

Nixon And Anti-Semitism

In the midst of last week's historic events, one small item reported in San Francisco newspapers was fairly lost.

That was, of course, the piece of the famous June 23 tape in which Nixon said to Haldeman: "Now the worst thing (unintelligible) is to go to anything that has to do with the arts.... The arts, you know—they're Jews, they're left-wing. In other words, stay away. Stay with Middle America."

There is an understandable tendency to relate those words to the question which has recurred over the years: "Is Richard Nixon anti-semitic?" That question probably recurred so often because many people associated Richard Nixon with right-wing extremism, and associated right-wing extremism with anti-semitism. Otherwise, there was little evidence on which to base such a charge.

There was the time Nixon bought a house in Washington; and the sales contract carried the former owner's clause excluding resale to Jews and others. But, as he pointed out, the effect of such a clause had already been ruled illegal and invalid by the Supreme Court. Nixon certainly had as many Jews around him politically, as were proportionate in the Republican Party. And, as President, his two closest advisors on substantive issues were Jewish. Then, of course, there was the matter of his staunch support of Israel in its time of crisis. Most Americans don't support or oppose Israel because they like or dislike Jews — or even because they like or dislike Israelis or Arabs. On the other hand, Gerald L.K. Smith wouldn't put himself in the position of supporting Israel for any reason.



Raab

But what about those remarks of June 23? They could signify more contempt for Middle America than for the Jews. Or they could indicate his politician's belief that Middle Americans hold a stereotype of artists, Jews and the new left as all dedicated to the counter-culture, all trouble-makers, against the traditional values. Or he could hold that stereotype himself. By test, over two-thirds of the American people hold two or more negative stereotypes about the Jews. At what point does one become a certified "anti-semite"?

It is a futile and self-indulgent exercise. Many Jews still miss some of the meaning of Jewish history: The survival and security of the Jews does not depend so much on whether people like them or not; but on other political attitudes which relate more closely to that security and survival. Whether Nixon privately liked or disliked Jews was less important for the security of American Jews than the fact that he endangered constitutional freedom in this country. And whether he privately liked or disliked Jews was less important for the security of Jews abroad, than what he believed and did with respect to the Soviet Union.

In that regard, Nixon has been "softer" on Communist states than President Gerald Ford has been, according to the record. Ford has always been an avid supporter of Israel. But he has also worried about the mushy nature of Nixon's detente with the Soviet Union. Ford has been inclined so far to make more American demands on the detente. Aside from strengthening the detente if it is genuine — this approach may auger well for both the Soviet Jews and for Israel.

This is all speculation, of course—but it is more relevant than speculating as to whether Nixon was more or less of an anti-semite.