

See also Joseph Kraft, SFChronicle 12 Sep 72, this file.

TOM BRADEN

To call Richard Nixon intellectual mocks the word, defies the term

CHICAGO, Ill. — In between working on his speeches and trying to get a little sleep on his airplane, Sen. George McGovern is reading the first volume of Arthur M. Schlesinger's history of the New Deal. It is called "The Crisis of the Old Order." And one can understand why McGovern might find it comforting as well as instructive. For he sees his own campaign as pointing up a crisis of spirit in America much as the last days of the Hoover Administration revealed a similar crisis.

I thought of McGovern's reading habits when I picked up a copy of Life magazine on the same plane and read Daniel Patrick Moynihan's plea to his fellow professors. "Nixon is an intellectual," he told them. He went on to explain that Nixon's aim for his country is precisely that of Adlai Stevenson's because like Stevenson, Nixon is trying to establish the political arena as "a center of civility and rational discourse open to all."

One can agree with Moynihan's criticism of violence on the campus and of professors who have encouraged it. One can agree with his pleas to blacks to try to make their gains by persuasion and the use of reason. One can go further and say that Mr. Nixon's early warnings to "lower our voices" were wise. One can even acquiesce in Moynihan's finding that Nixon has appointed a number of Jews to his administration, though his listing of their names strikes me as a form of racism unbecoming a Harvard professor. Is Moynihan trying to tell us

that because a man is a Jew he is an intellectual?

But let us deal candidly with Mr. Moynihan's principal assertion. To suggest that Richard Nixon is an intellectual, that the White House he runs is intellectually oriented or that his endeavor to keep peace in his country is modeled upon the forum ideas which Adlai Stevenson advocated is so gross a misrepresentation of this administration that it opens Mr. Moynihan to a charge of toadyism unbecoming an intellectual, even a self-proclaimed one.

One would have to go back to Warren G. Harding, at least, to find an American Presidency so devoid of intellectual content as that of Richard Nixon's first term. Except for Henry Kissinger, George Shultz and speechwriter William Safire, there is hardly a man in the entire appointive list whom one could suspect even of reading, let alone reading seriously. Except for Kissinger and Shultz, what administration official can you think of whom you would classify as possessed of a first-rate mind? Peterson at Commerce? Yes. But his is a practical, how-to-do-it mind. He would not call himself an intellectual.

This is not to say that American presidents ought to be intellectuals or that intellectuals necessarily make good presidents. But nothing in the career of Richard Nixon suggests even that he understands the necessity for promoting that climate which leads to the discovery and dissemination of ideas and encourages creativity.