

Free At Last (January 2009)

I'm a boomer. Born to a returning GI and his war wife, I grew up in a world that was planted in hope and shattered by reality. I witnessed the emergence of the transistor radio and rock-and-roll; I hoola-hooped and believed that Camelot was real. But I also shuddered at the concussion of a sonic-boom; I walked home early from school on November 22, 1963; I watched my city burn in the summer of 1967. For years to come, historians will struggle to understand the consequences of a generation that experienced such mood swings. From Pollyanna to Putney Swope, from Beaver Cleaver to Archie Bunker, I lived through a time that was tumultuous and chaotic, violent and painful. But then again, nothing comes into this world without the convulsions and pangs that accompany birth.

The boomer generation, more than anything else, should be known as the time that freedom came to be. Freedom for blacks and women, freedom for lesbians and gays. Think of where our world was when, in 1954, Linda Brown's father challenged the notion that black children should have to get to school in ways different than white kids. Remember back (if you're old enough) when African-Americans were called "colored" and no one ever talked about cousin Victor and his "friend". Be honest. It wasn't until the assassination of Martin Luther King that most of us realized how extraordinary he truly was. The Kennedy brothers may have ruled this nation, but King led the way. He carried the torch.

On Tuesday, January 20, we will inaugurate our first African-American president. Regardless of how you voted, you have to admit that we are witnesses to history. More than just a significant milestone, the election of Barack Hussein Obama is a watershed, a transformational moment, an opening of not just a door but a smashing down of a gate—a gate that kept us apart for an eternity. For the first time since our founding fathers considered notions to be "self evident," we have finally come to realize that all human beings are created "equal." We made that happen. All of us.

And no one more than The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Barack Obama would not be where he is today were it not for Dr. King's ability to dream—and act on it. Nor would Hillary Clinton, Clarence Thomas, Joe Lieberman and Barney Frank; they are all beneficiaries of King's vision and courage. Martin—as he is often referenced in the African-American community—is as close to the embodiment of a prophet as we have ever known. He reminded us, as did the nevi'im of ancient Israel, that more than being created "equal," we are

all created “in the image of God.” And even more, he inspired us to remember that we are each commanded to rescue those imprisoned from the darkness of injustice and hate.

Tuesday, January 20 may be the day wherein we mark history, but Monday, January 19 is the day we have set aside to acknowledge how it is that history is made. Join us at 12 noon at St. Paul Baptist Church in Montclair when we—black and white, Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic—gather to affirm that, “thank God Almighty,” the dream has come true. At last.