



DREAM INTERRUPTED

Many more mountaintops to scale in struggle for civil rights

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The day honors not only the man but also the civil rights movement he championed.

One of King's oft-repeated quotes is "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Maybe an arc is not the best way to visualize the struggle for civil rights. Rather than a long, graceful curve, it's an endless mountain range. Every time a summit is crested and the path starts downhill, another peak rises ahead that must be scaled.

Civil rights proponents celebrated the election of the first African-American president.



KEVIN O'NEILL

InSites

The results of the subsequent presidential election, however, reminded them that progress is not guaranteed. His successor won on a platform that demonized minorities and talked of building walls, not bridges. Proposals that would restrict voting rights, reimpose harsh sentencing, leave child immigrants vulnerable and ban transgender people from the military have dashed their hopes.

The causes he supported — easier access to voting, sentencing reform, leniency for child immigrants, LGBT rights — gave them hope that the struggle was being won.

The history of the civil rights movement is full of stories of victories and defeats. The Civil Rights Digital Library (crdl.usg.edu) focuses on the movement from Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954 until King's assassination in 1968. This was an extremely volatile time for the cause in America. While much blood was shed, important civil rights legislation was passed.

Digital record of struggle

The website is geared more for academic research than casual browsing. A search field and a list of topics running down the left side of the site enable you to access the various collections. The topic links are organized by event, place, people, topic, media type and more. The links take you to related lists arranged by date, location or alphabetically, depending on the subject.

Some of the list items are subdivided even further. Eventually you get down to the actual archived files. These can be text, clippings, cartoons, photos, recorded audio or video. Many links take you to other websites where the files are stored.

Examining these files transports you back in time to the events. Reading contemporaneous FBI reports and newspaper articles, or looking at photos from the Birmingham bombings or the King assassination, brings these historical events to life.

The site is organized and easy to use, but it's not very visually engaging. It mainly consists of lists and links. Considering the iconic imagery in the archives, it's a shame you have to dig so deep to find them. A more dynamic design making the imagery dominant would attract and keep users.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites and apps with him at koneill@timeshamrock.com.