

# Remembering isn't fun for this anniversary

There's some guy in New York whose job it is to look up anniversaries and then newspapers go out and do local stories about them. The latest to be dredged up is the 25th anniversary of the year 1968. I won't be celebrating. Any sentimentality is wasted on that year.

No, I won't drag myself through all the details, but here's a box score for the year: Robert Kennedy assassinated, Martin Luther King assassinated, the TET offensive in Vietnam and Richard Nixon elected.

Anyone of those events would have made it a memorable year, if you look at things that way. A much younger co-worker recently expressed nostalgia for

that era because of the social change that took place.

It didn't seem so much fun at the time. I was 20 that year and spent it at Wayne State University, wondering if I'd be plucked up at any moment and dropped into Vietnam.

Like others, I went back and forth between wanting to either go over there to kill the little guys in black pajamas or head north to Canada. Either option seemed better than waiting around.

I shook hands with Robert Kennedy in Detroit's Kennedy Square and within a month he was dead. King was dead just about the time I started listening to him.

And by the fall friends were asking



JEFF COUNTS

where I was going to be when the revolution came.

My answer was always Cleveland, probably for the same reason that W.C. Fields always said "I'd rather be in Philadelphia." Being anywhere than

where you were would have been better.

At 20 you're supposed to be chasing girls, getting an education and learning how to drink whiskey. You aren't supposed to be worrying about politics and war. There's always plenty of that stuff to deal with.

This really struck me this past Christmas when my living room was full of 20-year-olds from Livonia, Farmington Hills and Westland — all friends of my 20-year-old son.

My son's girlfriend, a Farmington High School graduate, doesn't have to worry about my son being sent on a tour of Southeast Asia.

Sure, there are worries. AIDS has certainly put a dent in dating and the employment future for these college

students is grim, but at least these kids can talk about a future.

It wasn't like that in 1968. Things are better now. Sure it sounds romantic to think back about student protest, social change and rock and roll. But the flip side to that tune was violence, drugs and hopelessness.

There was a reason hippies headed to the hills to make candles and stare at their navels.

It sure beat reality in 1968.

Jeff Counts is the editor of the Plymouth and Canton Observer Newspapers and keeps a Tiny Tim album in mint condition to remind him of 1968. He can be reached at 459-2700 or faxed at 459-4224.

# Join schools in remembering our great leaders

It's indisputable Martin Luther King was a great American, though not the only one. He was a leader definitely worthy of national holidays, celebratory marches and laudatory speeches.

For example, there was a breakfast in his honor Jan. 18 at Walled Lake Middle School. "Martin Luther King: Keeping the Dream Alive Today, Tomorrow, Forever."

With educators, parents and students on hand, King's legacy was revisited. It was a scene definitely played out in schools all across America.

Guest speaker Miriam Blanks-Smart, new president of the South Oakland County Chapter of the NAACP, lamented the lack of progress made among black Americans during the 30 years since King gave his famous "I Have A Dream" speech on Capitol Hill.

She said it was fitting the tribute breakfast was held at a middle school

and emphasized the real hope for a better tomorrow lies with our young people.

"This is where it has to start," Blanks-Smart said. "It's where we have to plant a seed."

That is a point well taken. Older generations haven't accomplished very much since 1963 in the name of equal rights and acceptance of others.

But students shouldn't be allowed to forget two other great Americans whose birthdays are coming up in February, when King also will be honored throughout as part of Black History Month.

They shouldn't be allowed to forget about two presidents, who, in fact, these days don't get marches and tributes but cartoonish commercials — usually featuring animated bobbing heads and predictable references to cherry trees and honesty.

That's really a pity. There may not even have been a



TIM SMITH

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United States of America without George Washington, who fought heroically for freedom from Great Britain during the Revolutionary War and later became this country's first chief executive.

And without Abraham Lincoln's bold leadership and vision, African-Americans might have had to endure the chilling wrath of slavery for decades. That's not to mention his major role in ending the Civil War and bringing together the North and South, unifying the nation.

It used to be that we separately celebrated their birthdays, Feb. 12 for Lincoln's and Feb. 22 for Washington's. Now we've lumped the two celebrations together into a bogus concoction called Presidents' Day. This year the so-called holiday is scheduled for Monday, Feb. 15.

As usual the Presidents' Day focus will be on Washington and Lincoln as historical "characters" who are, com-

plete with wigs and top hats, better suited for irreverent TV appliance commercials.

There will be jokes about "The Father of Our Country" and "Honest Abe," not marches. It's doubtful that, on Feb. 15, communities virtually will stop to take a closer look at these great men and their accomplishments, as they did for King.

That isn't meant to belittle what King achieved or criticize the annual accolades and tributes that come his way. He is deserving.

But when Presidents' Day rolls around, give some serious thought to what George Washington and Abraham Lincoln attained for generations of Americans. Don't just think of them as caricatures.

Tim Smith is a reporter for the West Bloomfield/Lakes Eccentric. To leave a message for him, dial 644-1100.

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