

**William Safire**

# A Few Words About Hatred And Motives

Washington

"THEY HATE ME," said Franklin Roosevelt of his most savage critics, adding with a vengeance "and I welcome their hatred."

To be the object of hatred of a despised minority has long been considered a political plus: George Wallace could hardly do without his "pointy-headed professors" nor Ralph Nader without his corporate oligarchs.



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Dwight Eisenhower touched a responsive chord when he denounced "the sensation-seeking columnists and commentators"; Richard Nixon, sometimes through Spiro Agnew, liked to play off the public's suspicion of the "elitist establishment press."

Mr. Nixon's recent display of what is usually a decorously-draped hatred of the press was not a studied blast, however: As he said earlier in the same

press conference, he was seeking a "cease-fire at home." When he returned the fire of his tormentors, he handed them a victory, because he was not playing off a despised minority — he was rubbing his neck against the cutting edge of what had become majority sentiment.

The element of calculation is gone: We are witnessing honest hatred, gleefully returned, and at the root of the mutual hatred is an irresponsible, self-indulgent, and ill-examined attribution of evil motives.

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IN THE EYES of the media-haters, the press is out to "get" the President, just as it forced the previous president into early retirement. Its motive is to sweep aside the verdict of the majority in the past election, to assert its primacy in the manipulation of popular opinion, to settle past personal scores with a longtime enemy and to make itself a superpower which can override the traditional system of checks and balances.

Surely to some degree, those evil motives exist in some members of the media, but the media-haters will not recognize other motives that predominate: A fierce desire to defend individual freedom from the excesses of governmental power, a determination to see justice done, a belief that the exposure of wrongdoing will in the long run strengthen the system.

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IN THE EYES of the Nixon-haters, the President's motive is to wield tyrannical power; to crush dissent and humiliate the political opposition: to satisfy a bloodlust by waging secret war, to throw sand in the eyes of justice to protect himself and to assert a new imperialism to answer feelings of personal insecurity.

Certainly a desire to stay in power mixes with other, more noble motives, but the Nixon-haters will not recognize good motives anywhere near the White House: A desire to build a structure of peace in the world that can last, or (less nobly) to be seen in history's eyes as the great peacemaker of this country; a desire to preserve the separation of powers and to restore the mistakenly-absurd confidentiality of the president's office.

Motives are almost always mixed and no prism exists to separate them; yet there was never more certainty about the motives of the forces in opposition, and the mutual verdict is that the other guy's motives are all bad.

The perception of bad motives is demonstrably false: We are no more governed by evil blunderers than we are informed by evil geniuses. Yet we permit ourselves to bite down on our toothaches as if there were satisfaction in suffering.

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LET'S GET personal about motives. If you are a member of the new noisy majority—who wants to see the Sheriff of Nottingham appoint a special prosecutor and Judge Sirica give way to the Red Queen — ask yourself why you are reading this essay.

Your good motive for so doing: To try to understand a different viewpoint so as to form a judgment on your own rather than accept the stereotypes of others. Bad motives: To see how a Nixon sympathizer will squirm out of this one, or to whip a dander up at breakfast which will keep your vindictiveness feeling vindicated all day.

If you see only good motives in yourself, you prove the point: If you recognize mixed motives, you make the case.

A turnabout is required: Why is the essayist trying to sell you this bill of goods about the need to repeal universal motive-impugning? His good motive: To reduce the general hate-level and thereby take some of the mindless passion out of what should be a more mutually respectful confrontation. His bad motive: To pose as one of those above-the-battle, even-handed good guys.

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