WHY MAILER AND JONES MATTER

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J. MICHAEL LENNON, WARREN MASON

The following panel and discussion, moderated by Barry H. Leeds, took place on November 11, 2011, in the Prothro Theatre of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Austin, during the joint conference of the James Jones and Norman Mailer Societies.

Barry Leeds: My name is Barry Leeds, and I'd like to welcome you to "Why Mailer and Jones Matter" with an elite blue-ribbon committee of scholars here, each of whom is going to speak for about five minutes. Then we're going to throw the discussion open to the audience, and we would like everyone to have a chance to say something. The first speaker today is Warren Mason, who's a professor of corporate and professional communication in both the college of business administration and the department of communication studies at Plymouth State University where he teaches both undergraduate and graduate students. Dr. Mason received the Distinguished Graduate Teaching Award in Business in 2003. He's also a member of the interdisciplinary honor society Phi Kappa Phi. He's been an investment representative, a principal in the hotel/restaurant industry, an advertisement and promotion manager for banking institutions, and he's a member of the Public Relations Society of America. He regularly advises profit and nonprofit organizations on public relations and media issues, and sits on the board of directors of the James Jones Literary Society. Warren.

Warren Mason: Thank you, Barry.

Walt Whitman wrote "The real war would never get in the books." And James Jones himself, before he wrote *The Thin Red Line*, said "I don't think that combat has ever been written about truthfully." Well, we sit here today

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knowing these statements aren't correct, with the half-century-plus existence of *The Naked and the Dead* and *The Thin Red Line*. Mailer's war novel, *The Naked and the Dead*, and Jones' trilogy, *Eternity*, *Line*, and *Whistle*, plus *The Pistol*—which I've always called the 3–plus-1—represent what Willie Morris stated about Jones's work as, "The literature of World War II that future generations of Americans will read—even 500 years from now." Yet neither author was a one-hit novel author, although Jones has sometimes been accused of such, or a one-theme author—WAR, again a charge often flung at Jones but refuted by, if nothing else, *Some Came Running*.

This always makes me think of these guys coming back from the war, how they were all vying for writing "The Great American Novel." I had the opportunity to interview Gore Vidal when he was a Montgomery Fellow at Dartmouth in my state of New Hampshire, and he wasn't really interested in giving an interview, but I told him it was about Jones through an associate, another public relations guy, and he perked right up and said, "Oh, if you want to talk about Jones come on over." So I did, you know, a delightful afternoon, his partner Austin was still alive at the time. (And by the way when Vidal says he doesn't want to talk about himself, he wants to talk about Jones, that *really* means he wants to talk about himself!) The brief version is that he liked James Jones very much. He called him "Jimmy" Jones; I never heard James Jones called "Jimmy" before, and he said, "You know, out of all of us after the war, particularly in Paris"—and most people associate Vidal with Rome, but he also spent a lot of time in Paris—he said, "Jones was the most decent," and he added, "he was the most generous." Jones was a notorious soft-touch for helping beginning writers, as most of us know. Vidal said he really "couldn't read most of Jones's stuff," but he admitted that *From Here to Eternity* was a great book, and he did mention Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. But then, Vidal paused and said, "But you know, I was a war author too, and I was first." And, right, we don't normally associate Vidal with World War II, I mean anything but, but it's true. He got back early because he had severe frostbite. He was up in the Aleutian campaign, he wrote *Williwaw,* and technically speaking, it was the first major World War II novel, after the war.

Both Jones and Mailer returned from the war old beyond their young ages, and Jones was particularly struck by changes he was observing in the soon-to-be

post-war American society and its soon-to-be world prominence. He, as I believe so too was Mailer, was put off by the prosperity and materialism of the civilians living the good life and celebrating the good times, the boom generated by the actions and the sweat and the blood of those who served in Europe and the Pacific. And briefly I remember my father, who was a Marine in World War II, who tried to enlist at sixteen. They said no, no, no, we can't let a sixteen-year-old in, so he came back at seventeen. And like a lot of Marines, a few months later said, "What the hell did I just do!?" When he came back from the war he was struck, as was Jones and I believe Mailer, with the prosperity in the nation. And he saw a lot of young people his age that he knew in high school who didn't go off for the war, because you could get exemptions, particularly where he lived, in manufacturing and farming. And many of the veterans, when they would get together, they would wonder, you know, geez, we went and fought the war; all these guys who stayed at home just made a lot of money during the war. We forget how much money was being made during the war, particularly for young men who did not go. That resonated; that's always resonated very much with me.

So, here we find two young men, Jones and Mailer, old beyond their chronological years, having lived through a common experience for that generation, members of what Tom Brokaw called the Greatest Generation. And I foolishly once asked Brokaw, "Tom," I said, "Why did you call it the *greatest* generation?" He quizzically looked at me like I was the village idiot and answered, "Because they <u>were</u>."

(laughter)

This common experience of war, whether a "hot" war, or a "cold" war, for each individual, or participant, was a common experience of that generation. Unlike today's two current wars with one half of one percent of our population serving overseas, the complete opposite of what occurred in World War II. I mean, Norman was, as you know, a Harvard graduate. Today there are darn few Harvard graduates fighting overseas. Two authors tempered by a common experience, but prepared to write about this common experience in a very uncommon manner. But neither one was a one-trick pony. Both men expanded beyond their novels of war, although the war and its experiences never left either man. Together they produced what are today most uncommon beasts: Numerous, serious novels—and I mean

that, plural—many novels. Very serious novels. However, with substantial commercial success. Serious novels, yet commercial successes. Today, that's pretty much an oxymoron. Today, this is a rare commodity indeed. Or as Mailer stated, "Culture has its risks!" Thank you.

(applause)

Leeds: Thank you Warren. Our next speaker is Ray Elliott

Leeds: Ray Elliott's biography is quite impressive. He holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and English from Eastern Illinois University, a master's degree in English education from Southern Illinois University, and a master's degree in journalism from the University of Illinois. He served for three years in the Marine Corps from 1958 to '61. He's a past president of the James Jones Literary Society, and the founder of the Richard I. Pitman Marine Corps League Detachment, number 1231. Currently he's a guest columnist for the *Champaign News-Gazette*, editor of the *Spearhead News*, an official publication of the Fifth Marine Division Association, and communications director and editor of *The Black Sands*, Iwo Jima Association of America. His books include *Wild Hands Toward the Sky*, *Iwo Blasted Again*, *Bittersweet: The Story of the Heath Candy Company*, and others that he has written or edited. His work in progress, *The Wages of War, A Personal and Literary Perspective*, explores the soldier's lasting memories and effects of war. Ray.

Ray Elliott: Thank you. I was an enlisted man, and I think that's one of the reasons why Jones appeals to me more. I didn't know any officers to speak of until I met Mike Lennon, and I'm getting so I can talk to him recently. But you know officers and enlisted men have a different perspective and a different relationship. There's no question about that. And I think that's what was the appeal of Jones' work. He wrote about the experience of the enlisted man in the war. I was five years old when World War II was over. My cousin landed on Normandy with the 741 First Tank Battalion. They had those skirts on their tanks that were supposed to help keep them afloat. But many of them went out too far in choppy water and went to the bottom of the English Channel. About thirty-three of them in B and C Companies died, but my cousin made it to shore with A Company. He fought all through the war, came back psychologically and physically damaged and ended up committing suicide on June the sixth, years later, when he was on total disability. So

when I retired from teaching and started writing, I went back and talked to a number of these men, veterans who had landed on Iwo Jima, who had landed on Normandy, who had fought all through the Pacific in the war. And they were, almost to a man, enlisted people. And I captured that in my book, *Wild Hands Toward the Sky*, which is autobiographical to some extent, but it talks about the experiences of those people.

My cousin worked for my father after the war. When I rode in trucks with my cousin at the time, we would talk with other veterans. After *From Here to Eternity* came out, that was the book that they talked about because it spoke to them about the war in which they had fought. Then after high school, I went into the Marine Corps. And now I'm sometimes asked to speak at a ROTC commissioning ceremony at the University of Illinois. As a former enlisted Marine, I always think that's rather strange. They ask me what my credentials are and what my service was and I say it's very undistinguished. I was in the Cold War, basically between Korea and Vietnam, and I was enlisted. It's quite an honor for me to be here speaking to a group of people who have been commissioned, I say, having been enlisted myself, and in fact I was only a PFC—and I made that twice. That is the enlisted experience because people like Mike—and I don't mean this derogatorily—are the ones who bring you up for office hours and don't let you live the way you would like to live. And I think Jones was like that. Many of the people that I talked with were like that. I was in the service with men who landed everywhere from Guadalcanal on through the Pacific to Okinawa and to a man they liked the work of James Jones—I never heard anybody say, "I don't like *From Here to Eternity*." Because it talked about the problems between the officers and the enlisted men. It talked about homosexual activities. It talked about all kinds of things that every enlisted man, particularly in the Marine Corps that I was in, experienced or knew about at one time or another. And I think Jones matters for that reason because when you think about the meaning of *From Here to Eternity* now, there's going to be a little difference because of the times, of course, but the experiences that Jones had and captures in *From Here to Eternity*, *The Thin Red Line*, *Whistle*, those things have not changed dramatically whether it was, in World War II, or whether it's in Afghanistan or Iraq at this particular moment. I know most of you obviously are familiar with *All Quiet on the Western Front*. And you know in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Remarque says it's the facts that are important.

They're the only things that matter. So I think Jones has a realistic perspective. And I agree with what Willie Morris said, as far as if you want to know what it was like at the time in World War II five hundred years from now, you will be reading James Jones' *From Here to Eternity*. And I think that's a true statement. Thank you.

Leeds: Thanks Ray.

(applause)

Bob Begiebing is the author of over thirty articles and six books. He is the founding director of the low-residency MFA at Southern New Hampshire University, where he has won three awards for excellence in teaching and is now professor emeritus. His books include two on Norman Mailer and a trilogy of novels. His novel *Rebecca Wentworth's Distraction* won the Langum Prize for Historical Fiction in 2003. His fiction writing has been supported by grants from the Lila Wallace Foundation and the New Hampshire Council for the Arts. Bob.

Bob Begiebing: Thank you, Barry. I wrote something down because I was afraid if I started talking about this topic I would ramble. So to avoid a ramble I'm going to present my thoughts as efficiently as I can, because the whole purpose here is to hear some discussion from the audience about why these men matter. So I'll get right to it.

When Phil Sipiora, editor of *The Mailer Review*, first proposed the topic, Why Mailer Matters, it occurred to me that you might have to start a framework for discussion—which is what I'm trying to do here—at least three ways. First, how does Mailer matter to American literary culture; second, how does he (or might he) matter to the broader culture; and third, what in your personal experience matters (why Mailer matters to you as a writer or reader)?

Let's say, to begin with the literary culture, that anyone who has achieved two Pulitzer Prizes, a National Book Award, the National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, the presidency of PEN America, the Harvard University Signet Medal for Achievement in the Arts (twice), the co-founding of *The Village Voice*, some forty published books of fiction and nonfiction, uncountable essays and speeches and interviews, and four produced films *has* to matter to the literary culture, even

if a particular reviewer or academic or affinity group would hope to deny Mailer importance to that culture. The archives at this Ransom Center further demonstrate Mailer's decades-long involvement with numerous writers of all levels of achievement, with important periodicals and publishers, with universities, and with other organizations that contribute to our literary culture. When you look at the record of public achievement and at the less visible record submerged in the Mailer archive, you might be forgiven if you begin to feel that an individual, critic, editors of post-secondary anthologies, or other momentary gatekeepers of the twentieth-century literary canon who would diminish Mailer's importance are being tendentious, not to say benighted (or even willfully blinkered). Mailer has often been obstreperous, has behaved badly on this occasion and that. He has sometimes presented himself to the public (in the flesh and in his works) in pugnacious ways not especially good either for his sales or reputation. He has been so public a figure for so long that his flawed humanity has been on much more display than less public authors, or than your flawed humanity or mine. He has, in short, made more enemies than your run-of-the-mill contemporary novelist. Like most prolific authors he has written some not very good novels among his large and often experimental oeuvre. And beyond those reliably negative reviewers and academics, how often have you seen one of your interlocutors make a face (to put a generous spin on it) of disapprobation when you mention Mailer? Let us count the ways.

Of course the man has his friends, supporters, and avid readers, and a society and colony in his honor, yet the question of why Mailer matters arises not from these, but from those who take Mailer as their bête noir or object of ridicule—as our celebrity-cum-literatus who cannot possibly matter. Or if he does, matters only as a gadfly or a difficult frequent guest matters. I don't want to get too defensive or paranoiac here, but I want to be up front about what seems to me an essential issue in any discussion of why, how, or whether Mailer matters. Perhaps our discussion period will consider this issue further. A starting point might be Joan Didion's remark that too many people have come to believe that "Norman Mailer is no better than *their* reading of him."

In the broader culture, to address my second point, the sheer number and controversial nature of his television appearances alone would claim for Mailer some significance in American society, including popular culture, in

the second half of the Twentieth Century. As Morris Dickstein put it during his keynote address here at the Ransom Center, "You could no doubt write a history of the age through Mailer's idiosyncratic involvement in it." The four biographies of him while he was *living* (and the fifth authorized biography soon to be published), the three memoirs by others immediately after his death, his fat FBI file, his 160 weeks total on the NY Times Best Seller Lists over 59 years all attest to an interest beyond our literary culture alone. But in addition to that, since *Advertisements for Myself* in 1959, through his political reporting, *The Presidential Papers, Cannibals and Christians, The Time of Our Time, Why Are We at War*, to *The Big Empty* in 2006, Mailer has addressed head on in his original vision the celebrities and the major political, economic, and social issues of our time. Often with remarkable prescience, but always with a vision almost unlike anyone else's. As a self-confessed Left-Conservative, Mailer like left-conservatives before him (think Thoreau, Ruskin, and Orwell—and maybe even John Adams if you go back far enough —or even a contemporary like Edward Abbey or Christopher Hitchens), the insights he presents on topics of the moment seem often, if oddly, both timely and timeless. That is, they carry both popular and historical interest; they have the potential to stand the test of time that other more commonly acceptable insights expressed in our mass media by commentators inhaling heavily off the popular zeitgeist do not.

Finally, on the personal level of mattering, each person sitting here can recall when Mailer first hit his or her radar screen, and what it was about his work that felt important enough to gather your serious interest. These are individual testimonies I hope we hear something of from the audience today. The short version of my own first powerful interest happened in my twenties during the 1970s when for the first time I began to read Mailer, not only *The Naked and the Dead* a few years after my own stint in the Army, but *Advertisements* and *The Presidential Papers* and *Cannibals and Christians* particularly. I had the same initial reaction my father (an engineer, musician, and veteran of the Pacific war himself who also was not very much of a reader) had when he first read a copy of *Walden* I gave him one year for Christmas. I had been teaching the book, was reminded of my father's wry approach to "The Age of Conformity" (the 1950s), and thought he'd get it. "Jesus, Bob," he said over the phone during his thank you call, "somebody finally went ahead and said it!" My door into Mailer's work when I was a

young man was that the SOB, unlike the mass of his contemporaries, finally went ahead and said it. Thank you.

(applause)

Leeds: Our fourth speaker, J. Michael Lennon, is potentially the easiest and simultaneously the hardest guy to introduce. He's the easiest because you all know him, you all know what he's done. The hardest because his bibliography would fill a whole pamphlet. So I'm just going to give you a very cut-down version of it. J. Michael Lennon is the late Norman Mailer's archivist and authorized biographer. He has written and edited numerous books about him including *Norman Mailer: Works and Days,* which was the recipient of a *Choice* magazine award for Outstanding Scholarly Title in 2011. Some of his other books are *Critical Essays on Norman Mailer*, *Conversations with Norman Mailer*, *The James Jones Reader*, *The Spooky Art* and *Norman Mailer's Letters on An American Dream*. He's the past president of both The Norman Mailer Society and The James Jones Literary Society and still serves on the boards of both organizations. He's also the chair of the national board of *The Mailer Review.* His work has appeared in numerous impressive periodicals, which I won't enumerate, and he is currently writing the authorized Mailer biography to be published by Simon & Schuster. He's emeritus vice president for academic affairs and emeritus professor of English at Wilkes University, and his degrees are an AB from Stonehill College and the MA and PhD from the University of Rhode Island. Mike.

Lennon: Thank you, Barry. Why Mailer Matters, three reasons. Number one, Mailer was the key innovator in the new wave of participatory journalism that took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He argued that there were no immutable boundaries, no lines drawn in heaven, between the genres, and demonstrated this by drilling holes through all the watertight compartments dividing them. Mailer once described himself as "a Nijinsky of ambivalence," and he was able to deploy the warring parts of his psyche as both actor and observer, protagonist and witness, and thus achieve the enviable status Walt Whitman described as "being in and out of the game, watching and wondering"—and doing. The consummate artistic control he exercised over his persona enabled him, in *The Armies of the Night* (1968) and succeeding works, to shift from The Beast to The Ruminant with ease, jumping from one to the other like circus acrobats leaping from one horse to another and

then back again. Thus, he was able to avail himself of the techniques and powers of journalism, historical narrative, biography, autobiography, and the novel—always the master form for him because of its tendency, its tendency to engulf and ingest other forms. I would add, however, that it was the idea of the novel, and its aspiration to range wide yet dive deep, that inspired him and allowed him to plunder and reshape the other forms. His actual novelistic achievements, while brilliant, sit in the second row behind his successes in the polemical essay and several kinds of nonfiction narrative, including one often passed over too quickly—biography. As Richard Poirier once wrote, Mailer was Melville without *Moby-Dick*, George Eliot without *Middlemarch*, and Mark Twain without *Huckleberry Finn*. But with *The Armies of the Night* and *The Executioner's Song* (1979), he had his *Walden* and his *Crime and Punishment*.

Two, Mailer was the most important public intellectual in the American literary world for over 30 years, and along with other figures such as William Buckley, Saul Bellow, Gore Vidal and Susan Sontag, helped establish the creative writer as important a commentator as politicians, pundits, and professors. Mailer presented his ideas and commentary on modern politics and culture in every major media venue, save the Internet, and he even dabbled there in his final years. No American writer going back to Mark Twain mastered the modes of communicating with a variety of audiences for as long or as well as Mailer. He wrote for every sort of magazine and journal, underground and aboveground—*Partisan Review*, *Parade, Esquire, Playboy*, *Way Out, Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts, Dissent, Life, Look*, *Village Voice, Nugget*, the *NYRB,* and the *New Yorker*—over 100 different periodicals. He appeared on every major talk show, and many obscure ones. People saw him with Charlie Rose and Dick Cavett, and heard him at 2 a.m. on a local radio show in Nevada. He spoke at most of the major universities in the country, making hundreds of appearances; he was on symposia and panels in a variety of venues. One of his wives once said he would go the opening of an envelope. He could be counted on to present his point of view on the controversy *du jour* in a letter to the editor—hundreds—an essay, interview, live broadcast, or a book. He was the cultural spokesman for a generation, perhaps two, and was our hero, our man out on a limb talking a blue streak, fulminating against technology, pollution and plastic, worrying about our fragile democracy, and taking on all comers. [Note: the phrase "out on a limb

talking a blue streak," or something close, is borrowed from a review read long ago, and not since located. Thanks to the reviewer, wherever he is ensconced.] No American writer—Christopher Hitchens (another Left Conservative) might be the closest—has yet come close to replacing him.

Three, Mailer was the most important chronicler of and commentator on the major events and figures of American life during the last half of the twentieth century. He had daring insights on the great events and phenomena of the period: the Depression and World War II, McCarthyism and the Hollywood blacklist, the Cold War, Black Power, the sexual revolution, Vietnam and civil disobedience, the Women's Liberation Movement, technology and the space program, prize fights and political conventions (he covered six), and some of the most loved and hated persons of the 20th century: Muhammad Ali and Marilyn Monroe, Hemingway, Castro, Nixon, Gary Gilmore, Lee Harvey Oswald, Madonna, Jackie Kennedy, Picasso and Henry Miller, and, at the end of his life, Adolph Hitler. The most important figure for Mailer was John. F. Kennedy. No event in American history reverberated for as long or as hard for Mailer as Kennedy's assassination. It was either the focus or the backdrop for at least eight of his books, from *The Presidential Papers* (1963) to *Oswald's Tale* (1995). He owned two sets of the 26–volume Warren Commission Report, and was obsessed by the causes and effects of J.F.K.'s death and legacy. *The Time of Our Time* (1998), his 1,300-page, one-volume anthology organized by the date of the events chronicled therein, is one of the few narrative works that can stand comparison to John Dos Passos's chronicle of the first half of the 20th century, *U.S.A.* We would not know what America was about for a long stretch of years after World War II, not as well as we do, were it not for Mailer's words.

In sum: Perhaps no career in American literature has been as brilliant, varied, controversial, public, productive, lengthy, and misunderstood.

Leeds: Thanks, Mike. I wouldn't begin to pretend to try to summarize or synthesize or respond to the four dramatically varied viewpoints just aired, but I'm sure that among the audience we have a number of comments and questions and we welcome those for this recorded session. Yes, Mark Olshaker.

Mark Olshaker: Everybody in this room knows and appreciates Norman Mailer's work. How do you guys, who are the proponents of it, how do you

introduce new generations to his work? With somebody as protean and varied as Norman was, how do you start off to explain to new students or new readers what he was all about? And whoever wants to take that can start.

Lennon: Well, what I've done for a number of years is give them *The Executioner's Song*. I used to give them *The Naked and the Dead* and I still do. You try to look to what their interest might be, where they're coming from, what their career is like, if they're journalists, if they're, you know, in the literary world, if they're just a common reader. *The Executioner's Song* can be read by anybody who's been to junior high school. It's so accessible. It's incredibly accessible, and it's so powerful it just blows you away, just knocks you down. It's like a prairie wind, it's so strong. So that's usually the way. Then they get interested. I mean, you could talk a blue face, but you know students are usually, you know, they're used to professors coming in and saying let me tell you about Shakespeare, let me tell you about Spencer, let me tell you about Dante. I mean so they kind of tune it out, and they have to experience it themselves. That's the best way; then you can begin a conversation with them.

Begiebing: The other thing about it is my guess is that about a half of Mailer's books are not teachable at the undergraduate level. At least that's been my experience. It's very difficult, the novels. The nonfiction is much more teachable. What I wish there was a way of doing is getting two books, *Why Are We at War* and *The Big Empty,* out to the people in Occupy Wall Street, all those young people, and Occupy America, because I went through those books again as I was thinking about this presentation and saw again what Mailer has to say about democracy and patriotism and fascism. About the United States and Islam. About greed and empire. About the struggle between capitalism and democracy (about which struggle, as you probably remember, two historians, Beard and Parrington, said that the history of the United States is the history of the struggle between capitalism and democracy). About empire's uses of propaganda. About the way empire and fundamentalism go hand in hand. I mean, it's what these Occupy people are on the streets about. They would have from Mailer fabulous examples of quotations, of sentences they could hold up and speak before the cameras. So it's there. The difficulty is getting it to people, but the material is there. It's so strong.

Leeds: Like many of us I've been teaching Mailer if not every semester, certainly once every year, and I find that even among my senior and graduate

student English majors, at least half of them have never heard of Norman Mailer at first. You might as well say Joe Putiofahtzagahnotti and they would blink at you with as much recognition. What I find is what Mike first said. Mike coined the phrase that "Mailer is Proteus." He's so protean that you can find something to interest every student. Not limited, for example, to *The Executioner's Song* or *Why Are We at War,* but even *Tough Guys Don't Dance* pulls in kids who like page-turners. Mailer hated page-turners, but they love that page-turner and that's an entrée to him, an entry place to him. And I find that I say to them that if you're interested in movie stars, he's got two books and a play on Marilyn Monroe. If you're interested in boxing, he's got two books on that. And so on.

Mason: I might add to that. When the name of the session was announced, *Why Jones and Mailer Matter*, I first thought to myself, perhaps, it should be reworded *Do Jones and Mailer Matter?* And I don't mean this to the people in this room, but it's along the lines of what you just said Barry. Where are they being taught? And for Jones he is certainly not being read enough. And the case with Mailer, he's read more, certainly more, but perhaps not until the graduate level.

I did an informal student survey. I didn't do it before I left home, but as recently as last year. Now these are undergraduates, granted, and they tend to be professional studies students. I asked: "How many of you have heard of James Jones?" No hands. "How many of you have even heard of Norman Mailer?" A third to half the hands will go up. "How many of you have read a word of Norman Mailer?" Not a hand goes up. Now these, again, are undergraduates, but they've all had freshman comp and studied literature throughout high school. The question becomes how do we introduce them? This may be a little bit easier with the case of Mailer. He lived long and he's been in the anthologies and the whole idea of Mailer in popular culture can't be escaped. I mean he was, as you said, everywhere. So, as a public figure, along the lines of Hemingway, absolutely, but is he being read?

Leeds: That's good, that's good. Gary Bell. I'm sorry, Larry Schiller.

Larry Schiller: Well, let us say we've got fifty educators at this conference that will communicate more to their students. Let us say you have another hundred-and-fifty or two-hundred educators across the country that might

want to communicate to their students. How do you get thirty-five-thousand teachers to communicate that Mailer is worth reading? I admire and respect everybody in the room here, but you know you guys have the energy and the chutzpah. If the road is not clear on how we get to everybody. . . . Now, yes there are selfish reasons to travel the road but Mailer has a view of America, as Mike Lennon has pointed out, that is worthwhile reading. That's the big question that I'm faced with and I'd like to hear some other opinions. How do you get to the math teachers?

Leeds: We'd like to recognize the lady in the back row. Would you identify yourself please? I'm sorry. Kaylie Jones.

Kaylie Jones: Yeah, I'm Kaylie Jones. I just—the problem is as my friend Lori here just reminded me and my husband reminded me before I came here, is that they're not in the anthologies mostly. Norman is more than my father, but still they are not anthologized to the point that they should be and, I think, unfortunately this is across the board with the college and the high school humanities anthologies, literary anthologies, and it's almost, and I hate to sound you know, like it's a conspiracy, but I do think that very often they'll pick one African-American writer to be represented. They'll pick one, they'll put in maybe James Baldwin and then they'll put in maybe Alice Walker, or "Tony Catibumbato". . . . or something like that. And then they'll put maybe Sherman Alexie, and an Indian writer, and then they'll feel sort of well-rounded and represented but they're not and there are a lot of people missing from those anthologies. And I don't know why they keep saying it, the new anthology has been revised or edited by so-and-so. And usually it's true, it's the white literary establishment pretty much, you know, that's deciding who's in there and who's not. I looked through all the anthologies and my father's not in any of them anymore. He was a while ago in a few of them; there's a period where some of his short stories would be there. He's not, and Mailer very rarely is also, I think, anthologized, and that's who the thirty-five-thousand teachers read. My daughter's teacher at Stuyvesant High School didn't know who James Jones was and he's an English teacher. He apologized to her because he found out pretty quickly from the other teachers who he was, but, you know, that's because he's basically working from anthologies. He's working from textbooks.

Lennon: You know, the Internet may change this because Mailer and Jones were very tough to anthologize as, I mean, that's one reason, and you need to look at who's putting the anthologies together. Who are the editors of the anthologies? So that's another question. A lot of the people who are putting it together are people who went to graduate school when theory was dominating and deconstructionism was dominating, and Mailer and Jones don't fit in very well. Not easily. There's a lot of connections that could be made. I think the Internet—when textbooks are going to die at a certain point. It's a racket, as you know, you have to put out the same textbook, you take twenty authors out, you put twenty new ones in and you sell a whole new edition and therefore the kids can't buy the used book. And they do it all over; it's a racket. It's a terrible racket. The Internet may change that. Many people now are putting together their own packets from stuff that's on the Internet, printing it out and so forth. There are copyright places where you can work all this stuff out. That may happen down the line. But you know, Herman Melville's s tough to put in the anthologies too. He's very tough to anthologize.

Woman in background: *Bartleby* maybe once in a while but that's it.

Lennon: That's right, you need *Bartleby* and you need *Benito Cereno* and then there's a few things like that, but his poems are impossible. *Moby Dick*. You know, you just have to jump into *Moby Dick* and swim. You can't really break it down without destroying it. So, Bob, you probably got a—

Begiebing: Well, just quickly, there's an article John Whalen-Bridge wrote in the second issue of *The Mailer Review*. It starts on page 199, and he talks about how Mailer was embargoed. Sections on Mailer were embargoed at the American Studies Association, and then at McGraw Hill, Norton, and Heath. Heath, which prides itself on being the inclusive, all-inclusive, everybody's-in-there anthology, has dropped Mailer. There's two major problems, I think: It's theory, yes, or to put a slightly broader scope on it, ideological correctness. And then you get a left conservative and such a pugnacious character as Mailer. . . . Well, it's both problems.

And one of the greatest fears on these anthology committees is: Will we have somebody in there who says anything that anyone can possibly think of as being hurtful. That's the—

Olshaker: That's it.

Begiebing: That's the nature of boundaries or limits they draw.

Mason: Kaylie, I couldn't agree with you more, about the anthologies; but how about Mailer being removed from the Norton Anthology? Many of the people in this room, including myself, you know we sent e-mails and letters and all that. I mean, even look at the sainted Hemingway, how he fell out of favor. Even though he'll always be anthologized to some degree, and the short stories hold up well for anthologies, but he fell way out of favor because of—I'll put a little shaper point on it—political correctness came along when that was in vogue. Until the *Garden of Eden* came along. And then, oh, with the gender experimentation in the French Riviera, the newlyweds, the male and female swapping roles. All of a sudden, well, maybe there's something to him! Maybe he's not just the hairy fist holding the rose. All of a sudden he became somewhat politically correct, because of gender confusion. Maybe our guys aren't confused enough!?

(laughter)

Leeds: Before Mimi Gladstein speaks, I just wanted to say that one day Heath stopped asking me to update the section on Mailer for their anthology because it was suddenly out without them even asking me about it, and the reason I would suggest is the rest of something that Bob Begiebing quoted in his opening statement, which is Joan Didion's remark on the front page of *The New York Times Book Review* in her review of *The Executioner's Song*, that "it's a testimony to the tenacity of self-regard in the literary life that vast numbers of people remain persuaded that Norman Mailer is no better than their reading of him." Mimi.

Gladstein: I think Chaucer probably had this right. I mean we can theorize till the cows come home, being in Texas that's an appropriate metaphor. But I think Chaucer's *The House of Fame*, remember when the eagle carries the poet to the house of fame and there minor writers are long remembered, great ones are forgotten, so forth and so on, and in my experience over the thousand years that I've been teaching, when I went to school I had a [word unclear] anthology and the major works, of the contemporary works of the time. I cannot find in any anthology when I teach them from the [word unclear]. And of

course all of you can probably tell as many stories as I can. When I first wanted to study Zora Neale Hurston, who has now been canonized, I could not find her in any anthology of African-American writers. So it's so difficult to know what is the thing that we need to be, that either keeps a writer in the public eye or drops them out of it.

Leeds: The gentleman in front of Deb Martinson, next to Linda Begiebing, who is next. I don't know your name, sir.

Paul Sweeney: Paul Sweeney. I just wanted to make the point that one of my heroes, James T. Farrell, made a lot of enemies along the way, and I was telling Bob I think he had the best description of the publishing industry—he often said that he hated publishers. I met him and he told me Bennett Cerf was such a person. Someone asked him what he did when he was almost seventy years old. He said the first thing I do is I get *The New York Times* obituary page and if some son of a bitch has died I know it's going to be a good day. And I think that Mailer made, like Farrell, maybe more so, made so many enemies in so many different camps that you've got to, you know, you've got to battle like a Mailer himself to get people to listen. I mean, I'm not saying there's a vast right-wing conspiracy, but I'm saying there's, you know, he obviously has a lot of enemies out there. And you've got to get past that.

Unidentified: He has on the left too.

Leeds: Thanks Paul.

Elliott: I'd like to say something here. You know, I'm sitting up here and I'm thinking about Admiral Stockdale, when he was in the presidential debates here some time ago and said, "Who am I and what the hell am I doing here?" Because it seems to me that James Jones—I have nothing against Norman Mailer's work, it's everything that Mike and others said here, I agree with—but if you want to know what it's like in the military, read James Jones. And there are a lot of military people, people who have served. While they don't all take classes or go to college, they read James Jones to find out what it was like in World War II and to compare their own life to it. James Jones has influenced a number of people who became writers after serving in later wars: Tim O'Brien, Winston Groom, Larry Heinemann, a number of those writers who capture the essence of what war and warfare in the military is like.

And that's the reason, to me, James Jones matters, because he holds a mirror up to the reality of the world in a way that I don't know very many writers are able to do. But Jones didn't have the same kind of influence in other areas that Norman Mailer does, as Mike and Bob have been talking about here. But I think that's why James Jones matters because he tells you what it's like to serve in the military. And if you haven't served in the military, you can go there and see what it's like. If you have served in the military, you can look at James Jones' military writing and say that's the way it was when I was there, or there are a lot of similarities.

Leeds: Thanks Ray. Deb Martinson.

Deborah Martinson: Thus far we've talked about content but I think the way that both writers will have to secure their legacy is through writing. They're both such fine writers that no one can dispute that, and I know. I teach creative nonfiction, and that's how I turn all my students onto Mailer and they're shocked. God, this guy can write. They can do this, they can do that. And maybe Mike's right about the Internet. But those, bringing both Jones, who I think also is a fine writer, and Mailer into classes about writing. Students are hungry to see and read really good writing and they, they'll go with the content. I mean, from anything, so I think that if I had any influence, which I don't, I think I would try to do something about that in what is now being called the fourth genre. I mean, it's getting big. Certainly creative nonfiction is, in colleges. That's my two cents.

Leeds: Thank you, Deb. Do I see a hand?

Lennon: You know, one other thing is films. If you think about the films that were made of James Jones's work, there have been extraordinary films. The Terrence Malick, obviously, *From Here to Eternity*, but also *Some Came Running*. They were wonderful films, and I think that's had, that has helped to keep James Jones out there. He was such a graphic writer. He had such beautiful conflicts among his characters that he lends himself beautifully to film. Mailer has not had that success. *The Naked and the Dead* was a disaster as a film. *An American Dream* was unspeakable. It was so bad. You know it's set in New York City, they filmed it in L.A. It was, that's how bad it was. *The Executioner's Song* was the greatest success and is by far the greatest success. Larry Schiller, who is sitting back there, of course was the director of that and

Norman's collaborator in that whole effort. That was the one great success as a film. Norman's own films, you know, they had their place in film history, but you know, people aren't going to go see them in the theaters. John Buffalo's written a wonderful screenplay for *The Naked and the Dead*. I'd love to see it remade. There's a number of other films that could be made from his books. I know Michael Mailer has talked on more than one occasion about *Armies of the Night*, if that could ever be made into a film. Difficult to put a film on, but a great film coming out of a great book can have a lot to do with the resurgence of interest in an author. I think if there's any way to make these writers matter, you know, even more it would be to see some of those films. Come on, I kind of feel that'll happen someday.

Leeds: Bonnie Culver.

Culver: And just adding to that, that the way I've found of bringing students in to Jones specifically is *The Thin Red Line*, because that is such a contemporary film, and it's just been remastered. I brought that to them and handed them a book, and then handed them another book. And that's the way to reach them, and that's another way, vis a vis popular culture.

Mason: That's at the college level, right Bonnie? The question becomes how can they be introduced at the high school level as well, and there you get problematic. Because *The Thin Red Line*, which I tend to agree with Ray, if it's not the finest of the three, you know, it's nip and tuck with *From Here to Eternity*. But the scenes, and Ray maybe we talked about that last night at supper, the scenes in it, taught at the high school level with the helicopter parents today. Well . . . you know the phone's going to be ringing at the superintendent's office. Then you're really off to the races!

Leeds: Larry Schiller.

Schiller: See, one of the things that existed in the '70s, which no longer exists, is reading guides in high school when films and major television shows brought contemporary themes even from period works. Procter & Gamble was a big sponsor of reading guides. It was a way of promoting their products in a subtle way, and so was Hallmark greeting cards. And I think a great thing has been lost now that when you have films that are out there that are written by major authors, you don't know they're written by those major

authors. I don't care whether the name is on the screen or not, you know who the star is, and you know whether it was a nominated for an Emmy or an Oscar. So, I don't know how one gets back into the reading guide phase; we had a good twenty years of it in America. And all of a sudden the funding for it left because films for television drifted away. I can tell you that I made a few films. *The Executioner's Song*, you know, but I made a film called *Peter the Great* with Maximilian Schell, and the reading guide for that was over sixty pages long. Of course the author was Robert Massie and, you know, nobody ever heard of Robert Massie in high schools and colleges. But the reading guides were very, very important. You take a film that I made called, what was it, about Patricia Neal and Roald Dahl [*The Subject Was Roses*]. The reading guide Procter & Gamble did was on strokes and so forth. You know, it made the author Barry Farrell for a long period of time because all of a sudden everybody knew who Barry Farrell was. So if one can get back into reading guides—whether they're made by the teachers, whether they're made in school districts or whatever—I think that would be a great asset in promoting the authors.

Leeds: Mashey Bernstein.

Mashey Bernstein: I've just got one comment. I always think of that conversation between Edith Wharton and Henry James. Ah, Henry James turns to Edith Wharton and she had just bought a Rolls Royce when her last novel was published and Henry James turns to a wheelbarrow and says 'That's what I bought with my royalties." So it's impossible to prognosticate what would happen in the future. And I know we despair sometimes, there's so many factors involved with high schools and teachers and who's reading what and who doesn't know what, and the only thing I used in my classes is the last page of *Armies of the Night,* which I think stands with the last page of *The Great Gatsby* as one of the most beautiful statements of America, and it floors the students. You know, maybe it's not an anthology, it's a page. That's what gets them going. It's what got me going when I came across Mailer.

Mason: If I may, that was part of the commentary in my reading, that both of these authors had the ability to write serious, serious stuff and still make the *New York Times* bestseller list and still make salaries that put them in with movie stars or sports figures. And while there are many writers today that are making salaries like sports figures and movie stars, my take is they're

not writing serious literature. So maybe it was just a time in American culture when that could be done. I'd like to think it still could be done and, back to the original point. But you have to bring young people to these authors early on.

Leeds: Therese.

Therese Halscheid: Well, I had a couple things that came to mind. One is there was a book that came out a while ago called *The Language Police*, and there was somebody that was head of education, I think under Clinton, and she was kind of appalled because at the school level—I'm talking about high school and elementary school—the parents now, they're kind of like a censorship going on as to the content of the books that are being read and they're very vocal about that. And there's also kind of a conglomeration of publishers now of school texts and they are being dictated by what parents and community want. So there's this censorship. Just like we had with this Kahlo exhibition in the Harry Ransom Center.

This particular woman actually left the Clinton education department and went and wrote *The Language Police* to show the extremes being taken. And I remember hearing a radio interview about that, that at the elementary level they didn't even want true disasters to come up because an earthquake could shock a child. And they wanted to take away Halloween stories because of its relationship with witchcraft. And when you do things like that you run into trouble. So I don't really know how far Mailer and Jones would go at the high school level, but what I see is a very opportune time for you to work with people coming back from Iraq with their war stories. There's a lot of war anthologies being published now. If you got on list-serves to see what these contests are and contacted them, and said we have a Mailer or Jones short story, or we have a letter, whatever you want to excerpt. I think they would be thrilled to take it and that maybe it wouldn't be right now at the high school level but it would certainly be somebody who's studying war at college level, graduate level, and community at large. There's a lot of soldiers coming home from Iraq that would love to be on the page with Mailer and Jones.

Elliott: I think that's an excellent point, and as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are supposedly winding down, we're going to have—for the next fifty or sixty years—a society that's going to have to take care of those

people who were damaged psychologically and physically during this war. Jones's unpublished novel, *They Shall Inherit the Laughter*, just came out as an excerpted version titled, *To The End of the War*, dealing with those things, and that's going to be something that society is going to have to look at now. So that's an excellent point that you make that we need to start thinking about.

Leeds: Gentleman in the center.

Unidentified Man: Yeah, to pick up on that point both writers wrote significant books on the Pacific War and got at truths about war that are shocking even today. Scenes in those books. And you know war has been so mythologized today that it seems almost an abstract concept. But these books show you what it's really like. And I was wondering if maybe you could speak to the comparison of the two books and their different approaches and their similarities.

Mason: Mike before you begin. I was going to ask this question to the panel myself, so thank you for introducing it. My question, combined with yours, why is it that the two greatest World War II novels, combat novels, are both Pacific-based. Why the Pacific? I mean I have some thoughts on it, but name a great European theater WWII novel, not nonfiction, that comes out of the war, and most of us . . .

Lennon: Well you've got *The Young Lions* . . .

Mason: Well, I was just gonna say, that Irwin Shaw's *Young Lions* . . . .

Lennon: It's a wonderful book. It's not elite. Writing about the war in Europe was just so much more complex because you've got all the accretions of culture. You know, a thousand years in there and monasteries being bombed in Italy and all kinds of other questions. You didn't have those questions in the war in the Pacific. War was much more naked, Mailer always felt. He was very upset that he didn't go to the Atlantic theater. But comparing the two books, you mean *The Thin Red Line* and *The Naked and the Dead*, because *From Here to Eternity* isn't really a war novel. It ends with the war, it's an Army novel, it's actually dedicated to the U.S. Army, and it ends with the combat at Schofield Barracks, and so forth but it's the great prelude to the war. I mean that's what makes it so great. But to compare those two novels, Mailer always

said that Jones knew about infantry tactics that he should be teaching at the school for infantry tactics in the United States because he knew so much more about them than Mailer did. And I think that's true. His small unit operations stuff in *The Thin Red Line* is unbeatable. Mailer wrote about officers as well. Jones didn't have very much about officers in *The Thin Red Line*. There's very little. And the same with *From Here to Eternity*. Mailer had the opportunity, when he was in the Army, to first of all work in the intelligence tent. He was in there typing up intelligence reports. And he also interpreted aerial photography. He was a mess cook, and he was also in a reconnaissance platoon and was right out there behind enemy lines and so forth. So he saw the war from high and low and inside and outside. Jones saw it, you know, inside, in a little different way. Obviously Jones knew an awful lot about officers as well; he just didn't write about them as extensively as Mailer did. In a way, I think the books can't be compared. They're both so brilliant. They're both so wonderful. Mailer always felt that Jones was the better writer when it came to war than he was, and he said that many times. And about the Army, as well. I think Mailer had more political overtones—the coming of fascism in America—Mailer's great fear was in there, and that makes it different from Jones. On the other hand, Jones had all the nitty gritty of Army life and small unit tactics, probably as well as anybody ever wrote.

Mason: One of the reasons with Jones, also, is Jones was, I don't want to say Civil War buff, but he was a student of the Civil War. And I think that in addition to his own service in the South Pacific that's where he learned to write about infantry tactics, at the beginning, 19th century infantry tactics. So he was always a student of that. I think that served him well when he went to write war scenes, whether or not it was World War II. I'm not sure if everyone knows—he had planned a Civil War novel which he never got around to working on, but it was on his list of things to do.

Leeds: Kaylie Jones.

Jones: I just wanted to say that my friend, the lieutenant in the U.S. Navy right here, just reminded me that we disagree a little bit with Mike that my father's writing's about the officers, at least in *The Thin Red Line*. That two of the greatest characters in *The Thin Red Line* are both officers, Colonel Tall and Captain Stein .

Lennon: Yeah, I stand corrected. You're right. They are two great characters, yeah.

Jones: OK, that's all I'll say.

Mason: I would add one more thing. Your question about the Pacific War added to my question. I think that the Pacific War, and Ray can speak to this, it was total war. Absolutely total. And one of the advantages, quote marks around advantages, was there were no significant civilian populations to worry about in most of the Pacific War. Very little involvement of the civilians. Iwo Jima being a perfect example of that. When they went head-to-head, toe-to-toe, there were no civilians, there were no villages, it was just total war.

One more comment. During the entire war my father talked about how few prisoners there were. And as we well know, there were lots of prisoners taken on both sides in the European war. However, he saw only three live Japanese in the entire time he was in the Pacific. Either they killed themselves or the Marines and soldiers killed them. But both sides understood the "rules." It was vicious and it was to-the-death war. And with the European theatre, you actually had some rules. There were rules to "the game" there, believe it or not. But there were no rules in the Pacific, other than kill or be killed.

Elliott: Well, there were civilians in the Philippines, villages. But the rest of the Pacific campaign, starting in Guadalcanal and going on to the island-hopping campaigns on the way to Japan, it was total war. It was a totally different war, all out war, kill or be killed. And you could write about one particular campaign whether it's the Philippines, Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Peleliu, or wherever it was, and there was some other major battles. Eugene Sledge has a very good combat memoir, *The Old Breed*, about Peleliu. But it and other novels from the Pacific Theater are about one particular campaign where the civilian population didn't have to be considered as opposed to civilian presence throughout the entire war in Europe.

Okinawa, yes, towards the end of the war. Civilians towards the end of the war, which starts with Peleliu, then Okinawa.

Lennon: There are quite a few who tried it too.

Leeds: I think Mimi Gladstein and then Mashey Bernstein.

Bernstein: I'll go after you.

Gladstein: Okay. Just two side comments. These are like footnotes, you know, sometimes footnotes give you information relevant to what you're writing and sometimes they just give you some auxiliary information. Number one would be many of us are speaking or are going to hear people in the Tom Lea room and you will find Tom Lea; he didn't choose when he became a novelist to write about it, but as a correspondent for *Life* he drew some incredible pictures of Peleliu and the war in the Pacific. So if those of you who are that kind of buff you might look in the Tom Lea room and see some of that. Number two, do we count Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as a sort of pre-World War II novel for Europe?

Lennon: *Across the River and into the Trees.*

Bernstein: I know, it's a combat novel. I know you have somebody from England here. I was wondering how is Mailer faring in Europe? I read him as a young boy in Dublin, in Ireland. I remember him as *The Naked and the Dead* and *Why Are We in Vietnam?* So I was wondering, we talk very much about America, but does Mailer go further?

Fraser Mann: I wish he was more of a presence in UK and –

Leeds: Could you identify yourself?

Mann: Yeah, Fraser Mann from York in the UK. I wish he was more of a presence. I mean, you mentioned Orwell earlier. He's our great debunker of national ideologies, oversimplifications: young people and older in Britain at the moment have a terrible propensity to believe anything they're told by public relations, advertising, tabloid newspapers, the government, and often it's oversimplified and in the interests of economic progress or short-term gain with long-term disadvantage to the majority. Now, Orwell for us provides an opportunity to deconstruct that mythology. However, for a lot of young people in the UK Orwell is from a time that is very difficult to understand; he was a great rejector of popular culture. On this we have more of a relationship with Mailer and with Jones, and how I would draw those two war novels together is that they honestly buffer the bullshit of those oversimplifications about war and national ideology and heroism and patriotism. And we need to have the courage to actually have an engagement with the

complexity of issues, the complexity of human experience, rather than just taking the convenient way out and believing oversimplification. So I hope as someone who teaches young people in the UK to bring their attention to writers that really engage with those ideas and in a manner that without oversimplifying their work covers a much broader range of human experience than some of our English authors do, who tend to be very bourgeois and offer novelistic ideas that don't speak to whole population. So, yeah, I wish they were more of a presence.

Lennon: How did you get interested in Mailer or Jones?

Mann: It came through my interest in Kurt Vonnegut. When I was an undergraduate I had a teacher who was a great fan of Kurt Vonnegut, and my coming to text route led from Vonnegut to Joseph Heller, and then I wanted to find out more—you know, I fell in love with both of those novels and wanted to read more. So this great lecturer said to me, "Well, if you want to read more, try *The Naked and the Dead*," and through that found *The Thin Red Line* and *From Here to Eternity*, and then worked my way backwards, reading through Dos Passos, Hemingway, William March, Shaw, as you've mentioned, so, really yeah through Kurt Vonnegut, that was my route into it.

Leeds: Deborah Martinson.

Martinson: Just have to say this. I remember reading *The Thin Red Line* as if it were yesterday. And I was very young, not interested in war a whit. A young girl in a rural town in California. What Jones and Mailer both do though is they talk about the life of the interior mind in a way that is very complex and rich and accessible. So aside from what else is going on in terms of plot, which is great, I'm a sucker for the arc of the narrative. But I think why both matter is because there is interior life that is being projected in a way that doesn't allow it to be flattened or to be modified; it just is articulated, and I think that is really important.

Begiebing: Yeah, and I think *honest* interior life might be one of the reasons why it's difficult to get American publishers to jump on board now. When you look at the recent publications of the university presses—I haven't done a thorough survey of this—but with the two most recent scholarly studies (as opposed to a critical collection) that I know of, one was published by

Ramsay in Paris and the other is going to be published by Manchester University Press: books devoted to Mailer only, I mean. You all remember books have come out about Mailer *and* other authors. Mailer fits in with one of these authors, so its thematic study, but it's actually a pretty hard sell these days even at the university press, as well as those little commercial presses, to get a critical study published of just Mailer alone. The Europeans for whatever reason seem to find him a little more congenial. And I haven't read it yet, but I hope to, Gwendolyn Chabrier's book *Norman Mailer: American Prophet*. That pretty well sums it up. I think I know what the book's going to be about, but the title really hits home for me.

Leeds: We have about three minutes left –

Paul Sweeny: I have the microphone, I wonder if I could get a word in. Towards the end of his life, I saw Mailer, I think he was with Lawrence Schiller at Barnes & Noble, floating to the mirror and making a general appearance, and I heard Mailer say that one of the reasons that Bush and Cheney were able to take us into this war so cavalierly was because neither man had served in the military. And that always stayed in my head. And I have to say it stays in my head a bit with Barack Obama too, and so you say why does Norman Mailer matter, why does James Jones matter? Our leaders should be reading these works too, especially since they have no first-hand knowledge of war. And so I think there's another reason why Mailer and Jones matter.

Obama didn't even know how to pronounce corpsman. It's coreman.

Leeds: If I could call on Larry Schiller, he has something to say.

Schiller: Why doesn't the Norman Mailer Society take a couple of these books and send them on to Obama to read?

Begiebing: I'll vote for the two I held up earlier. Send them to Occupy Wall Street. Send them to Obama. See what happens.

Unidentified: Send them to all the Republican candidates.

Leeds: Does anyone have Parthian shots? Okay, thanks for coming to the session.

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