

It's been forty years now ... forty years ago today. April 4, 1968 - the day the earth stood still - the day that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated.

To many, it's simply a milestone of our historical era. Time passes, history is made, important people die, events happen - repeat ad infinitum.

But perhaps that's what makes this so worrisome to me, so sad, so heart-wrenching - because to many, it IS simply "another day in history", another day left to the annals of the history books, for children and their children to read about years and years from now.

Forty years ago, Martin Luther King spoke of a dream ... spoke of the mountaintop ... spoke of equality and freedom for all. Color wasn't a question. Religion wasn't the issue.

I've always admired King for his oratory skills. I was but a little more than 2 years old when he died, so I can't profess to have witnessed these skills first-hand. But all it took was a few video clips on TV, and a listen of the "I Have A Dream" speech, and I realized that these skills were of epic proportion.

Then you get down to the words ... the meaning ... and the context of what was said. Powerful stuff ... material that could have provided the last 2 generations with enough meaningful learning to move the issue of equality and freedom forward by light years. If ... if ... we'd only chosen to listen.

There are times that I think that his words have fallen on 40 years of deaf ears.

Sure, things are different now than they were in 1968. Of that I have no doubt.

But all you have to do is read the newspapers (or if you so desire, hop onto YouTube or the like)

We Simply Cannot Forget | Allan Besselink

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and you'll come to realize that many aspects of "equality" - in spirit - are probably not that far removed from 1968. For anyone doubting this, watch the 2008 national election play out over the next few months. Watch as it becomes a Clinton - McCain battle (in which you have conservative white man versus liberal white woman - glass ceiling included, some assembly required) ... or as it becomes an Obama - McCain battle (same conservative white man versus educated liberal black man). It scares me to think of what will happen to the concepts of "equality" and "freedom" in the next few months - and I fear for a tearing-open of many old wounds facing this country from ... yes, King's era and much earlier. Let's face it - when politics become heated in this country, you can almost guarantee that gender, race, or religion are going to enter into the discussion. Not long after, the reminders of this country's base perceptions of "equality" appear in ugly yet vivid color.

We continue to look outside our own borders to promote freedom and equality - but are infinitely challenged with these same concepts on our own terms within our own borders.

If only we'd paid attention then ... forty years ago ...

... but it's never too late to learn.

As King himself noted when asked of the rioting, "For if we say that power is the ability to effect change, or the ability to achieve purpose, then it is not powerful to engage in an act that does not do that - no matter how loud you are, and no matter how much you burn".

Power is the ability to effect change. Forty years later, we still need to effect change - on so many social levels.

We simply cannot forget the life (and words) of Martin Luther King. There are still too many lessons yet to be learned.