

~~TIMES-CORE-THUNDHOLD-NORM~~

FROM THE TIMES

Dear Mr Mailer,
 It's a splendidly provocative piece which, no doubt, will stir up as much offence as agreement: a thousand green-inked emails will be aimed at The Times. Thanks for making those modest amendments which I hope clarify and strengthen rather than flatten. Ah, if only all writers were so serene. My point about the final paragraph, which I think got lost over the 'telephone and lost under the office background hum, was I was worried that it might be too elegantly, too obliquely put. I guess I'm too much of a hack and I like my thumpingly vulgar conclusions which tie up the argument neatly, hence my instinct to bring that last par back to white males.

I've underlined those bits that have been changed. Please let me know if I've got confused, or if you want to make any other changes. Once again, thank you.

With best wishes,
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BY NORMAN MAILER

Exeunt: lightning and thunder, shock and awe. Dust, ash, fog, fire, smoke, sand, blood, and a good deal of waste now moves to the wings. The stage, however, remains occupied. The question posed at curtain-rise has not been answered. Why did we go to war? If no real weapons of mass destruction are found, the question will keen in pitch.

Or, if more likely, such weapons are uncovered in Iraq - not a tenth, not a hundredth of what we possess - but, yes, if such weapons are there, it is also likely that even more have been moved to new hiding places beyond Iraq. If that is so, then horrific events could ensue. Should they take place, we can count on a predictable response: "Good, honest, innocent Americans died today because of evil Al-Qaeda terrorists." Yes, we will hear the President's voice speaking before he even utters such words. (For those of us who do not like George Bush, we may as well recognize that putting up with him in the Oval Office is like being married to a mate who always says exactly what you know in advance he or she is going to say, which helps to account for why half of America loves him.)

The key question remains - why did we go to war? It is not yet answered. In the end, it is likely that a host of responses will produce a cognitive stew, which does, at least, open the way to offering one's own notion. We went to war, I could say, because we very much needed a war. The U.S. economy was sinking, the market was gloomy and down, and some classic bastions of the erstwhile American faith (corporate integrity, the FBI, and the Catholic Church - to cite but three) had each suffered a separate and grievous loss of face. Since our Administration was probably not ready to solve any one of the serious problems before them, it was natural to feel the impulse to move into larger ventures, thrusts into the empyrean-war!

Be it said that the Administration knew something a good many of us did not - it knew that we had a very good, perhaps even an extraordinarily good, if essentially untested, group of armed forces, a skilled, disciplined, well-motivated military, career-focused and run by a field-rank and general staff who were intelligent, articulate, and considerably less corrupt than

any other power group in America.

In such a pass, how could the White House not use them? They could prove quintessential as morale-builders to one key group in American life, perhaps the key group: WORDS ADDED HERE:

STARTThe white American male. END If once this aggregate came near to fifty percent of the population, it was, ~~down~~ down to was it now thirty percent? Still, it remained key to the President's political footing. And it had taken a real beating. As a matter of collective ego, the good white American male had had very little to nourish his morale since the job market had gone bad, nothing unless he happened to be a member of the Armed Forces. There, it was certainly different. The Armed Forces had become the paradigmatic equal of a great young athlete looking to test his true size. Could it be that there was a bozo out in the boondocks who was made to order, and his name was Iraq? CHANGES

HERE: STARTIraq had a tough rep, but he was old and a blowhard, and how much moxie could he left ~~inside~~? END CHANGES HERE A choice opponent. A desert war with no caves in sight is designed for an air force whose state-of-the-art is comparable in perfection to a top-flight fashion model on a runway.

So Iraq was chosen. Our good people on high would rush to claim that our putative foe possessed a nuclear threat. Along the way, they presented Hussein as the closet architect of 9/11. Then they declared he ran a nest of terrorists. None of that held up on close examination but it did not have to. We were ready to go to war anyway. After 9/11, and the absence of Osama bin Laden's body in Afghanistan or anywhere else, why not? SLIGHT CHANGES

HERE: BEGINSaddam was now the evil force behind the fall of the Twin Towers END. We would liberate the Iraqis. Wantonly, shamelessly, proudly, exuberantly, one half of our prodigiously divided America could hardly wait for the new war. We understood that our television was going to be terrific. And it was. sanitized but terrific - which is, after all, exactly what network and good cable television are supposed to be.

There were, however, even better reasons for using our military skills, but these reasons return us to the ongoing malaise of the white American male. He had been taking a daily drubbing over the last thirty years. For better or worse, the women's movement had had its breakthrough successes and the old, easy white male ego had withered in the glare. Even the mighty consolations of rooting for your team on TV had been skewed. There was now less reward in watching sports than there used to be, a clear and declarable loss. The great white stars of yesteryear were for the most part gone, gone in football, in basketball, in boxing, and half gone in baseball. Black genius now prevailed in all these sports (and the Hispanics were coming up fast; even the Asians were beginning to make their mark.) We white men were now left with half of tennis (at least its male half), and might also point to ice hockey, skiing, soccer, golf, (with the notable exception of the Tiger) as well as lacrosse, track, swimming, and the World-Wide Wrestling Federation - remnants/and or/ of a once great and glorious centrality. On the other hand, the good white American male still had the Armed Forces. If Blacks and Hispanics were numerous there, still they were not a majority, and the officer corps, (if the tube was a reliable witness), suggested that the percentage of white men increased as one rose in rank to the higher officers. Moreover, we had knock-out tank echelons, Super-Marines, and one magical ace in the hole - the best air force that ever existed. If we cannot find our machismo anywhere else, we can certainly settle in on the interface between combat and technology. Let me then advance the offensive suggestion that this may have been one of the cardinal reasons we went looking for war. We knew we were likely to be good at it. In the course, however, of all the

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→ quick events of the last few weeks, our military went through a WORD CHANGE transfiguration. Indeed, it was one hellion of a morph. We went from a potentially great athlete into a master surgeon capable of operating at high speed on an awfully sick patient. Now, even as the patient is being stitched up, a new and troubling question arises: Have any fresh medicines been developed to deal with what seem to be teeming infections? Do we really know how to treat livid suppurations we were not quite prepared for? Or would it be better to ignore the consequences? Mightn't we keep trusting our great American luck, our faith in our divinely-protected can-do luck? We are, by custom, gung-ho. If these suppurations prove to be unmanageable, or just too time-consuming, may we not leave them behind? We could move on to the next venue, Syria, we might declare in our best John Wayne voice: You can run, but you can't hide. Saudi Arabia, you over-rated tank of blubber, are you out of gas? And Iran, watch it, we have eyes for you. You could be our next real meal. Because when we are feeling this good, we are ready to go, and go again. We must. We have had a real taste. Why, there's a basket-full of billions to be made in the Middle East just so long as we stay ahead of the trillions ADD HERE of debt END ADD that are coming after us.

→ Be it said: the motives that lead to a nation's major historical acts can probably rise no higher than the spiritual understanding of its leadership. While George W. may not know as much as he believes he knows about the dispositions of God's blessing, he is driving us at high speed all the same. CHANGES HERE He is more of a white male by at least an order of magnitude than any other boyo in America. We have this man at the wheel END CHANGES whose most legitimate boast might be that he knew how to parlay the part-ownership of a major-league baseball team into a gubernatorial win in Texas. And - shall we ever forget, - was catapulted, thereafter, into a mighty hymn: All Hail to the Chief!