

The self-destruction of Ted Cruz

Ted Cruz asked to speak at the Republican National Convention. Donald Trump graciously consented, allowing him to deliver the speech Cruz wanted to give. Cruz was thus given a precious opportunity. In anticipation of Cruz's remarks, the media drew parallels to the masterful address by Ronald Reagan at the 1976 Republican National Convention, where Reagan effectively snatched political victory from campaign defeat. Would Cruz rise to the occasion, would he replicate the example of Reagan, would he prove himself to be the great hope of conservative America, the promise of 2020?

Campaigns for President are often filled with harsh words which can sting. The sting is particularly hurtful to the thin skinned. The petty reaction is to harbor a grudge. The noble, to rise above and to forgive those who spitefully hate you. The party's national convention is ordinarily a time for healing after the battle, when the hatchets are buried, at least in public, for the good of the party and of the country. Only the petty refuse to bury the hatchet, refuse to let go of the bitterness that ordinarily fills a struggle for the highest office in the land. Only the petty remain personally affronted and place their selfish pride above the goal of maximizing the chance that the shared goals of the party bear fruit in the election of the party's nominee.

Ted Cruz proved himself the exception to the rule, not in the way Ronald Reagan proved himself exceptional but in the pedestrian way of one who reacts out of spite and conceit. He could not bring himself to endorse the party's nominee, yet he arrogantly assumed it appropriate nonetheless to speak at the party's nominating convention.

Cruz had the opportunity for a Reagan moment, but he proved

himself to be no Ronald Reagan. As convention speeches go, Cruz's was mediocre. He unexceptionally played upon emotion, using the example of a slain Dallas police officer's bereaved daughter, but while he spoke broadly of freedom, he did not develop that theme beyond platitudes, and he never defined how America could overcome its obstacles and reestablish its empire of unparalleled strength, flourishing free enterprise, and individual liberty. He appeared uncomfortable. Although he caused listeners to feel sympathy for the plight of a family victimized by violent racial bigotry, he failed to inspire them to appreciate the American capacity to overcome all obstacles and transform defeat into victory. Rather, his speech contained an enormous, obvious logical whole. He neither told us precisely how to overcome the violence that plagues our country from radical Islamists, racial bigots and anarchists nor did he inspire us to appreciate our inherent capacity to achieve victory. In the end, his call to action was a lame and generic one, to vote your conscience.

Having delivered a mediocre speech, and having failed to be gracious and endorse the party's nominee, Cruz appeared selfish and bitter, not altruistic and grand. He missed his opportunity for a Reagan moment. He instantly became forgettable. Few listening to his words would think him the inevitable choice in 2020. His words made him a distant also ran.

When Reagan finished addressing the convention in 1976, everyone (Gerald Ford included), knew that we had not seen the last of this great man. The words Reagan spoke were inspirational and brought the delegates to their feet in thunderous applause, even tears of regret that the great man had not been named the nominee.

The speech caused delegates to yearn for 1980 and the chance to vote for Reagan. Reagan rose above defeat to define the way to victory. He graciously called for party unity, embraced Gerald Ford despite a bitter contest, and he turned his

campaign defeat into political victory.

By contrast, when Cruz finished addressing the convention of 2016, everyone knew that he had failed to capitalize on the Reagan moment given him. That spoke volumes about his lack of leadership. He allowed his campaign defeat to define him, leaving him broken and embittered. The words Cruz spoke fell flat. The delegates booed him. He proved himself a fallen man, not an inspirational leader. He did not define the way to victory. He ungraciously refused to endorse Trump, refusing to let go of his selfish bitterness.

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