

What the Republican Party Could Learn from 'Miracle on 34th Street'

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If the Republicans want to retake the White House in 2024 and gain control of Congress, they would do well to learn some lessons from the 1947 Christmas classic *Miracle on 34th Street*.

In the movie, Kris Kringle is hired to play Santa Claus for the children coming to Macy's, one of the biggest stores in New York City.

His methods, however, are not orthodox.

"Ignoring instructions from the toy department head, Mr. Shellhammer, to recommend overstocked items to undecided shoppers, Kris directs one woman to another store to fulfill her son's Christmas request. Impressed by Kris's honesty and helpfulness, she informs Shellhammer that she will now become a loyal Macy's customer."

In other words, rather than tearing down his store's competition, Kringle promoted a spirit of brotherly love and comradery, thereby producing more, not less, customers for Macy's.

The plot thickens when it turns out that Kringle actually claims to be Santa Claus in the flesh, which the movie seems to verify by the end. That part, however, is not the point of this article.

Instead, I want to state the obvious: If the Republicans tear each other apart for the next two years in the lead-up to the primaries and the general elections, the Democrats could win

decisively. If the Republicans can show a united front, the Democrats could lose by a landslide.

Of course, there are a multitude of things that could happen by 2024. But all things being equal, what I've stated here is as plain as the nose on my face. (For the record, it is very plain.)

Most of us know that Jesus said, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand," (Matt. 12:25).

That is a universal truth, whether or not one believes in Jesus. Internal division will always undermine, undercut and destroy.

Similarly, Paul wrote, "If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other," (Gal. 5:15).

The sniping has consequences. The infighting is deadly.

Perhaps these two verses can be posted in every political office in the nation? (Now that I think of it, wouldn't it be great if we learned to live by these principles in our local churches?)

I recently saw a comment on the midterm elections claiming that the Democrats do a better job of voting for their own.

As expressed more fully (and pungently!) by John Zmirak on The Stream, the Left "maintains internal coherence among its many splinters of crackpots, haters and weirdoes—while the Right gnaws off its own limbs. . . .

"The Right . . . acts more like Stalin's Red Army: 'Every man for himself, tovarisch and the devil take the hindmost!' While the Left's unashamed to champion actual terrorists like Bill Ayers and Angela Davis, the Right is too squeamish and cowardly to stick up for innocent heroes and scapegoats." (To

be clear, Ayers and Davis are former terrorists.)

Getting back to Kris Kringle's example, I'm not suggesting that Republican presidential candidates spend their time encouraging their constituents to vote for their competitors.

So, in a debate setting, when Candidate A is asked why we should vote for him (or her), I don't expect him (or her) to say, "Actually, you should vote for Candidate B!"

But that's a far cry from the vicious attacks ads that are so common and from the demonizing of one's opponents that is the rule of the day.

It's true, of course, that these attacks go all the way back to our earliest political contests, especially in the battles between Jefferson and Adams.

As noted on , "The 1800 election still stands as one of the nastiest in history. Jefferson's supporters accused Adams of having a 'hideous hermaphroditical character,' while Adams' camp called Jefferson 'a mean-spirited, low-lived fellow.' Jefferson hired a sleazy journalist, James Callendar, to smear Adams in the press, including the (false) story that he wanted to start a war with France. On the day of Jefferson's inauguration, Adams took the early stagecoach out of Washington to rejoin Abigail in Quincy, and was not present during the ceremony. They would not exchange another word for 12 years."

It is also true that candidate George H. W. Bush characterized the economic proposals of Ronald Reagan as "voodoo economics." Not long after that, Bush became Reagan's vice president.

As for Jefferson and Adams, they eventually reconciled with the help of Benjamin Rush, who was also a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and they remained friends for the rest of their lives.

But why divide and attack and tear down only to try to reconcile and rebuild after the damage has been done (or, worse still, not even try to reconcile and rebuild)? Why not fight the political battles, especially the primaries, as respectful competitors rather than mortal enemies?

I have engaged in high level public debates for the last several decades in venues ranging from synagogues to churches to universities, including Oxford, Ohio State and Yale, just to name a few.

And the subjects I have debated are often life and death issues for me and my fellow debaters, issues we believe in deeply, to the core of our beings, issues for which we would go to the mat.

But you can engage in spirited, pointed debate without demeaning (or, worse still, demonizing) your opponent. You can point to the supremacy of your position and expose the errors of your opponent's position without engaging in ad hominem attacks.

When it comes to the Republicans, they would do well to remember this, determined to form a united front against what they believe is a destructive, radical leftist agenda, focusing on issues, not personalities.

It is very tempting, of course, to retaliate when you are attacked.

But it really does take two people to get into a fight, and if you are determined to deescalate the conflict, you will score political points in the process.

For the Republicans, the primary goal must be combatting what they believe to be a dangerous political agenda. With that goal firmly in mind, they can then jostle for the right to lead their party.

But let them not wound and bludgeon and alienate or even bury their own on the way to the finish line. That kind of victory only guarantees defeat. {eoa}

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