

After Goldwater, the . . .

## Origins of Dissolution

John C. Meyer

Surveying the political scene today one finds fragmentation and disorder on all sides, yet only six years ago the Liberal Establishment was fresh from its greatest triumph, having united Liberal Republicans, trade unionists, white ethnic groups, Negroes, academicians, and even radicals for the defeat of Barry Goldwater. But in the nature of that victory, the discerning eye could see the shape of things to come. It was not a victory for a new coalition espousing a new program, as that of Franklin Roosevelt, but a negative victory. It was a victory for an anti-Goldwater coalition made possible by a campaign of fear and distortion, run not only by the Democrats but also by the media themselves, before which anything the 1970 Nixon-Agnew campaign has been accused of pales into insignificance.

The breakup of such a coalition was inevitable, but it did not simply return American politics to the status quo. With the 1964 election out of the way the growing tensions within the Democratic Party were free to emerge. As it had to face the existential consequences of its theories of half-hearted struggle with Communism abroad and social engineering at home, the Liberal Establishment itself became divided.

However the first split in the anti-Goldwater coalition, that of the radicals, black and white, occurred by the spontaneous choice of these radicals, and so soon after the election it cannot be considered a result of Great Society policies. But it was a result of liberalism, particularly as manifested in the rhetoric and action of the Kennedy administration. Both these strands of radicalism feed on such New Frontier ideas as the "revolution of rising expectations" (often deliberately created both at home and abroad); both are deeply rooted in the attitudes and methods of the civil rights movement.

The liberal intellectuals around Kennedy did not understand that the principle of civil disobedience, though it may occasionally be moral for a few highly disciplined individuals, is destructive of democracy and incompatible with the maintenance of a civilized order over the long term. It is destructive of democracy because the very keystone of democracy is the idea that everyone must respect the results of the decision-making process, and that if one's side loses, one must wait until next time. Demands for instant perfection -- "freedom now" -- usually cannot be satisfied even when the objective sought is inherently legitimate; those who expect such demands to be satisfied completely disable themselves from responsible participation in actual democratic processes which are the best we have, and in many cases the best we are ever likely to have.

Civil disobedience is incompatible with the maintenance of any civilized order,

because it has an inherent tendency to spread -- from the more sophisticated to the less, and from the supporters of one cause to the supporters of all causes. We have already fully experienced the results of the first of these phenomena, but the second has yet to run its full course. True, we are afflicted with Women's Lib, but the opponents of such leftist causes have yet to take it up. If civil disobedience is a legitimate part of the decision-making process, why shouldn't they take it up, and if it is not, then why is it allowed to affect the decisions actually made in our society?

Until 1965 radicalism was not a significant political phenomenon. In that year the Black Power and student radical movements emerged with startling suddenness. Both retained the idea of disobedience to an "unjust" authority, but discarded, or relegated to the tactical plane, the idea of non-violence. Both movements rejected liberal methods, and at least some liberal goals. The Black Power movement led both directly and indirectly to Watts, Newark, and Detroit; student radicalism led to Berkley, Columbia, and San Francisco State. The Black Power movement was made possible by liberals who told Negroes that society owed them whatever they wanted and that they should blame society, not themselves, for all their ills; the student movement was made possible by liberal professors telling students that the American system is so rotten that they are justified in doing whatever is necessary to change it.

While radicalism was growing, liberals became progressively more split, with two groups appearing -- what we may call left, or radical-liberals and center-liberals. The former, concentrated especially in education and the media, became dovish and at least apologists for Black Power; the latter concentrated especially in the governmental, corporate, and union bureaucracies, were more committed to integration and the middle (Johnson) course in Vietnam.

These divisions continue to be reflected in the liberal approach to defense and to the law and order issue. Even when things go to extremes and such cherished liberal values as academic freedom and free speech are under attack from the radicals, the liberals are usually unable to take a strong stand without leadership from outside their own ranks, and even when they do, there are always some who side with the radicals.

This same period saw another, not strictly political, phenomenon, that is, the emergence of the "counter-culture." The term "hippie" and the wide-spread phenomenon to which it refers both became current only in 1965. The same year saw the emergence of the drug cult on campus which has done more than any other single factor to set the campus in opposition to the world outside, and which, of course, tends to bring them in conflict with the law.

"Turn on, tune in, drop out" is just as revolutionary a message in its own way as "burn, baby, burn", and it is far more acceptable to most of its potential audience. It is a rejection of self-discipline, reason, and reality for self-indulgence, irrationality, and illusion. If those who are devotees of the counter-culture simply "did their thing" it might be annoying, but, as believers in individual freedom, conservatives might merely adopt an attitude of tolerance toward them. However, they are wont to "do their own thing" with a disregard of the right (especially property rights) of others who do not happen to share their proclivities. Furthermore, having no commitment to the American, constitutional system, and only a vague, generally left-oriented system of values, they are easily led back into the political arena.

It is but one short step from the non-political hippie to the Abbie Hoffman Yippie, or the nihilist-anarchist Weathermen--or for that matter the Charles Manson-type criminal. When people speak of rejection of "middle-class values" it would be well to remember that, while they may start with sexual taboos, marijuana, and motivation toward material success, there is no basis either in reason or experience to expect the process of rejection to stop short with these values. Rather, history would seem to teach us that many will go on to reject the entire system of self-restraint which civilization imposes on the individual, leaving the natural man, otherwise known as the savage, free and unrestrained.

I believe it was this coming cultural revolution which Goldwater was trying to warn us about when, toward the end of the 1964 campaign, he began to emphasize the "breakdown of morality" in America. At the time I thought it was a false issue, but years later when I was engaged in the struggle with the radicals at Columbia, I remembered his words and knew he had seen deeper and farther than I.

The liberal reaction to the cultural revolution is even more confused and ambiguous than their reaction to the political revolution. Many try to be "with it", while others serve on commissions to study it. Being relativists they cannot say it is bad, and being believers in Progress, they cannot be against the newest trend.

What has happened is that 1964 was the last victory of the Liberal Establishment, because liberalism itself is dying. However, so intertwined is this establishment with the fabric of our society, and so entrenched are liberals in positions of leadership in our society, that the destruction of liberalism threatens to be the destruction of the society itself. This is doubly true because the consequences of liberal policies for the whole society are coming home to roost at the same time that dying liberalism leaves us with a dearth of leadership, moral or political.

So, what should conservatives do? Sit back and say "We told you so; it serves you liberals right; now clean up the mess you have made, or perish in it"? Unfortunately we cannot afford such an attitude, because when the liberals receive their just deserts, it is our cities, our universities, indeed our country which will

be destroyed. We are not utopians; hence we must realize that we can only work with what exists. As conservatives we also know that even a bankrupt leadership is not replaced all at once, except by revolution, which is the worst of all political evils, except tyranny. Therefore, it is our lot to work with and support such liberal institutions as can be saved from the radical destroyers, until the time comes when we are strong enough to take

leadership ourselves through established channels. □

*John C. Meyer studies law at the University of Pennsylvania. He has appeared in Ideas, National Review and Triumph. From 1968 through 1969 he was one of those crazed fascists trying to save the late Columbia University from Liberalism's Darlings.*

## Cover Story

# Brando, Mailer and Liberalism: A Tale of Decline

John Avey

In 1947, Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire" made Marlon Brando a theatrical star. In 1948, the publication of *The Naked and the Dead* made Norman Mailer a literary celebrity, the American left had a third party -- the Progressive Party -- and Liberals scored an amazing political victory when Harry Truman defeated Tom Dewey.

Brando, Mailer, Liberalism: What happened to these three gods of the late nineteen-forties? There was a time when people of taste and intelligence took them quite seriously. Today, at a time when one might have expected Brando to have become sort of an American Olivier and Mailer an authentic successor to Dos Passos and American Liberalism a realistic political alternative for thinking human beings -- what do we have? If you seek an answer to that question, simply go to see the latest Brando film -- or read Mailer's latest "new journalism" piece -- or listen to Charles Goodell. Utter disasters.

It is difficult to explain to those who did not directly experience it the impact Brando and Mailer made during the late forties and early fifties. People who had never been within a thousand miles of the Broadway theater knew of Brando. They had seen his photograph in all the magazines -- the torn teeshirt picture, with Brando folding his well-muscled arms across his chest, scowling into the camera. He was the New Actor -- and America wondered what he would do next.

Mailer didn't make the same kind of direct impact on the American consciousness. For one thing, he had achieved fame by writing a novel -- and there weren't that many Americans then (or today for that matter) interested in somebody who writes books. But this was a different kind of book. It daringly used almost-curse words ("fug") and had explicit sex scenes (explicit for those innocent days). But what was more important was the quality of the writing. Here, at last, was the super-writer of the left that American Liberals had been waiting for since the nineteen-thirties. Here was a young man from Brooklyn (forget about the Harvard part) who exposed the hypocrisy and boredom and fear of army life by telling his story through the

eyes of many kinds of Americans: the white-southern semi-literate; the frustrated Irish-Catholic; the cruel Texan; the Mexican-American who couldn't find his way in Anglo society -- and, on the officer's level, the semi-facist General Cummings and the Liberal Lieutenant Hearn.

Mailer was the writer the left had always said would come. Here was a good, Liberal-minded, progressive young man with his roots, so to speak, in the concrete. He could write like hell and he had all the right -- or is it left? -- kinds of attitudes.

If anyone had been asked to predict a future for these two, it might have sounded something like this: Brando will go to Hollywood and become a star. He will grow in stature as an actor and probably be the leading American actor by 1960.

Mailer will write long, multi-character novels of social protest and become a popular as well as critical success. He will be to the fifties and sixties what Dos Passos and Hemingway were to the twenties.

Such a prediction would have seemed quite safe. There simply were no other young men in the fields of acting or writing who had so completely captured the imagination of the public. Yet, within a few years, Brando began his decline and Mailer never artistically recovered from his second novel, a fiasco titled *Barbary Shore*, which, despite the efforts of the Mailerites to give it some kind of critical standing, is a dreary, unconvincing, pretentious, leftist tract disguised as a novel.

There are those among his admirers who will admit *Barbary Shore* was a disaster but who will claim that his next novel, *The Deer Park*, is a neglected masterpiece, proof of Mailer's great genius, etc., etc. This theory received an extra-critical boost when, allegedly, President Kennedy greeted Mailer at the White House by mentioning *The Deer Park*. Volumes could be written on this scene: a President whose favorite fiction was the James Bond series, having been briefed by his staff to say just the right thing to this distinguished representative of the leftist intellectual establishment . . . ah, the delicious fakery of it all!

Yet President Kennedy was ill-served:

despite the untiring efforts of the Mailerites to make *The Deer Park* seem to be an Important Novel of our Times, it is really a failure. It has only one trouble, but that a fatal one: Norman Mailer has nothing to say. Whatever is good in the book -- the use of the Hollywood milieu as representative of what the author thinks is the worst in American culture -- was done infinitely better by Nathaniel West in *The Day of the Locust*. What is bad about the novel -- the turgid philosophising and the adolescent crush on fashionable leftist attitudes, is all Mailer.

Mailer finally turned his back on fiction and tried social prophecy. Then he tried to become a Certified Public Nuisance. Then he became a routine television talk-show bore, then a wife-stabber, then . . . but why go on? The further he removed himself from the rather simple but believable characters of his first novel, the more absurd his artistic life became. Re-read *The Naked and the Dead* and you wonder how anyone twenty-five years old could have written so well; re-read *Advertisements for Myself* and you simply wonder.

That Mailer has lately received praise and even the Pulitzer Prize for his work does not seem to me to contradict the theory that he is artistically out of gas. Unable to write a good serious novel, he has turned to a less demanding craft, journalism, and, with the help of some trick mirrors and slight-of-hand publicity, made his efforts in the new journalism seem to be a continuation of rather than a break with his work as a creator of fiction. His sycophants in the world of literary criticism have heaped him with praise, but his latest fiction (*An American Dream, Why Are We in Vietnam?*) just isn't very interesting, and I think his books must embarrass him more than anything else. He must realize he has never fulfilled his promise as a novelist and fifteen Pulitzer Prizes won't change that.

What about Brando? He made his first movie appearance in *The Men*, a low-key story of paraplegics. He was sullen, moody, sensitive, and altogether excellent as a crippled soldier. He then repeated his stage success in the film version of *Streetcar*. He was, again, excellent as Stanley Kowalski.

All of this was in the early fifties. From then on he went into a steady and horrifying decline with four exceptions: his very good Antony in *Julius Caesar*; his motorcycle chief in *The Wild One*; his lead in *Viva Zapata*; and his magnificent interpretation of the longshoreman in *On The Waterfront*, a movie which, despite a few overly melodramatic scenes, is one of the few great American films made during the nineteen-fifties.

But what has he done since then? It is all but impossible to remember the names of the films, let alone the roles he played. He has set some kind of world record for making movies that fail to make much or any money for their producers.

He has become addicted to seeing himself as a Christ figure and even *On The Waterfront* was marred by the battered, bloody, look-mom-I'm-a-holy-masochist ending. His career has been a sacrifice to the fashion that a film simply must have some kind of allegorical significance,