

CHRISTMAS: THE TRUE STORY

We don't normally print unsolicited manuscripts from crazy people, but after careful consideration we figured, "Hey, crazy people buy pants, too." And there's principle involved: as the famous lawyer Clarence Darrow once said, "I may disagree with what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it." Free speech is A-OK in our book; we hope it is in yours, too.

As a Jew, I don't know much about Christmas except that it is a blatantly pagan, capitalistic ritual. Just like other made-for-Hallmark holidays like Mother's Day and Flag Day, Christmas exists to line the pockets of Macy's, the postal service, and the Salvation Army. I don't have anything against these groups, but it's high time to stop all the exploitation and tell the truth.

Some of you may be asking, "What kind of a nut thinks Christmas is a pagan holiday?" Well, I ask you, "What kind of nut do they make pickles out of?"¹ As any historian can tell you—but won't—Christmas was originally a Bavarian festival celebrating the winter solstice. Bavarians felt that if they invited Old Man Winter to a huge party and got him way drunk, he might leave a few months early, and everyone could go outside again. (Sort of like a 17th Century Bavarian Groundhog Day.) And even if O.M.W. didn't skedaddle, Christmas was an excuse for the entire population of Munich to eat too much, sleep with people they didn't know, and only occasionally go blind from drinking too much wood alcohol. Needless to say, Christmas became very popular.

The biggest partier of all was one O. Tannenbaum,² a German who died in 1640, leaving a bunch of money in his will to promote "thee hollydae of Kristtmass I hast loved so welle." Every year after that on December 25th—Tannenbaum's birthday—the townspeople gathered together, exchanged gifts and ate ham. Now I ask you this: why would anyone celebrate the birth of Oskar Tannenbaum—a Jew—by eating ham? Do you have any idea what my friends Moshe, Saul, and Sammy Davis would do if you served ham at their birthday parties? I'll tell you: they would return it.

What does this have to do with the holiday we celebrate today? Not much. Like swimming trunks, Christmas is much different now from the way it was in the old days. Who was responsible for the modern conception of Christmas? The answer is No.³

The year was 1932 and a fellow named No Zwenger had lost all of his money in the stock market. Starving, he won a small amount in a floating craps game with the original Broadway cast of "Guys and Dolls." Never the wise

investor, No took his meager winnings and promptly invested them into stamp futures. His gamble paid off nicely until the Great Stamp Panic of 1934 made everyone panic over using stamps. Once again, No was facing financial ruin. He had just bought his first motorcar—a shiny new black one—on credit. If he didn't think of a way to increase the volume of mail (and therefore, he theorized, stamp usage) he was headed for debtor's prison.

No needed a plan. So he made one up. No realized that most people sent letters that read like this:

Dear Alice,
Thank you so much for your lovely thank you note that you sent me for the thank you note that I sent you for the present you gave me for your sister's wedding of two years ago.
XOXOXO,
Mom

No needed to convince people of some new reason to send letters to each other. He immediately hit upon the idea of sending cards to celebrate the birthday of his childhood hero Oskar Tannenbaum. He called the cards "Christmas Cards." No slipped them in with the regular mail and awaited the rewards. Soon everyone was sending cards and buying stamps. No was saved.

No became a regular man-about-town. A great groundswell of support swelled up around him (and boy, was it swell). Hoards of screaming teenage fans would congregate, chanting "Just say No!" before heading off to the frequent, then legal Ecstasy fueled orgies of the 1930's; part of FDR's radical New Deal. The word "no" would enter the English language in 1938.

Unfortunately, No's luck was short lived. In 1941 he was sent to an internment camp in Redlands, California, for being a philatelist.

¹ Cashews.

² Get it?

³ Keep reading—it makes sense eventually.

We would like to wish all the crazy people reading this magazine, be they Jewish, Christian or whatever, a happy and prosperous holiday season. P.S. Buy more pants.

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