

A Case Of Ambi-Semitism

A spectacular case of ambi-semitism has just occurred.

The difference between *anti-semitism* and *ambi-semitism* is the difference between hating the Jews, and just not caring whether someone else hates the Jews. Ambi-semitism is indifference to the Jews, including indifference to anti-semitism.

Ambi-semitism is in some ways more dangerous to the Jews than is anti-semitism. All modern anti-semitic movements have been made up of a smaller number of anti-semites and a larger number of ambi-semites who were willing to go along, for other reasons. Now comes an American film festival, at Telluride, Col., which just gave an award to Leni Riefenstahl, noted maker of Nazi propagandist films. She was Hitler's favorite film-maker. She produced, among others, some powerful films extolling the great accomplishments and virtues of Nazism.



Raab

She has now been honored by this American film festival for her skills, along with Gloria Swanson and Francis Ford Coppola. The Jews protested. They picketed the award ceremonies. The film producers were "startled." They explained that she is just being honored as an artist.

"I was not political," Ms. Riefenstahl said. "I was just making documentary films. I told Hitler I did not know the difference between the S.A. and the S.S. Hitler told me they wanted films made by an artist not by a propagandist. I was never a Nazi."

On the subject of her art, a personal episode: I was teaching a class at San Francisco State College at a time when one of Leni Riefenstahl's films was being shown in this city as a historical oddity. The students who had seen it were asked their reactions. One bright young lady, unborn during the Nazi period, replied that the film gave her a new insight: "Hitler gave pride back to the German people."

A stunning response. But there it was in the film: marching young Germans, heads up, chests out; factories bustling; autobahns being built; and so forth. Of the mass arrest of political dissenters — not a disturbing word. Of the Nuremberg Laws and the beating up of Jews, not a disturbing word. Art? Artful, yes; artistic, never. There is an ineluctable relationship between art and truth; at least the *deliberate* avoidance of truth is incompatible with art. There is also some ineluctable relationship between art and a regard for the human being as non-object. (An aside: note the parallel in the recent destruction of "unauthorized" Soviet art by the Soviet government).

It may very well be true that the Leni Riefenstahl was *not* an ideological Nazi, that she was *not* political, as she claims. *So much the worse.* There were many like her. It may very well be true that Leni Riefenstahl was not an anti-semitic, as she claims. *So much the worse.* There were many like her. There is much evidence that one of the chief technicians of the slaughter of Jews, Eichman, did not personally dislike Jews. He was just indifferent to their fate. He was an ambi-semitic. At the least, so was Riefenstahl. They went along, actively, willingly, enthusiastically. They are accountable.

But what about the film festival people? What about Coppola, who had lunch with Riefenstahl, and "cleared" her of having been a Nazi — thereby freeing himself to join her in the award circle? They also exhibited a degree of active indifference to the fate of the Jews; and certainly to the sensitivity of the Jews. Can you imagine an award being given, today, to the person who made films extolling the virtues of apartheid in South Africa?

Ambi-semitism is what may be on the rise today. The Riefenstahl award is a case in point — all the more dramatic because it links a sinister ambi-semitism of the past with one that seems to be growing in the present.