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Is the Face of America Donald Trump or George Bailey?

Newspaper Column by Evan Barrett

December 9, 2015

In an unusual nexus, Donald Trump's latest excess against "Muslims," a religion of 1.6 billion humans -- 23% of global population, coincides with the Christian season of Advent. The nexus is that on the tube we each can see two radically different versions of America. One view can be found by watching the political news, dominated by the face of Donald Trump, while the other view can be seen by viewing a presentation of the movie classic "It's a Wonderful Life," which runs every Christmas season.

Could there be any greater contrast than the comparison of the over-bloated face of reality-TV excess, Donald Trump, with the face of Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey, the protagonist of the acclaimed Frank Capra film. In an added irony, it is worth noting, during this period of Trump-led immigration-bashing, that multi-Oscar winning director Frank Capra was an Italian immigrant who lived the American dream and portrayed the America in which he believed in his 36 feature films, including "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" and "Meet John Doe."

You are probably familiar with "It's a Wonderful Life," but if you haven't already seen the film, you need to. You can try to catch it on NBC during the several times it plays in December. But better yet, buy the DVD, you'll never regret it as you replay it many times. When the American Film Institute (AFI) listed the 100 Greatest Films of All-Time, the Capra film was listed as #11. And in 2006, the AFI named it #1 as the most inspiring film of all time.

After watching (or remembering) "It's a Wonderful Life" you will see the clear contrast between Donald Trump and George Bailey and their views of America.

Donald Trump represents (and is likely to be one of) that top 1% who, in this age of income disparity, have been sucking the economic lifeblood of the U.S. away from the middle class, while George Bailey is an American everyman, pitted against power and greed.

Donald Trump is about *hubris* while George Bailey is about humility. Trump is about self-aggrandizement, while Bailey is about self-sacrifice. Trump is clearly full of himself ("I'll make America great because I am great!") while Bailey is dedicated to helping others, often at a cost to himself.

Donald Trump, with reality show exuberance, yells "you're fired" to 1.6 billion Muslims world-wide, who he would preclude from any entry into the US based solely upon their religion. George Bailey, on the other hand, helps the immigrant families of his Bedford Falls to own a home of their own thanks to that "good old Bailey Building & Loan" that his family managed, even though that rankled the bitter but powerful banker, Mr. Potter.

Donald Trump wants to put every one of the 2.6 million Muslim-Americans on a government watch list. George Bailey's list determines which families will be next to get a Bailey loan for a house.

Donald Trump is rich with money, and brags about it incessantly, as if money is the measure of a man. George Bailey, it turns out, is "the richest man in town" – rich with friends.

Bottom line of "It's a Wonderful Life" is that if you go out of your way to help people, people will be there to help you when you are in need. In essence, the application of "The Golden Rule." An American, a human, ideal.

In this Advent season, when we Christians reflect upon the values that sustain us, the contrast between the America of Trump and the America of George Bailey is stark, a contrast between excess, greed, power and ambition as opposed to selflessness, commitment and community -- the American ideals that I was raised on.

Our identity as a nation is at risk in this coming election year. But, I believe that America will return to its ideals as Americans choose their leaders. Choose hope over fear. Choose doors over walls. Choose inclusiveness over exclusivity. Choose tolerance over bigotry. Choose Frank Capra's America, not Donald Trump's. Frank Capra will then smile down upon us as we reflect the America he believed in and George Bailey lived in. It can be, in fact, "a wonderful life."

Evan Barrett of Butte, has spent the last 46 years at the top level of Montana economic development, government, politics and education. He is currently the Director of Business & Community Outreach and an instructor at Highlands College of Montana Tech. These are his personal views.

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