
11/22/63 The Kennedy Assassinations

Questions, questions, questions.

by Stu Segal, 6/14/2006

On 11/22/63 I was just more than 14 years old. That day our President was assassinated; at 14 I had no idea exactly what this meant, but like everyone else I watched the events unfold. Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, the President's funeral.

It deeply affected me, but it has taken me 43 years to realize that what died in me on that day was the belief in all those things my parents, my grandparents, and the “establishment” told me were true. “Good people have a good life”; “Go to school, get an education, and everything will be OK”; “Nice people don't do that”; “The meek shall . . .”; “Do unto oth”; “A penny saved is”; “Blah Blah, blah blah,”

Maybe it didn't all die that day. Sometime in early '68, my friends and I cut school one day in the spring to go to the “northside”, the neighborhood that was all black and where our parents would have for sure thought we wouldn't be safe if they had known we were going to see, just see, Bobby Kennedy, who was visiting and walking down the street shaking hands and meeting people; and was I suppose going to run for, and most likely win, the Presidency. In the next couple months Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bobby, were both assassinated.

We were really excited in '68 to even get a glimpse of Bobby. He somehow represented the hopes and dreams of our generation. His brother had appealed to all that was good and noble in us, had taught us we could reach for the stars, had taught us we could hang tough when we needed to, had taught us America could be the land of equality and you didn't need to be born white and rich to have a chance. And somehow Bobby represented the possibility that all those things could still be.

Then when Bobby and Martin died, for me it was like the final nails in a coffin. A confirmation that all the establishment truths were, in fact, a bunch of b.s. That all these words of wisdom from my elders were just drivel. That it all could be swept away in an instant - - - just because “they” (whoever “they” were) wanted to kill the dream.

For me, November 22, 1963 really was the end of the innocence, and the beginning of a lifelong belief that whatever noble and good exists in this world can be snuffed out in an instant.

On a slightly different note, somehow the younger generations don't understand what JFK represented, as in the past 40+ years that has been focus on trivial and sordid details and rumors about JFK, RFK and MLK, instead of a focus on why these men emerged as leaders and heroes. There have been few true heroes in my lifetime, and I understand and accept that those few have not been saints. Unfortunately in some cases (Gandhi, JFK) some folks have taken the position that their human shortfalls “cancel out” their great deeds and ideals. Let's not erase Washington, Jefferson, FDR, JFK and MLK from history

because they were men; let's remember the great deeds, the great dreams, and the dreams they inspired in others.

Anyway, 40-some years later I wonder if the Kennedy and King assassinations, which to me were also the assassination of the dreams of one 14 year old, and which contributed heavily to a life of doubt, skepticism, sarcasm and cynicism, had the same effect on my entire generation. Were we all thrown off our Ozzie & Harriet, Leave It To Beaver path through life, never to recover? Did we all develop the "Life sucks, then you die" attitude? Was there no way to get back to that place?

Did we have to have Nixon? My G-d, how stupid could we be? It seems we lost the path and have been wondering around in the wilderness ever since. Have we all become so cynical and jaded that we can recognize no hero among us?

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