wish was running the city, the state, the country, the entire planet. As he does whenever he speaks, Jindal gave the impression that he could accomplish all the great stuff he was suggesting, no problem, and still get home in time to play Monster/Daddy hide-and-seek with his kids.

He rejected as divisive the notion of "identity politics." It doesn't matter what color or gender you are, he said; it matters what kind of job you do. He called Barack Obama the best speaker he has heard since Ronald Reagan. He said the Republican party had gotten away from its traditional strengths, that it had become a victim of its own success: Wholesale change was needed. Luckily, he was proud to say, America has the choice of two great candidates for president. While he himself was supporting McCain, he said, he urged the American people to go to the polls in November and "vote for one without voting against the other."

Then, with a slight head bobble of his own, Reid changed the subject. "Let me make a sharp turn here to a different issue, an issue that has raised some controversy," he said ominously.

Jindal's lips molded themselves into grim determination. He knew what was coming.

"You were a biology major in college," Reid said. "And you support the teaching of intelligent design in schools. Do you have doubts about the theory of evolution?"

Since the beginning of his public career, Jindal has spoken openly of his faith and his socially conservative views. He is against abortion, even in cases of rape and incest. He is against stem-cell research, for private- and parochial-school vouchers, for teaching intelligent design. He and Supriya have a covenant marriage. His closest advisor and chief of staff, Timmy Teepell, thirty-three, is a product of home schooling. Teepell never went to college. For most of his life, he has been a foot soldier for the conservative movement, working his way up to deputy political director for the Republican

National Committee before hooking up with Jindal, after Bobby's first gubernatorial loss. Teepell wouldn't take the job with Jindal without first having his wife meet Bobby. They made it a foursome for lunch and have been close ever since.

"A couple of things," Jindal said now without hesitation. You couldn't see his fingers but you knew he was ticking them off. "One, I don't think this is something the federal or state government should be imposing its views on local school districts . . . Secondly, I don't think students learn by us withholding information from them."

"But how about you personally," Reid pressed. "Where do you stand personally on the issue?"

"I personally think that life, human life and the world we live in, wasn't created accidentally," Jindal said matter-of-factly. "I do think that there's a creator. I'm a Christian. I do think that God played a role in creating not only earth but mankind. . . ."

So it went for the next couple of minutes, Jindal explaining in some detail his true and honest feelings about his faith. Then it was time for a commercial.

"O-kaay," Reid said, closing out the governor somewhat abruptly. Clearly, Reid had heard a little more about God this morning than he felt comfortable with. His dubious tone was reminiscent of the comedian David Spade, as if to say: Time to go, nutjob.

Jindal stared into the camera, unblinking. The man who may well be the most accomplished young political figure in the country looked like someone who'd just survived a rollover in the family SUV.

He seemed to take stock for a moment--all limbs were still operational. He managed a sort of spastic half smile. You could tell what he was thinking: I'll be back here again.

TOPICS: Culture/Society; Front Page News; Politics/Elections; US: Louisiana
KEYWORDS: jindal; louisiana

1 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 1:44:13 AM** by **nickcarraway**
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **View Replies**]

To: **nickcarraway**

that make Piyush Jindal different.

the bashful aplomb of a spelling-bee champion.

he longish, spidery fingers of his right hand

his navy-blue suit, waist 28, one size up from the boys' department

his elfin ears and prominent nose

his one hundredth day as the first nonwhite governor of Louisiana

Dark skinned

a “guy who looks in the mirror and sees a white man,”

“scary, ultraconservative religious fanatic in cahoots with the Christian Right,”

issued the fey little wave

His rubbery lips formed a crooked smile, exposing his slightly bucked teeth, which seemed brilliant against the contrast of his skin.

Jindal’s complexion is darker than a brown paper bag.

I could have sworn that Jindal was wearing some kind of cover-up or cosmetic to soften his razor shadow, which is very dark

lending to his countenance a somewhat unfortunate Nixonesque swarthiness.

He looked down into his spidery hands

I had to stop there, what a bunch of codeword crap....

2 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 1:55:40 AM** by **icwhatudo** (PALIN VID=========>>>>>http://www.overstream.net/view.php?oid=n1ronxelmtin<+++++++++)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 1** | **View Replies**]

To: **nickcarraway**

Any clues as to what the other figure in the painting with Jindal is about?

3 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 1:59:59 AM** by **skr** (I serve a risen Savior!)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 1** | **View Replies**]

To: **nickcarraway**

Piyush Jindal

I guess we now have the media's permission to use the name "Barack Hussein Obama".

4 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 2:00:45 AM** by **Darkwolf377** (Fearing an Obama planet :()
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 1** | **View Replies**]

To: **icwhatudo**

When Jindal runs for higher office, the media will go after him just like they’re going after Palin. Eric Cantor too because he’s Conservative and Jewish.

5 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 2:06:45 AM** by **SMCC1**
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 2** | **View Replies**]

To: **skr**

It's supposed to be a demon inspired by 16th century German painter Hans Baldung Grien's depiction of Adam, that the painter added.

Please don't ask me why.

6 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 2:12:29 AM** by **nickcarraway**
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 3** | **View Replies**]

To: **Darkwolf377**

I suspect we'll hear the Brady Bunch bit every chance they can trot it out. "Hussein" is a reminder of terrorists whereas an Indian name, if it is recognized as such, doesn't have that negative connotation.

7 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 2:17:15 AM** by **skr** (I serve a risen Savior!)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 4** | **View Replies**]

To: **icwhatudo**

You missed:

Nor does Jindal ever seem to have to urinate.

What a thoroughly creepy writer.

8 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 2:45:02 AM** by **untenured**
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 2** | **View Replies**]

To: **icwhatudo; nickcarraway; All**

JMHO : This seems to be a wanna-be-a-hit-piece on Bobby,,,

He is OK by me these days,,,

We had to give him a spankin' a few months ago but all

is fine now,,,

Instate matter,,,

We still have some work to do about spending Money,,,

Bobby has been a very good "General" with these hurricanes.

9 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 3:16:37 AM** by **1COUNTER-MORTER-68** (THROWING ANOTHER BULLET-RIDDLED TV IN THE PILE OUT BACK~~~~~)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 2** | **View Replies**]

To: **nickcarraway**

"When you were born . . . did he say--" Leno bobbled his large head, playing to the studio audience. He put on a corny, over-the-top, Apu-from-The-Simpsons accent: "We will name him Bobby!"

I'd love to see the day Leno grows a pair big enough to try this with Batak Obama, using a corny, over-the-top stereotypical black accent. And I remember that Rosie O'Donnell seems to think making fun of Chinese accents is acceptable. Why is it liberals have no problems mocking the accents of Indians and Chinese?

10 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 3:31:20 AM** by **AnotherUnixGeek**
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 1** | **View Replies**]

To: **icwhatudo**

Nasty. The article is racist. Especially the quote about him looking in the mirror and seeing a white man. Since when do any of us need to look in a mirror and see what race we are screaming at us. It is like for the writer what race you are makes a huge difference. The article is written extremely yuckily. Reminds me of Hitler's interpretation of jews.

11 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 4:13:32 AM** by **Bellflower** (A Brand New Day Is Coming!)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 2** | **View Replies**]

To: **nickcarraway**

PALIN / JINDAL 2012

12 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 4:44:53 AM** by **Ranald S. MacKenzie** (Its the philosophy, stupid.)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 1** | **View Replies**]

To: **nickcarraway**

Instead of detailing his eating and urinating habits, I wish the author would have told what happened to Susan. I couldn't care less about the size of his bladder - I wanted to know the results of the biopsy.

The author's transition from page 3 to page 4 was as smooth as a right angle (I had to hit the back button to make sure I hadn't skipped the last paragraph on page 3) and his bias was clearly anti-Jindal (I envisioned Charlie Gibson, with his glasses, looking down on Jindal). I only continued reading, because Jindal is my governor. If I didn't know better, I'd have thought the author was describing someone unfamiliar to me (with his negative, wimpish adjectives).

Anyway, thanks for the article.

13 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 5:24:10 AM** by **Creme Brulee**
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 1** | **View Replies**]

To: **Creme Brulee**

I naturally assumed there was a page missing in the excerpt, because the transition was down right bizarre.

14 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 5:35:41 AM** by **Truthsearcher**
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 13** | **View Replies**]

To: **nickcarraway**

Crappy article, but Jindal stands out in spite of it. His accomplishments are undeniable, as are his hard work, intelligence and honesty. Young Republicans like Bobby Jindal and Sarah Palin give me hope for the future of America.

Palin/Jindal 2012!

15 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 7:22:17 AM** by **Max in Utah** (A nation can survive its fools, and even the ambitious. But it cannot survive treason from within.)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 1** | **View Replies**]

To: **nickcarraway**

Thank you for the information. Apparently Esquire's negative article needed a negative image to go with it.

16 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 12:37:31 PM** by **skr** (I serve a risen Savior!)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 6** | **View Replies**]

To: **AnotherUnixGeek**

Most Chinese and Indian folks here in NJ are libs (in terms of voting, not in lifestyle) but don't protest like a certain other group of people do when comedians do poor impersonations of their accents.

17 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 12:56:09 PM** by **Clemenza** (PRIVATIZE FANNIE AND FREDDIE! NO MORE BAILOUTS!)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 10** | **View Replies**]

To: **nickcarraway**

The one thing I really, really don't like about Bobby Jindal ...

... is that he's not running for President this year.

18 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 1:03:40 PM** by **Campion**
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 1** | **View Replies**]

To: **AnotherUnixGeek**

Why is it liberals have no problems mocking the accents of Indians and Chinese?

Perhaps its because Indians and Chinese actually work and don't look for handouts? And because for these two groups, family is all important?

19 posted on **Monday, September 22, 2008 1:50:54 PM** by **Cronos** ("Islam isn't in America to be equal to any other faith, but to become dominant" - Omar Ahmed, CAIR)
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 10** | **View Replies**]

To: **AnotherUnixGeek**

"Why is it liberals have no problems mocking the accents of Indians and Chinese?"

Because the upward mobilty of these groups have been especially visible. This validates something that

the U.S. takes particular pride in.

The treatment accorded Bobby Jindal by this “Mike Sager” guy is a lot like the rabid reaction of the liberal press to Sarah Palin. And don’t forget what Clarence Thomas got dragged through. When a woman or a member of a minority makes it big without being patronized by the Dems, liberals react as if they’ve been betrayed.

20 posted on **Tuesday, September 23, 2008 1:30:21 AM** by **haroldeveryman**
[**Post Reply** | **Private Reply** | **To 10** | **View Replies**]

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