

President's Message February 2008

Most of the following material has been taken from [Wikipedia](#) sources. My only contribution is an attempt to synthesize them into my "way of thinking."

"Equal Justice Under Law" is a phrase engraved on the front of the United States Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C. The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified on July 9, 1868, guarantees "equal protection of the laws." Supreme Court Justice Noah Swayne characterized these enactments as follows: "Fairly construed, these amendments may be said to rise to the dignity of a new Magna Carta."

That it would take one hundred years or more to put these amendments into action remains one of the darkest moments in United States history. A prime mover to enable the force of law to these amendments was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day is celebrated as a national holiday on the third Monday of January each year. It is a schizophrenic day since one never knows which establishments will or will not be open. In general, public offices are closed while private businesses continue their daily chores. This holiday was signed into law in 1983 by President Ronald Reagan.

Dr. King received many accolades. He was the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, recipient of the American Liberties Medallion from the American Jewish Committee and is honored in the Gallery of 20th Century martyrs at Westminster Abbey.

Watching the PBS special on Jews in America, one is immediately struck by the connection between Jewish and black citizens for full civil rights. That show portrayed signs from (liberal?) Massachusetts' establishments allowing "No dogs, blacks or Jews." Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, both of Jewish heritage, were assassinated by the Ku Klux Klan, along with James Chaney, who was black, in 1964. The event occurred while they were promoting voter registration among Mississippi black citizens. This event was the impetus behind the film "Mississippi Burning."

Another interesting vignette in this series was the portrayal of Jewish slave owners and what they must have felt celebrating Passover. The slaves, of course, were relegated to inferior servile status, serving a meal celebrating freedom. I hope that our Passover is a celebration of universal freedom, and not just freedom for "us."

Today, there may be a new group of citizens denied civil rights due to their religious beliefs. One of my friends is a native-born American of Bangladeshi heritage. She is not a practicing Muslim, but has a Muslim name. While traveling with her United States passport, she was interrogated for several hours, missing her flight. Since I have essentially no contact with this community, except for this one individual I know professionally, I can only imagine what is being done in the name of anti-terrorism.

Back to Dr. King. Like all of us, he had feet of clay. Boston University discovered that about 1/3 of his Ph.D. thesis came from uncited sources. They recognized the other 2/3 as original scholarship, and added a letter to his thesis in the archives at Boston University.

Back to the PBS program on Jews in America. Wednesday, January 23 is the last episode. It will have aired by the time this is read. That night I will be attending the first of Charlotte Fels' and Howie Hirsch's classes on the Hebrew in the prayer services. I hope to see you there, if not for the first class, then for the following classes.

Shalom,

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