

April 4th came and went this year ... and it amazes me how little was said about it. I asked my class why the date of April 4, 1968 was important. No response. In some ways I wasn't surprised - and in others, I was mortified.

Here's something to think about - a Canadian that can recite the date of Martin Luther King's assassination - and why we all should care.

It befuddles me how this can be so far removed from the national psyche. King - perhaps the greatest civil rights leader of our time, the man who forged the speech from August 28, 1963 containing the stark lines "I have a dream", words that could speak to so many across all racial borders - forgotten?

{youtube}PbUtl?0vAJk{/youtube}

Maybe it's just me. I've stood outside the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. I think it was back in 1992 - yes, the same trip in which I toured Sun Studios, home of the great works of Elvis, Carl Perkins, and many others. I remember standing there, wondering about the conspiracy theories that abound, wondering if the shots that "rang out in the Memphis sky" could truly have originated from where we were told. And in the stillness of the moment - it made me realize how important the Bill of Rights really is, how phenomenal the US Constitution really is - and how powerful King's message really is. And ... how tragic his death was.

But as stark and powerful as the "I Have A Dream" speech is, what could perhaps be even more telling is the speech delivered exactly one year prior to his death. It was a time of civil unrest, of pushing the comfort zone of America as we know it. The country was embroiled in the Vietnam war - the speech was entitled "Beyond Vietnam" - and quite honestly, the irony, 40 years later, is overwhelming.

{youtube}i3zwcQlWsPU{/youtube}

So when you ask a random group of young Americans why April 4, 1968 is so important - and nobody speaks up - no wonder I was concerned.

(A text version of the speech can be found at www.usconstitution.net/dream.html)