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VOUCHERS AND ANTI-SEMITISM

Signatures are now being gathered for a referendum to support school vouchers. And an analysis of anti-semitism in America has just been released. There is a connection between the two items.

The analysis of anti-semitism is the result of a massive opinion survey conducted across the country by the University of California, as funded and stimulated by the A.D.L.

A basic question in such an analysis: who are the people most likely to be anti-semitic? What are their characteristics? Having discovered that, it might be more possible to find remedies.

It was found, for example, that there is no significant difference in this regard between Republicans and Democrats. About 35 per cent of Republicans and about 33 per cent of Democrats measured high on anti-semitism. Those who held a systematic set of negative beliefs about Jews were marked "high" on anti-semitism. About one third of all Americans qualified in this survey.

There were also few significant differences between rich people and poor people. About 31 per cent of those with incomes between 5 and 10 thousand dollars measured as high on anti-semitism, as against 32 per cent of those with incomes over 15 thousand.

About 32 per cent of Catholics measured high on anti-semitism, as against 37 per cent of liberal Protestants and 37 per cent of fundamentalist Protestants. Again, no significant differences, by statistical standards. As a matter of fact, almost all of the characteristics which the analysts correlated with anti-semitism, indicated that they did not make much difference.

There was, however, *one* set of characteristics which did show a significant relationship to anti-semitism. That was education. About 51 per cent of those Americans who had only finished the 8th grade, measured high on anti-semitism -- as against 32 per cent of high school graduates, and 16 per cent of college graduates. Now, those are differences! And they show up without fail in all such surveys.

There are a number of elements which cause the more educated, as a group, to be less anti-semitic than others. They learn more about the irrationality of prejudice, for example. They may learn more about the real history of the Jews. But they especially learn more about history in general, about American history, and about democratic values. As one author in this recent analysis summed it up: "The uneducated are cognitively and morally unenlightened because they have never been indoctrinated into the enlightened values of the larger society, and in this sense are alienated from it."

Jews have always supported the public school system partly because that system gave them the chance to compete equally in American life. For all immigrants, the public school system has always been a kind of affirmative action program. But Jews have also supported the public school system because of its influence on *non*-Jewish children, their future fellow-citizens in America. The public school system tended to provide the learning and values which gave this country the kind of democratic base which is the best security that Jews can have. The figures show that the public schools *still* do that, although the struggle to maintain their quality continues.

The voucher system, which you and other Californians are being asked to put on the ballot, will probably put an end to such a public school system. The state would pay just about any school the parents would choose for their children. It is called "Family Choice," but it is really "No-Choice" for the citizenry. No longer could we be sure that, by and large, the schools were teaching democratic and American values, and the knowledge to support them.

One of the supporters of this proposed referendum gave the game away when asked what would prevent a group of Nazi-minded people, under his voucher plan, from setting up a neighborhood school with an undemocratic curriculum.

"Nothing," he said.