

1969

Two Speeches from
a Mayoralty Campaign
(and an interview after
the fact.)

much more highly qualified than they have been, and we can use them to better extent.

We feel the situation in this city has to be ventilated. We talk about urban problems in the past. The urban problem now is a color problem. It starts in this city. We think the only way that this can be done is to send everybody to his own room and we'll talk in the morning, but we've got an awfully long night to go through first. And let's ventilate, let's separate, let's have people in control of their own destinies, control of their own police, control of their own education, make this city a state, and later on, somewhere along the line, we can start to mingle. But I see no way for this to continue. This is just insanity and it's going to lead to increased violence, and it's no help. The narcotics thing—you know narcotics, that's the whole game—do you think that these neighborhoods will allow as much narcotics to run rampant as the system now allows? I can't imagine it. I think the people are much better at controlling their own destiny.

With that I think I'm going to step down, except for one thing—you had a class about bookmaking in this room before we arrived; I could bring in a guest lecturer for that anytime you want.

*Speech at John Jay College
(for police.)*

NORMAN MAILER

Well, these are strange times aren't they? Now, I know that most of you feel that to the splendid introduction of me one more term could be added, which is "cop hater." I've had that reputation for years. Whenever it began to die, *Time* magazine would revive it. They would say, "Cop hater Norman Mailer said today that the grass in Prospect Park was not as green as it used to be." And in fact there were years of my life when I was a cop hater. There were years when I hated some of you guys so much it wasn't funny. As recently as three years ago when José Torres was fighting Wayne Thornton at Shea Stadium I was trying to get to his dressing room, and I will confess that I had had about eight drinks before I started, and I was intercepted by a cop in the alley under the stands, and I'm very proud of that day because it was the last time I ever went ape. I'm not really a very strong fellow, but that day I was

so determined to get to José Torres' dressing room that ten cops were holding me and we were moving like a wave back and forth, back and forth. It was the only time in my life I've ever been strong enough to be on even terms with ten cops. Let me tell you, since I'm as yellow as any good cop, no punches were thrown by anyone; just a tremendous number of names went back and forth, mostly from me. New York's finest were finer that day than your humble visionary. Nonetheless, I have, and I admit this frankly, been obsessed as a novelist for years with the character of cops because it seems to me that the one thing nobody ever gives a cop credit for is that he's a very complicated guy, and a good cop is a fantastically complicated guy. In fact I've talked to little left-wing groups, students, student undergrounds, revolutionaries, Black Panthers, and I've argued with them about one thing—I've said to them that you've got to recognize that a good cop is a work of art, and that when you call cops pigs you're always hurting the best cops on the force because you are polarizing them down to the level of the worst cops on the force. The fact of the matter is that while I would not pretend that I consider myself in personality or temperament close to cops or their psychology, nonetheless the proof that I've been obsessed with what is the true nature of a cop is that I made a movie about the police force in a mythical city which was not named, although everybody seemed to think it was New York, a movie called *Beyond the Law*. And it's a pity that the police department never saw it because while there are many who think it was highly critical of the police department, I think it was the best movie ever made about cops, even though many of you may think it was unfair for one reason: which is that the cops in the picture (who were detectives) were as alive as the crooks, which is not something you can say for the average Hollywood film. In the average Hollywood film you guys are nothing but empty pillars of justice. In fact, you are shadowmen. In fact, it's hard I think that the average cop can recognize himself when he sees a cop movie. He says to himself, "Well, that's how those guys out in Los Angeles are, all those state troopers. We're not like that." At any rate, I'll go so far as to say that if there is curiosity in this place to see *Beyond the Law*, you're welcome to see it.

We'll have a showing here if I can talk my distributor into showing it for nothing, which is the basis of this promise.

All right. The introduction over, let me get to the point. Any man who is running for mayor by the fact of that declaration has also declared that he has to take the police seriously. A cop hater cannot be a mayor, a simple cop hater cannot be a mayor. A man who thinks that when a police force is less than its best is hurting every single thing in the city; he cannot conceivably be mayor. So what I've come here today to talk about is the platform we're running on that's going to make sense for practically everybody in this city, including the cops, because as you can gather from my running mate Jimmy Breslin's remarks, he feels, and I agree with him, that you guys have not been getting a fair deal either. We're running on a platform that's improbable: to begin with the fact that we're two amateurs, we have an amateur organization behind us, we have no money, we have been running right into the peak of a great big wave which is that we're running in fun. While I'm happy to talk here today because the one thing you guys know is that nobody who runs for office in this city is running for fun unless he's wearing a wig. I mean, you know, it's not particularly a funny way to spend sixteen hours a day, it's almost like having a double duty every day. But what we're running on are a set of ideas that we feel are good enough to give us an outside chance of winning. We're starting on the outside pole, the outside gate—you can see how much I know about the racetrack—we're starting on the outside gate and we're starting a pole back.

But we think that what we have running for us is not the beauty and the charm of our two splendid personalities, but ideas that are so sound and so sensible that they're going to appeal to everybody across the city. And the first thing we're running on is something that sounds so impossible when we first say it that people think we have to be running in fun because it makes no sense at all, which is to say that we're running on a coalition of the left and the right. And we are doing no less than asking large elements of the left and large elements of the right to each separately blow half their minds so that they can recognize that they have a common interest in the half of the mind that's left. We are running as left-conserva-

tives. Not conservative radicals, not liberal leftists, not whatever you want to call it—we're running as left-conservatives. I won't speak for Breslin because he's never been a man on the left, but maybe he's running as a right-conservative; I don't know. But I, as a man on the left, I'm talking across the board to conservatives and saying that after all these years of thinking about political problems I've come to one conclusion, which is that you conservatives are right about one terribly important matter: that a man has to have control over his own life. He has to be able to shape his own life. He has to be able to work with his own future, and he has to know the immediate result of his work. People begin to get into trouble, people begin to get crazy ideas and go completely out of line when they can't see any product to their work day after day. In fact, there's nothing more frustrating in a man's life than to wake up in the morning with a bright idea and be forced to lose it by noon because he's run into a set of impossible systems that keep him from being able to express any of his dream. You take the worst drug addict in New York, he can wake up in the morning and say, "Hey, baby, I'm going to go to work, I'm going to work today." Of course by noon he's taken a shot because he's run down the steps very quickly. But you can take that obvious example and you can stretch it out over many more subtle examples and recognize that what is true about this city is that the city is less good than the people in it. The people in New York, whatever they are, right or left, are strong people, they're proud people, they're full of fight, full of ideas. Everybody in this city has more ideas than they can keep in their head. And there's no place for these ideas to go because the entire legislative thicket of this city, of the city charter, impedes every honest man, and in fact every dishonest man from making any kind of quick or interesting move. So neither the cops nor the crooks have a chance to get any better. And my idea is that a good society doesn't depend upon having a great police force or having a great criminal element in society, which certain revolutionaries would believe; but rather that a good society depends upon the cops and the crooks getting better. Think about it, it's an unusual notion, but the idea behind it is that if they both get better, everybody is doing more every day,

which means you've got a richer society in terms of the real life that people are living.

Well, to go back to this point of the left and right coalition. What we believe is that this city is being run from outside by the federal government, by Albany, and that the major decisions that affect the most intimate matters of people's lives are decided without their will. That, for instance, people who live on Staten Island were handed the Verrazano Bridge without ever being given the opportunity to vote for it. When we were out at Wagner College we were told that there were polls that showed 90 per cent of the people in Staten Island didn't want that bridge. That's just a small example of what's been happening in this city. Over the last twenty years you've all seen how this city has gotten to look worse and worse and duller and duller because old neighborhoods were torn up, ripped apart, and had great big housing projects put in, which, believe me, do not begin to look nearly as attractive architecturally as ~~The~~ Tombs. And these dull neighborhoods create more violence because—I don't have to tell you cops one thing, you know it—when a neighborhood that's a potentially violent neighborhood gets bored, it gets more violent. When violent people are interested in something, they tend to be less violent. And when they're bored, they're bad. And there's bad dull architecture going up all over the city without anybody having anything to say about it. It's all come in through government programs. There's been an idea that the problems of people can be solved from without and above by experts planning together and deciding that the way to save people is to lay out programs for them. I've come to believe in something which is a conservative belief which is that this cannot be done, because finally people have to have the feeling that they are working for themselves and saving themselves as well.

So this is the platform we're running on. We're running on three points which we think can turn this city around. We don't say that we can give you any guarantee that this city can be saved. We think that you can almost say that the question is not the shame of the cities but the ultimate crisis of the cities, a terminal deathbed condition of the cities. The cities are in terrible shape because nobody in the cities any longer has the ability to shape their own lives.

The common ordinary people can't do interesting things with their lives in the cities, and they're at the mercy of forces larger than themselves. So we're saying this, that the only way you can begin to attack this problem is to make certain very basic changes. And the first thing we're saying is that New York City has to become the fifty-first state of the Union, and we're saying that our candidacy makes that possible because if any of the others were to run on that, if Wagner would have run on that, or Procaccino, or Lindsay, it would be no more than a politician's promise. But if we get elected, improbably as that is, if we first win a primary, and then go from there against all the triple difficulties of having really major forces opposed to us—'cause now they're all laughing at us, and we like that—but once we win a primary we'd have to go on and win the mayoralty, that would be a tremendous uphill fight. If we could do both of those things as amateurs, what it would mean is that something fantastic had happened in the political history of this city and this country, and everybody would recognize that people all over wanted something new, some new way of approaching their problems. So we're saying that our candidacy embodies the idea of the fifty-first state, that if we're elected we are within a year of getting it because the alternatives would be too awful for the federal government to contemplate. They would give it to us. They would give it to us because they would recognize that this was the true will of the people. And we are saying that once we had that in the act of being elected, and I can tell you this, if we didn't get it in a clean election, in other words if we ever won the mayoralty in a three- or four-way race, we would throw it right back to the people and say vote on this, vote on whether you want this fifty-first state. So that we are assuming that we'd be able to move only if we get this mandate. If we got this mandate from the people we would then say that the City Charter has to be rewritten from top to bottom, and as a matter of fact it would, because we would ~~now~~ be a state. And we would set it up in such a way that there would be a constitutional convention and the notion on which we are running, the basic notion on which we are running, could be instituted, which is power to the neighborhoods.

Now notice, left-wing groups say power to the people. We are

not saying that. We are saying power to the neighborhoods. And what we mean by that is that any neighborhood, of any quality or character—whether it's a historical neighborhood, a geographical neighborhood, or a neighborhood based on common economic problems—any kind of neighborhood, could constitute itself as a neighborhood, in other words, as a legal unit, a small town, a city, a village, whatever it wished to call itself, so long as the people in it voted to become a neighborhood. In other words we could not go around and say "You are a neighborhood." We would not do that because we think that's the beginning of the whole problem, since one of the problems of neighborhoods now is that they are confused with administrative districts. So what you get is half of one neighborhood and half of another neighborhood put together for administration. That's where all the trouble starts. And you all know more about that than I do. But what we say is wherever people would vote to constitute themselves into a neighborhood, they would become a neighborhood. And what that would mean is that they would get funded directly from the new city-state, and they would have the money to set up their own departments, their own police department first, if that was what was most important to them, their own board of education, their own fire department, their own sanitation department, their own parks. They'd be able to build themselves on any principle they wished. If they were a quiet, respectable neighborhood which wished security, they would be able to find it. If they were a poor neighborhood, with a long and bitter history of police relations, they might decide they wished to solve police problems their way. They might decide they wished to employ professional policemen because face to face suddenly with having a policing problem that they now had to solve by themselves as a neighborhood, they might decide that they wanted to keep some of the New York City police as presently constituted, hire them from the city. Or they might decide they want a brand-new system where they would police themselves. They would have votes among themselves to decide this problem. The point we are making is that we would not be telling people which way they had to administer their own community. Each community would be administering itself, each neighborhood which chose to become a neighbor-

hood. Now mind you, in the beginning there might be very few neighborhoods that might wish to do this. Maybe only a third of the present population of New York City might wish to constitute itself into neighborhoods. The rest of the city would remain about as it is now, would be administered by the mayoralty as it is now.

So the basic program we're running on is the separation of the neighborhoods, the idea that people have the right to constitute themselves into the kinds of neighborhoods they want. That people have the right to control their own destiny. We even say, when we get funny, that we are running on everything from Free Huey Newton to End Fluoridation. We're running on the principle that neighborhoods can constitute themselves in such a way that they have everything from compulsory free love to compulsory church attendance. And with that let me say "thank you."

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SPEECH

1969

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Nobody in this city can begin to work for anything they believe in, 'cause it just isn't there, it just doesn't exist.

This city is controlled from without. That's why everybody is going crazy in this city, because they have no objective correlative, which I remind you literary people is a remark first coined in twentieth-century cultural history by Mr. T. S. Eliot, of all people. There is no objective correlative in this city, but we say power to the neighborhoods would give an objective correlative that would give a notion of where everybody is. We are running on one profound notion. Free Huey Newton, end fluoridation. We're running on another profound notion — compulsory free love in those neighborhoods which vote for it along with compulsory church attendance on Sunday for those neighborhoods who vote for that. What we are running on is one basic, simple notion — which is that till people see where their ideas lead they know nothing; and that, my fine friends, is why I am running. I want to see where my own ideas lead. Thank you very much.

Use instead

To the Time-Life Staff

16 pages

(June 3, 1969)

16 pages

See in
primary
could
see on
more
edit

If I win the primary on June 17, I am — as Breslin always says — in trouble. I'm in terrible trouble. I will then have to go on and work in the mayoralty campaign all summer and earn not a sou. And after that point, if I win, I'll be in the paltry position of entering the mayoralty a tremendous number of bucks in debt. How will I ever keep from becoming corrupt? So you have to assume my candidacy is a prima facie case of seriousness. No man runs to win in such a way as to pauperize himself, unless he is either the victim of a *grande idee* or paying his debt to society. I submit that I'm paying my debt to society, and that is why I'm running for mayor.

~~Since I have brought the mood of this audience down~~

STET this Paragraph

Start next page

~~Stark~~ Plot

~~to zero in my feisty little way,~~ I present the simple campaign notions upon which we're running. They are several. One, that New York has become a city so sick, so wracked with pain, so torporous, feverish, edemic, pandemic, and miserable that, as my running mate, James Breslin, says: "To run frivolously in a city as mortally ill as New York would be a sin." The city is suffering from every disease that sets upon America, including the disease of bad reportage. None of us, by now, has an accurate notion of what is going on anywhere at all. We have the most extraordinary network of communications in the history of Western civilization, and we have less sense of where reality resides than perhaps at any time in our history. And the reason is that we are a divided nation. But we are a nation divided within the soul of each man and woman alive in the country, because we are racing forward, on the one hand, at a great rate toward the most extraordinary adventures in the history of man, and on the other hand, we find ourselves each year, each season, virtually each month, more and more unable to solve our most fundamental social problems. And in New York the diseases of America settle, and develop, and fester, and finally begin to burn and suggest that eventually they may even explode. We live in a city which has an enormous welfare roll. We have more than a million people on welfare in this city. The figure is actually one million two hundred thousand people. The moneys that we spend for welfare are over a billion and a half dollars a year now — they're larger than the amount we spend for education. Yet that welfare roll ~~we support in this city — not through direct payments — although more than directly we support it, as I will try to suggest a little later, that welfare roll is not even of our own creation.~~

There have been extraordinary developments made by

~~There had been a reference to the candidate as "feisty" in the preceding issue of Time.~~

the kind of corporations who produce farm machinery. They have discovered ways to mine the bottom lands of great cotton states like Mississippi. And in the course of that, whole hordes of tenant farmers who'd been buried in a miserable existence but nonetheless a cultivated one, because they at least partook of a culture down South, were uprooted and came here to the North, where they immediately were drawn by the fact that New York was a city with a mildly liberal tradition, a city which sought to pay people on welfare a little more than people were being paid in other cities. So a disproportionate number of dispossessed farm workers came to New York, and our welfare rolls began to grow ~~and grow~~ at a huge rate.

We had, at the same time, a series of powerful unions in this city, who would not let Black or Puerto Rican people into those unions. So the people who came here went on welfare and stayed on welfare, and their condition deepened until it became a way of life. And as it became a way of life, so it became a way of criminal life; and criminality became attached to the edges of welfare, so that many a hardworking woman lived on her welfare check and brought up her children, legitimate or illegitimate, and the young boys who grew up in this environment began to look more and more for purposes in crime. Because crime, for a man who is poor and landless and disenfranchised and living on a government dole, is finally a witty activity. It is the one way in which he may express himself.

So the crisis of the city deepened. It was like a boat waterlogged with welfare. On the other hand, all sorts — to use the worst word for crime — all sorts of rats were feeding on the cargo. This ship has been staggering along and getting into worse condition year after year after year, until now there's grave question whether it can really be saved, short of a federal takeover of the economic necessities of this city. Now in this situation, any man who runs for mayor has good cause to examine

his motives, if he's interested in attacking the problem on the old basis. To wit, running for mayor in such a way that he would be elected: making the old deals in the old ways, coming into power with an administration and a bureaucracy and a set of municipal unions who are all waterlogged themselves, all corrupt themselves, all full of crime themselves. Trying to work and accomplish anything in such a city — no matter how brave or honorable or worthwhile or even noble he may be in his own mind and to others — his hands are tied, he is manacled to the oppression of his condition because he too is oppressed. He has to deal with an administrative system which is impenetrable. So, at that point, he may be a man as well-intentioned as our honorable John V. Lindsay and still fail. He can work like a Trojan for four years and go down to abysmal defeat after defeat. The difficulty in the situation is that there is no way to solve the problems of New York, because the most fundamental problems of New York are not only aggravated by the farm machinery, but by the legislative morass of the north in Albany.

So over the last year, as must have been suggested to a thousand men in this city, many people came to me time and again to say, "Well, why don't you run for mayor? If Bill Buckley could run for mayor, you certainly can run for mayor." And I kept saying it was impossible. It was hopeless. One would not even begin to think of running for mayor. It is too terrible a job to contemplate if you ever won.

Until that marvelous day, and I blush to admit this, when a magazine editor talking to me said: "Norman, have you ever thought of the fifty-first state, of New York becoming a separate state?" And at that moment I said, "Good Lord, I've now found a way to pay my enormous account to you. I can work, I can campaign, I can serve. I can run on a notion that makes sense to me, which is that if New York can become the fifty-first state, it can

begin to attack its incredible problems." Because if I run, and win a primary, and go on from there to win a mayoralty election against the extraordinary opposition of forces by stealing a primary election, then indeed a small miracle would have happened in this city; and the people of this city would have voted for a set of ideas which would be unheralded in previous political history. To wit, they would not have voted for their immediate security, but for setting out on an adventure whose end could not be foreseen. Because at that moment when the people would vote to become the fifty-first state, which as I say would be embodied in our candidacy, at that moment the city would have declared that it had lost faith in the old ways of solving political problems, that it wished to embark on a new conception for politics.

Now this new conception would revolve around the second point in our platform, which is power to the neighborhoods. And what indeed could that possibly mean? It means something unheralded in American politics. It means that, because a state had been declared by majority vote of the citizens of this city and I can say in parenthesis that if the mayoralty election were won in a three-to four-cornered race, and one did not have a majority, there would be no recourse but to throw the city open to a referendum, where the people of the city would vote on whether they wished to have a fifty-first state or not, because one could not begin to proceed without a majority of the people in the city voting to become the fifty-first state — one could not steal or trick such an election. At that point, having won such a majority, one could then call into being a constitutional convention, which might be one of the most remarkable moments in the history of this city or of any city, because the talent and the dedication and the hard consciousness of people in this city is remarkable. There's more talent waiting on line in this city, there's more energy bottled up and pent waiting to express itself in this city than perhaps in any city in

America — and that's possibly a way of saying any city in the world. The people in this city have been disenfranchised from any kind of power, any kind of approach to the problems before them which could have political issue for twenty years. It is impossible for any man, even a man of power, to get anything done in this city, and it has been impossible for many, many years. So, at this moment, we might assume that an extraordinary amount of intelligence and experience might collect to write a constitution which would be a remarkable document, because it would have to contend with the age-old problems — no, the two-centuries-old problems of the constitution. It would have to deal with checks and balances, the proportion of power. It would have to contend primarily with the notion, upon the one hand of power to the neighborhoods, and on the other hand that power which is due in respect to the Constitution of the United State, to the Supreme Court, the decisions of the Supreme Court, and to the power of the new state. Under the umbrellas of the Constitution of the United States, the Supreme Court, and the powers allocated to the new state, power to the neighborhoods could have its expression. It would begin by neighborhoods voting themselves into existence in the new state, declaring that they wish to become neighborhoods incorporated, small towns, small cities, hamlets, villages — whatever. These neighborhoods would have powers to deal with their own immediate problems in a way they cannot deal with them now. And so a great variety of neighborhoods would soon begin to flourish, one might hope, in this city. At the very least, if the acrimony, if the sense of combat and strife in these neighborhoods was fierce, people living in these neighborhoods would have a sense of whether they adhered to the principles of the neighborhood, or if they really, literally, wished to move out and move on. But the one virtue of this, it seems to me, is that the energies of the people of New York, which at present have no pur-

chase or power — no purchase on their own natural wit or intelligence — no purchase other than to watch with a certain grim humor, a gallows humor, the progressive deterioration of this city, those energies could now be attached to working for their deepest and most private and most passionate ideas about the nature of government, the nature of politics, the nature of man's relation to his own immediate society. And it's possible that out of this interaction of these neighborhoods — which would be like small towns only in one sense, which is that they be small — these people might produce extraordinary results. So I present to you this notion: that we might begin to discover the nature of our reality as men and women in this seventh decade of the twentieth century. We might begin to discover which political ideas had validity, the power to continue themselves and nourish themselves, and those ideas which, finally, were surrealistic, nihilistic, excessive, and destructive to the ultimate aims of society, which finally is to find some balance in the lives of men and women.

Now, on this notion, I would like to throw some time open to you for questions and I will do my best to answer them, and then proceed with a peroration, if that still remains within our possibility. Thank you.

What makes you think you could get the fifty-first state?

I would ask you to use your imagination. We are not talking about the city as it exists today. We're talking about the city after Mailer and Breslin — forgive me for talking like a conventional politician — after Mailer and Breslin succeed in stealing a primary election in the Democratic Party from Meade Esposito, Mario Procaccino, and a few other people. Now, at that point, that is an extraordinary moment in the history of the city, nothing less. If we then go on, but I would submit that is easier to do than win the mayoralty election, because at that point the time is so surrealistic that people might just say, "Oh,

the hell with everyone. Let's just vote them in. Vote them in, so we'll have some amusement." Well, at that point, we then have four months to run through a hot summer through September and October, working under the long shadow of John Lindsay, who will seem more viable to leftists, liberals, conservatives, and reactionaries alike each day that they come face to face with the fact that if they vote for us, they are voting for an embarkation upon an unknown journey, which may end with the city of New York being cut loose from the mainland of America and being shipped out to sea. So I say to you, at that point, when we win the mayoralty election, this city will have gone through a transformation so extraordinary that the questions with which we engage ourselves today are not likely to be nearly so alive and pressing.

If you were mayor or governor of New York would you be able to continue writing?

I think, since I pay great attention to my betters, that would be a small sacrifice to make. I would merely have confirmed the fond opinion that *Time* magazine has of me, which is "this fella better stop writing or none of us will benefit." Seriously, I would not be able to continue writing, dear lady.

What are the legal steps necessary to achieve statehood?

There are three steps. A constitutional convention would have to be called; it would doubtless take months for a constitution to be written. At that point, it would be submitted to the state legislature in Albany for ratification; once Albany had ratified it, it would go to the Congress of the United States for ratification, and on that happy day we would be a state. Now, if you say how is that possible, how would Albany ever begin to pass it, let me point out to you, sir, that something like forty-two or forty-three percent of the legislators, I think it's actually more than that, forty-four percent of the legislators in Albany come

from New York City. And one would assume that the large majority of those men and women would be prepared to vote for statehood about the time we had gotten in, for that would be the shock from which no one could recover. It would mean that people who felt they really understood the political game would have to recognize they didn't understand it at all, and so they would be inclined to go along with the winner. Politicians keep that as their last resort. If you can't figure out what else to do, go along with the winner. I think we could find another five or ten or fifteen percent in the upstaters who are proud and feel that we in New York City have been dragging them down for one hundred and eighty-two years. On top of that, I think that President Nixon might go to the phone and talk to Rockefeller and say, "Now look, there's not much else you can do. Are you going to put on your tin hat? Are you going to go at the head of the state militia and cross at Yonkers?" He'll be worse than that; he'll say, "Will you defile through the hills of the Bronx? Cross the Harlem River? Move south? You will never reach Central Park!"

Do you have political ambitions beyond becoming the mayor of New York City?

It's precisely because I have the stature I have that my ambitions are limited. I wish to be mayor of New York. Lindsay, who's a tall fellow, looks further.

You've put forward a very provocative idea, the fifty-first state. Do you feel anyone is listening to this at all?

When we go down the street, we find that more people have heard of this idea than have heard of us, when we get out in the neighborhoods. They say, "Oh yeah, you're the fellows who are running with the ah — what is it — the fifty-first state." And I get the feeling, maybe, that I have nothing but candidatitis; but I also get the feeling

that people are particularly excited by this idea. Of course, I have an interest in thinking that way.

Why did you support the dual admissions policy for CCNY?

Well, I was the only candidate who supported the dual admissions plan, and I was pleased to find myself in such a position because it meant that I was living well, since it's almost impossible in a mayoral primary in which you have five men running in one election and two in another to find yourself on one side of an issue . . . well, you're all very serious about CCNY, aren't you? All right, I'll talk particularly straight about CCNY. It gives no one any pleasure, who has grown up in this city as I have, in Brooklyn, to enjoy seeing the pearl of the free higher educational system in New York having its standards adulterated. But the fact of the matter is simply this: we really don't know. One, we have no idea at all what's going to happen after two or three years; in other words, the students who succeed in being admitted without academic standards to CCNY will have much more life experience, presumably, than the students whose marks are a little better, because they've grown up in an environment which is near criminal for many of them. So I would just suggest that a great many of the people — among them the candidates who have been bleating about law and order and getting the crime off the streets — are acting like unconscionable hypocrites. Would they rather have those young people out on the streets, unemployed, living on welfare and looking for extraordinary varieties of mischief or would they rather have some of them going through the Draconian steps of trying to reorient themselves into an educational system, and conceivably some of them even wrestling with books at night to catch up? So to begin with, what was marvelous about the dual admissions system is that it would

have opened the system to the kids who are presently wrecking and sacking the high schools and running through them with only one sort of expertise, which is, whoever is most adept at disrupting the educational system in the high school because there is no future past these high schools. They know their marks are so poor that they can't begin to contemplate getting into a university. Having them now being able to contemplate the fact that, yes, they can get into universities, they will feel that first moment of fear — of what happens if I go to a university and I'm completely ill-equipped? Some of them might even begin to start studying in high school, which opens up the possibility that the high schools may ~~be seeded by this first seeding and may~~ begin to improve a little bit, so that the morale of the teachers may ~~begin~~ ~~to~~ improve at that point also. Now, all these matters, I think, are more substantial than the fact that the educational standards at CCNY may be lowered for a period. It's my optimism and my hope that Black and Puerto Rican students who enter CCNY will end up being fine students, and the academic standards of CCNY, after a few years, will become as high as they are now or even higher. But even if that does not happen, we have to recognize that we are merely paying our dues, because the history of the treatment of Black people in this city is not an honorable history or an agreeable one. They've been kept from getting into any of the powerful unions of this city, so they have not been able to enter the working class and the middle class in any numbers. And now that they've been shut out from all other opportunities, now that they are pushing into the colleges, we bleat when we discover that white boys who are qualified are not going to get into these colleges. Well, I say fine, because that's the point when you're going to begin to have community colleges in this city built to fulfill precisely that need. The moment white boys can't get a free education, then you're going to get the community colleges, not before.

So long as Black boys can't get it, you're going to keep having the same buck-passing and the same complaining about expenses, and so that was why I supported the dual admissions system.

Wouldn't communities set up along geographical lines tend to freeze in present racial and economic distinctions very poor cities or very poor mini-cities that couldn't afford the police, the sanitation, and the fire departments that they would need . . . ?

I think you'd have to begin with the notion that the fifty-first state would be able to command more moneys than New York City. We've had people working on it, and they can't come up with any figure that's really sufficiently satisfactory to present to a technical audience or even a critical audience, because there are too many fluctuations in too many of the figures. We estimate that, immediately, it would be worth between two and three billion dollars more a year to New York City, if it were a state. For instance, there are all sorts of taxes that we would be able to collect directly, like the cigarette tax, the gasoline tax, the tax on registered automobiles, the take on parimutuels — and if off-track betting were legalized, there would be a tremendous amount of money there. There would be any number of funds available that we don't have now, so we would have more money to deal with immediately. It seems to me that you would have to make some sort of estimate of the funds that are going into each neighborhood now. For example, when you take poor neighborhoods you would have to estimate how much of the money that goes into those poor neighborhoods is spent on police. After the neighborhoods were constituted block to block, you could figure out what the administration of those neighborhoods had cost in the past, and these moneys would be passed over to the neighborhoods so they could elaborate their own forms of administration. They might wish to save money on

one service or another in order to have more money available for other purposes. But on top of that, this could be any place in the city, and this is why I call myself a left-conservative, we would have to recognize that the history of these communities is not a fair nor an equitable history, and they are not capable of solving their problems through their own human agency nearly so well as we are in more fortunate communities. And so a majority of the new moneys in the new state would have to go toward economic funding in these communities. Now the difference between that and federal funding, which is going to happen anyway, is a great one, I think — because these particular poor neighborhoods would now be administering the funds themselves. So when people working in these programs began to cheat and swindle the programs they'd be cheating and swindling their own people rather than the federal government, and that I think would make a noticeable difference. I don't mean that all crime and all corruption and all embezzlement would stop; but I do think that it would make a big difference, because not only would they be cheating their own people, which might give great pause, but also they would have to face their own people, which might give even greater pause. So I think that would make for a more lively basis for economic funding for economic self-development in the poor communities.

Even more than financial problems you might have the freezing of racial enclaves and the polarization of communities which I think we've got to try to correct in New York.

Well, I think what you'd find is that you'd have a certain freezing into racial enclaves, as you put it, although I would suggest that that's exactly what we have today in the city, because there are few white people, for instance, who are going to just travel on the loose through Harlem after dark — just as a small example. So, as a practical

matter, Harlem and the rest of Manhattan are more separated, I'd say, than East Berlin and West Berlin. But apart from that, what you also could recognize is to the extent that certain neighborhoods declared themselves for this sort of separation, other people who had been rather tolerant, fairly noncommittal liberals up to that point might say, "This is a disgrace, now we've really got to work for integration because we're about to really lose it." They might recognize that integration is something that has been given to us from above, and if they really wish to work for it, they now have to work for it directly. So I think you would have communities that would form themselves on principles of integration and collaboration and tolerance. And on top of that, you've also got to recognize that New York is a particularly curious city, and there are any number of blocks in this city and small neighborhoods in this city where you have a mix of six, eight, ten minority groups, and they all get along together reasonably well. Sometimes there's a historic tradition for it. There's one neighborhood, Park Slope in Brooklyn, that's marvelous, and I think one of the reasons for it is that architecturally it's a superb neighborhood. So even though people live there who are rich, poor, of all minority groups and races, the architecture — the character of the neighborhood — is lovely. So there's a certain possibility for getting and living together.

Are you worried about hurting Badillo's chances in the primary? → P 354

Let's take it head on. ~~One, I don't think Herman Badillo has the chance of a snowball in hell of winning the primary, whether I'm in it or not. That's because I don't think he's a winner. I think he's a congressman, and I'm prepared to support him for Congress on that happy day he runs. Two, if Herman Badillo ever did win the primary he would hurt Mr. Lindsay's chances, because you would then have Lindsay running against Badillo, and~~

said "Best Bet." Of course, the handicapper was my campaign manager. Would you like to hear the rest of the handicapping? Well, it was the mayoral handicap, and in post position one was Wagner, a twelve-year-old gelding by Meade Esposito out of Machine. The handicapper's comment on him was "Knows the track." The odds were eight to five. In the second post position was Procaccino, a Bronx ridgling. Now a ridgling, for the ladies I must say to you, is a horse of evil disposition. In fact, the Italian word *vellano* is the only way to describe the disposition of a horse — what you do with a horse or a man who's *vellano* — I'll leave the man out of it — but in any case what you do with a horse who's *vellano* is you're obliged to perform a curious testicular operation — ah — which leaves the fellow with one nut. A ridgling. There was Procaccino, a Bronx ridgling. This is the one argument I had with my handicapper, who wrote this particular sheet. He had "By Fear out of Law and Order." I said to him after, "You should have had 'By Prunes out of Law and Order.'" Anyway, the comment on him was "Moves up on a sloppy track." Then there was Badillo and Scheuer. They were an entry. They were both "By Liberal out of Loser," eleven to one. And finally there was our own entry. "Best Bet."

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 9. the notion that we're running on, finally, is that everybody in this city suffers from the same disease that everyone in America suffers from — that we suffer from it ~~doubly, triply, and~~ in exaggerated form, which is, we do not have a proper sense of our own identity. So, we argue that statehood, the quality of statehood, once achieved would perform several wonders for this city. Not because we would get more money, although I think we would, and I think that money would be terribly necessary, but because the citizens of this city would have embarked upon an adventure in voting for that statehood particularly since we're the candidates, at the moment,

who embodied that desire. So to get to statehood at that point, they would have to vote for us, which means they would be voting for amateurs, which means they would be deserting their belief in expertise because we run on one notion over and over again, which is that the experts have driven this city right into the ground. And we run on the notion, finally, that politics is philosophy and that one cannot begin to solve the problems of a city without engaging in philosophical arguments with oneself and with one's neighbor.

And the particular small continuing event which gives me most pleasure since I've been campaigning is I find that I can give my speeches at the level at which I wish to give them, I never try to talk down, I say what I wish to say to an audience, trying to pick up the mood of that audience, talking at my best to reach that audience, and I find that the philosophical density of the argument never bothers them one bit. I've talked to left-wing audiences, to right-wing audiences, to all sorts of audiences, and they all listen. The right-wing audiences listen even more carefully than the left-wing audiences because, perhaps, our words are fresher to them. At any rate, the powerful notion in it, which I think is appealing to all people in degree, is that if each group of people, each interest, each force in this city can begin to think in terms of neighborhoods, then it can begin to think in terms of discovering whether its own ideas have validity, have savor, give energy to others, give energy to oneself, or don't.

The tragedy of this city and the tragedy of this country is that we all live in a situation where none of us know what the reality is, and we explore for it and we explore for it — we spend our lives exploring for it — and we never find an objective ground where we can begin to locate whether some pet idea of ours or some profound idea of ours is partially true or partially untrue.

To talk about the situation, even briefly, people on the right wing feel that the Black people are lazy, spoiled, ungrateful, and incapable of managing their own society. Black people feel, I would guess on the one hand, that they have extraordinary possibilities and that they are great people. On the other hand, they have to feel that they can't possibly know, because they never had an opportunity to express that desire. So, if nothing else, Black communities working with their own power in their own neighborhoods could show to other neighborhoods one of two things, which is either that Black people were right about their potentiality for the future or that they were wrong and that, finally, they are incapable of making those extraordinary steps. And so that even right-wing people would have, at the end of that time, the confidence of knowing that they were seriously right or seriously wrong about some extraordinary matter. In turn, right-wing neighborhoods would discover in living with their principles whether their principles were nourishing and could maintain a society against all of the nihilistic tides of the twentieth century, or whether, finally, their principles were not sufficiently flexible to meet the extraordinary quality of the age. And on top of that, we would have the marvelous, if somewhat comic, alternatives of considering all those magical LSD communities where you would have children living on LSD for five years. At the end of that time they would either be creating castles, or they might be two-thirds dead of liver disease.

The notion that we're running on, then, is that until we begin to know a little more about each other — not through the old-fashioned New Deal governmental methods of tolerance — but through the quality of human experience in societies, small societies and somewhat larger societies, founded upon various principles — philosophical, spiritual, economic, geographical, ter-

ritorial, historical, or whatever — we know nothing at all. And that's why I feel a certain optimism about this candidacy. Because what I think it offers to all the people of the city of New York is a chance to turn this city around and make it what it once was — the leader of the world. Thank you.

1974 - (1969)

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From Notre Dame Review

March 1, 1974
an interview with David Young

Interviewer: Don't you feel that the ~~one thing we~~ ^{can do now} is improve education for children

Mailer: I don't know if it's possible. The gulf is in the tap root. For instance, we can't even begin to teach arithmetic until we are able to abstract the object we're looking at. That means we have to divorce ourself from any intimate notion of its presence. The reason many sensitive children (black children particularly!) have a terrible time with numbers or arithmetic is because they're giving up a vital faculty of perception about the time they come to say that three apples and four apples make seven apples, and three horses and four horses make seven horses. What they have had to do is alienate themselves from the presence of the apples and the horses. Which is to say, ignore objects that are communicating to them. Seven horses in a meadow speak of many more vital matters to a child than numbers.

So if the faculty of measure in science is a species of communication, existential communication had to be destroyed in order for scientific measure to begin. Natural communication destroyed to provide mechanical communication. The false assumption that's been made by society was that mechanical communication (which is, by now, ubiquitously, electronic communication) was an addition to all other forms of communication. It's not. It's at the expense of other forms. The ability to measure comes out of the fact that we have destroyed those faculties which once gave a more acute sense of measure. To primitive man, it wasn't of first importance whether there were seven horses or five horses in a field. More important was the communication that he got off that tribe of horses. That herd. Five horses in a powerful and dangerous mood are obviously much more meaningful to him than seven horses placidly eating. Again, the mood. That was the only kind of measure to primitive man and it was a true measure I would think because it was a non-psychotic evaluation of the field of environment before him. Number cleaves the brain and encourages psychosis. If we are to talk of teaching children, the present permissive notions of instruction by which children learn have something, I think, fatal in them. Fatally dull. For example, you were talking to me earlier, while we were not recording, about some friend of yours who had

studied with Lamas, and how the Lamas beat the students with bamboo rods if learning the lesson. I was pondering that seemed to me, of course! that was indeed. The modern pedagogue would exclaim: "awful way to instruct; these people are afraid." And the students will of course will have a certain, let's say, ugly incentive as well as a fine incentive. That may be matching the dualities of the student. Perhaps beating with rods is also done by instructors because, well these instructors trying to instruct students in spiritual the utmost delicacy. There's nothing worse than everybody's delicacy more than a dead teacher. A teacher who's determined to be tolerant and humane to his pupils at the expense of himself, while certainly a lady or a gentleman but not necessarily refining his own quality.

Interviewer: By not communicating, is it

Mailer: By not communicating the rage arouses in him at an inability to learn. The purification rite for the teacher to whip the students. Think of the way in which a man on himself or turns on others when they don't embody his vision, or how most theater directors or movie directors are sadistic artists when they fail to deliver what the master is entitled to whip his students. Let the question remain open. I don't think I'm going to be able to teach children a great many things so long as we have notions of let them advance at their own rate in a gentle advance in the confidence that whatever issues from them is going to be a happy and that all expressions are equal. Perhaps the most intense expression of education is through the experience of being afraid, dominated by a teacher, fascinated by and yet be able to transcend that teaching ultimately. It may be the only true education through transcendence. Parents can be good to their children, can try to teach in the tenderest way. But it isn't necessarily the educational system to also present

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Interviewer: By not communicating, in effect.

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tenderness, because to bring up a child in an atmosphere of vastly greater geniality than exists in the world is a dubious venture. You wouldn't send armies into battle without having given them rigorous training. I think the direction for future education may be for the disagreeable aspects of school to emerge more than they do today. Let kids show what it is to wrestle with a closed system. To have that closed system killing things in them literally, so that they have to fight back, develop powers of adaptation to cope with a repressive and difficult system. In compensation, let's have other parts of the educational system freer than today. We need a sense of opposites. I don't trust any concept of education which assumes there is a way to teach children better than all other ways.

Interviewer: I think children have to be taught to be agile, to be able to keep their wits, and learn to preserve that center of their being, allow it to flourish. The education of our future is possibly the one thing that is going to allow a future to be.

Mailor: I have a different notion about a viable future. I repeat: I think we've lost the way. I suspect we're only going to find out what works by allowing more variety to the notion of society than any previous civilization has even begun to conceive.

Interviewer: A hundred different life styles.

Mailor: Yes, but not embodied in sects and clans and groups and secret societies. Rather, have open societies founded on other notions than the political and the economic. That was the idea with which Breslin and I were working when I ran for mayor in the Democratic primary. The only way New York could begin to save itself, we argued, was to let people have a little power over their immediate environment. Indeed that's the only way you ever learn. I think one reason why artists sometimes live to an old age and are rather nice looking old men is because they are able to try an idea and see the result of it. A man who doesn't have the life of an artist lives in this—it seems to me—almost unutterable anguish, in an almost implacable

hostility toward any idea that's new because of the fact that he, poor ribbon clerk or hard hat man, has no chance whatsoever to test out his own ideas. I mean, the closest an ordinary man can get to such verification is if he gambles, which is a natural reason for a passion for gambling. If your team is better than another, the only way to know is likely to remember your perception is if you lose money that day. Well I think if we have a point where people could gamble on the future of the society they think might work, I think they would begin to see some way of opening new horizons. For example, why can't people who think that children should be brought up strictly by the state, right in their schools just as people who think that a permissive system of education should be created, create their schools from the bottom up? People who believe that policing city streets is a necessary activity ought to be entitled to live in a community where they can do that, vote for it, and each serve a certain number of hours as a policeman on a voluntary basis. Other people who think that a slight schizophrenic element in life is healthy, and they don't want to work, could hire the best or the cheapest police force that they want, or even the worst bullies they want. If they prevail where they live, founded upon more idealistic impulses, that's interesting too. At least we'll know something much. Because we don't know anything

Interviewer: In other words, allow minorities . . .

Mailor: It's not a matter of allowing minorities. One of the notions we could never get to in the mayoralty campaign is that if we had it, it isn't as if we then would have sat down with the brain-trusters and parceled up New York into little plots for such an idea and this notion that cause. New York would have been a different notion we had, the first state—at that time groups of people might have chosen to call themselves as hamlets, towns, sees, or counties. But the people in these places would have come together and decide what was the common denominator for their enclave. These hamlets, towns, hamlets, principalities, whatever

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to call them, would have come into existence only by people forging them, choosing to create them out of hard work. So it would have been a pioneer endeavor in a highly developed urban environment. To the extent people didn't do it, to the extent that people were apathetic, New York would just have changed over from being a city to being a state and would still be administered from the top. In other words, as groups of people came together and decided that they wanted something for themselves, wanted a society in which they could live within a larger society, so we would have relinquished power to them. But it wouldn't automatically have been conferred upon them.

Interviewer: In other words you would set a lot of forces in motion presently stalemated and stagnant.

Mailer: ~~Forces now in static would have been able to crystallize.~~ Black people by the way often loved our idea. "Give us the power. We'll show you what we can do." I heard that over and over again. Of course the big argument liberals always advanced against us was that we'll just have black ghettos again. Well, we wouldn't be a white authority setting up the black ghettos. Black people would be choosing to have territories in that city which were theirs, where they would run things their way. When it was pointed out that of course there would be white areas which would make it very hard for a black man to enter, they would laugh. Because, they would say, we don't get onto that turf anyway. Of course there would be probably a great majority in the city to sit on the sidelines and say, "Hey, look, I work hard all day. When I come home at night I don't want to get involved in local government. Give me an apartment, a nice big anonymous building; let me do what I want my own way." And they would. These crystallizations into self-elected power would possibly occur very slowly in the beginning. If the notion worked, It would grow only if people began to believe that these societies forced by men and/or women having one collective notion on which they could agree, or even just one collective compromise on which they could agree, were working more interestingly than a lot of anonymous societies.

Interviewer: Because they were creating sense and thereby an enthusiasm? Per beginnings of a spell?

Mailer: Well just suppose for example have a community which decided that it was too expensive, and they wanted to have voluntary police system. They had nothing valuable to protect in the area. But they had security out on the streets. So they had volunteer—their own vigilante system, Suppose what happens is these guys decide have to put in one night a week working after work. They go out and they're scared they work, and they come back, and they're pretty good. Let us say that night their wife is a little better. Because the little closer to a western range rider. It might begin to illumine a community. Maybe can measure a good society by the number of fucks that take place on a given night. If you want to measure society, do it that way. It's a good measure as money. Of course you could argue that a lot of these vigilantes might be a little freaky or corrupt activity. At least a professional cop, corrupt as he may be, has his professional standards, no matter how tarnished they become. And you say what is the answer? I don't know the answer. I'm not going to say that and claim vigilante cops are going to be professional cops. I don't know. It may not work and people will find they have professionals again. If it does however we will have learned will be incomparable. The police, at least, will be honored a bit more value.

Interviewer: It would also force people to go into their own resources. . . .

Mailer: Of course, that can not only be helpful in killing. People who have been living a life for too long can be wrecked by becoming energetic. That's why apathetic people are clinging to apathy with the last passion left. They hate the whole idea that you want them run in the street.

would have come into existence only
ing them, choosing to create them out
So it would have been a pioneer (137)
highly developed urban environment.
people didn't do it, to the extent that
pathetic, New York would just have
from being a city to being a state and
administered from the top. In other
ups of people came together and
they wanted something for themselves,
city in which they could live within a
so we would have relinquished power
it wouldn't automatically have been
a them.

In other words you would set a lot
of motion presently stalemated and

now in statis would have been able
Black people by the way often loved
the power. Well show you what
heard that over and over again. Of
argument liberals always advanced
that we'll just have black ghettos
we wouldn't be a white authority
black ghettos. Black people would be
territories in that city which were
they would run things their way.
pointed out that of course there would
which would make it very hard for a
center, they would laugh. Because,
we don't get onto that turf anyway.
we would be probably a great majority
it on the sidelines and say, "Hey,
and all day. When I come home at
want to get involved in local
give me an apartment, a nice big
building; let me do what I want my own
y would. These crystallizations into
ever would possibly occur very slowly
g. If the notion worked. It would
people began to believe that these
l by mean and/or women having one
on on which they could agree, or
collective compromise on which they
ere working more interestingly than
nous societies.

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Interviewer: Because they were creating a kindred
sense and thereby an enthusiasm? Perhaps the
beginnings of a spell? (138)

Mailer: Well just suppose for example that you
have a community which decided that police were
too expensive, and they wanted to have their own
voluntary police system. They had nothing terribly
valuable to protect in the area. But they wanted
security out on the streets. So they had their own
volunteer—their own vigilante system, if you will.
Suppose what happens is these guys discover they
have to put in one night a week working as a cop
after work. They go out and they're scared stiff and
they work, and they come back, and they're feeling
pretty good. Let us say that night their sex with
their wife is a little better. Because the guy feels a
little closer to a western range rider. Now that
might begin to illumine a community. Maybe you
can measure a good society by the number of sweet
fucks that take place on a given night. Science
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argue that a lot of these vigilantes might go in for
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don't know the answer. I'm not going to sit here
and claim vigilante cops are going to be better than
professional cops. I don't know. It may be that it
won't work and people will find they have to hire
professionals again. If it does however work, what
we will have learned will be incomparable. And if it
doesn't, the police, at least, will be honored with a
bit more value. (end)

Interviewer: It would also force people a little more
into their own resources. . . .

Mailer: Of course, that can not only be healthy but
killing. People who have been living a lethargic life
for too long can be wrecked by becoming too
energetic. That's why apathetic people sometimes
cling to apathy with the last passion left in them.
They hate the whole idea that you want to make
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