

William Rusher

The Dangers Of Excess in Hating Nixon

IF AN OUTSIDER may be forgiven for intervening, I would like to caution America's vast horde of Nixon-haters that they are in serious danger of going too far.

I call myself an "outsider" in the decades-long dispute over Richard Nixon because for some peculiar reason I have never been able to feel strongly, one way or the other, about this strange and complicated man. I realize that in



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this respect I am far from typical. Though his political style did not encourage it, Mr. Nixon over the years developed a sizable personal constituency, and it was probably never higher than on the day he resigned the presidency. It is still out there — silent at the moment, to be sure, but ready to strike hard at his tormentors if an opportunity should ever arise.

Larger still, or at any rate far more visible and audible these days, is the great army of Nixon-haters. Certain men, perhaps by virtue of "some vicious mole of nature in them," as Hamlet speculated, have a quite extraordinary gift for inspiring hatred and focusing it upon themselves. Mr. Nixon did this for nearly 30 years, and the recent behavior of the impressive number of Americans who work off their aggressions on him is one of the most remarkable phenomena of our time.

They may think they despise him because of the crimes (notably a brief and unsuccessful obstruction of justice) of which he was clearly guilty, or perhaps because of the far larger number of which he was accused; but this is obvious nonsense.

Many of the noisiest Nixon-haters are today supporting for President men they know to be every bit as guilty as he was of such crimes.

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RATHER, "NIXON" is simply a code word. In part, he is merely the most convenient available receptacle for the large mess of indigestible hostility that is always floating around in our national life, looking for some safe outlet.

In larger part, and more specifically, he has long served as the surrogate punching bag for a great many ideas that various people wanted to take a sock at but were (and still are) afraid to attack directly: notably, though not exclusively, those implicit in the prosecution of Alger Hiss, to which Mr. Nixon as a congressman made an early and effective contribution.

Whatever it—s true basis, however, moral indignation can bring on a really majestic high, and there are signs that those who enjoy using Mr. Nixon to generate theirs are getting addicted to the practice. They require more fixes, and bigger ones, all the time. (That is why they resented Mr. Ford's pardon of Mr. Nixon so bitterly.)

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WOODWARD AND Bernstein's new book on "The Final Days" in the Nixon White House will feed their habit for a month or two; Robert Redford's "All the President's Men" (the movie version of the first Woodward-Bernstein opus) will serve the same purpose for several more. Then what? A movie, I suppose, based on "The Final Days," with Jason Robards as Mr. Nixon, weeping on his knees and pounding the floor.

All very exciting (and profitable, for the pushers), and intensely satisfying to the addicts. But I see signs that a good many sensible people, including quite a few who never voted for Mr. Nixon, are getting turned off by these penny-dreadfuls and Grand Guignol horrors.

I happened to be at a meeting with a dozen staunch liberals the day Newsweek's first issue containing excerpts from "The Final Days" came out. When a copy was brought into the room, all other business stopped until it had been skimmed, quoted and discussed. But unless they were all trying to impress me (which is hardly likely), every liberal there felt uneasy about publication of this locker-room gossip — several vocally so. It would be ironic indeed — though not altogether inappropriate — if the hatred Mr. Nixon generated, having dethroned its object, were to end by discrediting those who despise him most.