

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. □

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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,

preferably related to some fashionable Liberal dogma.

Notice: two gifted young men who begin their careers with enormous popular and artistic success, each of whom becomes, with time, less popular and less artistically successful. In their private and artistic lives, they become obsessed with the fashionable trappings of the American left: "causes" and social significance in his films for Brando and pseudo-philosophical leftist - Freudian - Marxian - you - name - it ravings in and out of print for Mailer. Instead of building on their initial popularity, they decide to become fashionably alienated. They strike poses. They make headlines -- but not for their artistic creativity.

Paralleling their decline is a similar decline in the political fortunes of American Liberalism. The Democratic Party, through which the Liberal establishment makes its wishes known, began to slowly but inexorably lose its historic association with the working class and lower-middle class American just about the time Brando and Mailer were turning their backs on "popular" success. The decline was momentarily halted in 1960, with the help of some gracious Democratic voters of Cook County, Illinois, who so loved John F. Kennedy they voted for him more than once. Yet, within less than ten years, things got so bad that midway through the Presidential campaign of 1968 some polls showed Hubert Humphrey, the ultimate late-forties Liberal, with less than thirty percent of the vote, an astounding political phenomenon.

Liberalism which could once claim to speak for the working man became increasingly alienated from him. In the public mind, the party of Al Smith became the party of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., John Kenneth Galbraith and other assorted Liberal academic zanies, men who mocked the values, openly scorned the lifestyle and derided the intelligence of the average big-city Democratic voter.

It is interesting to note similarities in the manner in which Brando, Mailer and Liberalism declined. All three chose what might be called the road of alienation. Democratic spokesmen began to sound like dime-store Jeremiahs, scolding the nation, demanding great sacrifices for alleged wrongdoing, calling down vengeance from heaven upon the hapless taxpayer who, according to the Democratic leaders, simply wasn't doing enough. It was a political version of Brando and Mailer artistic alienation: to hell with popularity and the masses, it's more fun to preach than to listen.

Thus, Liberalism has become the common scold of national politics. During the past ten years, every time a Liberal opened his mouth, out dropped a complaint about the racial attitudes of the white working class, the tyranny of the police or some other fashionable doctrine of doom and despair. The masochistic tendencies previously noted in Brando's characterizations are evident in almost every major Liberal politician, along with the running-off-at-the-mouth messianic delusions noted in Mailer. A masochistic messianic politician doesn't stand much of a chance with the average voter no matter

how much the intellectual left may love him.

The same is true of actors and writers. It may be tremendously self-satisfying to know that the film critic of *Esoteria Quarterly* just loved your work or that some deranged British critic in the *New York Review of Books* found your latest light-hearted tale of sodomy just three degrees south of the best of Andre Gide -- but it doesn't cut any ice with the people who buy tickets and books.

A psychologist could probably find the cause of this deliberate alienation from the mass audience and the Democrats' suicidal impulse to shove guilt and despair down the throats of an unwilling electorate. Whatever the cause, the result has been the same for Brando, Mailer and Liberalism: a slow slide into decadence and disrepute, a loss of creativity and imagination and a tendency to shower maledictions upon ordinary people for not applauding when their values and interests are ignored or abused.

The decline of Brando and Mailer has not had any great effect on the history of our nation. But the decline of Liberalism is one of the great historical mysteries that



scholars will ponder for years to come. Why did Liberalism die?

Perhaps the secret can be found in an examination of Brando's films and Mailer's books. A comparison of Clark Gable's portrayal of Fletcher Christian in *Mutiny On the Bounty* and Brando's Christian a generation later is revealing. Gable's Christian is virile, confident, optimistic and outgoing; Brando's is unsure, moody, introspective and bewildered. Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* is the representative protest novel of the thirties, yet it is a veritable hymn of praise to the capacity for self-renewal in the United States compared to Mailer's dreary, sullen, vicious portrayal of his country in fiction and non-fiction. A similar comparison of FDR's speeches with those of contemporary Liberal spokesmen shows the same change from supreme self-confidence to doubt, from optimism to pessimism.

Thus the decline of Brando and Mailer parallels a more disastrous and more significant decline in what was once the single greatest ideological force in the free world. Today almost every political observer has noted the movement of the blue-

collar worker and the middle class away from Liberalism. It is a movement which can be seen in politics and in the popular arts. The mass audience -- and the voting public -- just won't endure self-indulgence and cynicism and pseudo-intellectual posturing on the part of artists or politicians. Mailer and Brando have discovered this in art. The Democratic Party would have been wise to study the decline of these two giants of the late forties and early fifties, for in their decline can be seen the same historical process that is now leading the Democratic party to suicide. □

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Abortion

Bradley Warren Evans

Indianapolis attorney, Mr. Daniel Byron, and Notre Dame Law School professor, Dr. Charles Rice, have brought suit in Indiana court asking the court to hand down the finding that an unborn child is a legal person and entitled to protection of his Constitutional rights--a point still undecided by the higher courts.

Their brief states that the unborn child has a life of his own and is not simply a "part of the mother" -- a view held in ancient societies and in our own until the end of the nineteenth century. Recent medical research shows, the brief argues, that a distinct and individual life begins at the moment of conception, in that the genetic components determining the characteristics of the person are decisively established. Medical authorities are cited to show the fetus has distinctive biological status, and that life processes which make him a separate individual begin almost immediately.

Brown County, Indiana in autumn, the Mackinac Bridge during deer season, Colonial Williamsburg in the spring and the Astrodome anytime all have something in common: a lot of people won't see them these days. Take, for example, the 300,000 unborn infants who will be killed by abortionists' knives in New York this year.

Those babies, instead of inheriting the privilege of sucking in the crisp fragrance of the first day of winter, will be cut up, injected with saline solution, vacuumed into a bottle, or suffer any number of ingenious methods of killing cooked up by a society gone mad. Artur Rubenstein and Ludwig von Beethoven were almost aborted. How many geniuses have been shovelled into hospital incinerators? How many morons, indeed, for they were created by no less a Being than were their precocious counterparts?

We have lost our respect for human life. If we don't manage to prevent babies, then we kill them in the womb. And old people? And socially troublesome minority groups?