

To Earl Mazo

2 September 1958

[Montgomery, Ala.]

While preparing a biography of Nixon, Mazo wrote King on 5 August 1958 asking for his thoughts on the vice president.¹ King concludes his generally positive reply with a cautionary remark: "If Richard Nixon is not sincere, he is the most dangerous man in America." Mazo thanked King on 6 September, and in his book described King as a person who once "strongly opposed" Nixon, but came to see him as "a superb diplomat."²

Mr. Earl Mazo
New York Herald Tribune
Washington Bureau
National Press Building
Washington 4, D.C.

Dear Mr. Mazo:

I am in receipt of your letter of recent date, requesting some of my personal views on Vice-President Richard Nixon. I am happy to know that you are writing this biography and I am sure that it will serve a real purpose.

1. Earl Mazo (1919–), born in Warsaw, Poland, earned his B.A. (1940) from Clemson College (now University). Mazo worked as a writer and editor for several newspapers before becoming a political correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune* (1949–1963) and the *New York Times* (1963–1965).

2. Mazo, *Richard Nixon: A Political and Personal Portrait* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 251.

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I cannot profess to know Mr. Nixon as intimately as many other persons, but I have had a few personal dealings with him. Since these personal encounters have been relatively few, I am not sure whether my appraisal can be the best. However, I will gladly give you my thinking.

First, I must admit that I was strongly opposed to Vice-President Nixon before meeting him personally. I went to him with an initial bias. I remembered his statements against Helen Gahegen Douglas and also the fact that he voted with the Right Wing of the Republican Party.³ These were almost unforgivable sins for me at that time. After meeting the Vice-President, however, I must admit that my impression somewhat changed. I have frankly come to feel that the position and the world contacts of the Vice-President have matured his person and judgement. Whether he can have experienced a complete conversion, I cannot say. But I do believe that he has grown a great deal and has changed many of his former opinions.

Since I am quite interested in civil rights, I might say just a word concerning his views at this point. I am coming to believe that Nixon is absolutely sincere about his views on this issue. His travels have revealed to him how the race problem is hurting America in international relations and it is altogether possible that he has no basic racial prejudice. Nixon happens to be a Quaker and there are very few Quakers who are prejudice from a racial point of view. I also feel that Nixon would have done much more to meet the present crisis in race relations than President Eisenhower has done. It is my humble opinion that much of the tension in the South and many of the reverses that we are now facing could have been avoided if President Eisenhower had taken a strong positive stand on the question of civil rights and the Supreme Court's Decision as soon as it was rendered in 1954. His popular appeal could have made it possible for him to speak to the conscious of this nation on this pressing moral issue. Nixon, I believe, would have done that.

I have found Nixon to be a very personable man. He has one of the most magnetic personalities that I have ever confronted. Certainly, his personality will carry him a long, long way politically. Of course there is a danger in such a personality, and that is that it will be turned on merely for political expedience when at bottom the real man has insincere motives. I hope this is not the case with Nixon. He has a genius for winning people. I watched him in Africa. He is a superb diplomat. He knows what to say, when to say, and where to say. A reporter friend of mine who travelled on the Nixon plane to Africa, said to me that when they left the States, ninety-eight per cent of the reporters were opposed to Nixon.⁴ When they returned, ninety-nine per cent were wildly enthusiastic about Nixon. He had won almost every man and left them with a new appreciation of his ability and judgement.

Finally, I would say that Nixon has a genius for convincing one that he is sincere. When you are close to Nixon he almost disarms you with his apparent sincerity. You never get the impression that he is the same man who campaigned in

3. Actress and liberal Democratic state representative Helen Gahagan Douglas lost to Nixon in a bitter 1950 California Senate race after he used redbaiting tactics to undermine her campaign.

4. King probably refers to either Claude or Etta Moten Barnett, who traveled as part of the vice president's official delegation to Ghana in March 1957.

California a few years ago, and who made a tear jerking speech on television in the 1952 campaign to save himself from an obvious misdeed.⁵ And so I would conclude by saying that if Richard Nixon is not sincere, he is the most dangerous man in America.

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I hope you much success in this venture. I will look forward to this work with great anticipation.

Very sincerely yours,
Martin L. King, Jr.

MLK:mlb

TlC. MLKP-MBU: Box 28.

5. King refers to the nationally televised speech Nixon made on 23 September 1952 during his vice-presidential campaign in response to reports that his salary was supplemented by southern California businessmen. Nixon told an audience of fifty-eight million that none of the money went directly to him, but rather to the political campaign. Nixon acknowledged receiving a black and white cocker spaniel that his daughter named Checkers, but insisted that "regardless of what they say about it, we're going to keep it" ("Text of Senator Nixon's Broadcast Explaining Supplementary Expense Fund," *New York Times*, 24 September 1952). Telegrams supporting Nixon flooded Republican Party offices following the speech, but in some circles it came to be viewed as insincere.