

Federal Glover: King's 'Dream' speech should inspire all of us to act

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After making the rounds of the Martin Luther King Day events through my district, I want to share some thoughts that I shared with different audiences a couple of weekends ago.

We've all heard the stirring words in Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream," in which he uttered countless phrases that were repeated in television and newspaper editorials around the world on MLK Day.

On the day honoring the civil rights hero, I shared another speech. Toward the end of his life, King had realized that the dream he talked about when he gave that speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. would remain a dream unless that same dream became the dream of all Americans.

He realized that the equalities suffered by people of color that he talked about in his Dream speech were shared by Americans of all races who -- for whatever reason -- could not achieve the American dream.

Four years after he gave the "I Have A Dream" speech -- a year before he was assassinated -- The Rev. King gave a speech right here in the Bay Area -- at Stanford University -- that is as meaningful today as it was then.

The speech was appropriately titled "The Other America." It was a speech that he delivered many times before his death, but he first unveiled it at Stanford University.

What King was saying is that inequality comes in many forms:

- The Civil Rights Act was a law but laws don't change a person's heart. A law doesn't bring light to the dark places inside of us.
- The contrast between the America we wish to

- be -- America the Beautiful -- and King's Other America -- helps foster the divisions.
- We have to find strategies to lower the barriers to economic equality by bringing jobs to our communities and providing job opportunities to those who qualify for well-paying jobs;
 - We need to discover ways to provide adequate health care to all Americans.
 - We have to devise new teaching techniques, build better schools, train more competent teachers and we parents need to help and support those teachers and schools to erase the educational needs of our young people caused by low expectations and high dropout rates. Well, all these decades later, little has changed when it comes to economic inequality. If anything, the recent economic meltdown and recession -- which some people blame on President Obama even though the recession began under President Bush -- have made the injustice of poverty even more stark, as the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. The gap between the haves and have-nots has grown as wide as it has been since World War II. The middle class is shrinking as many slip under the poverty level. The mortgage lending practices that brought us this recession took advantage of Americans who believed they were moving into the middle class. They thought they were upwardly mobile. They thought they were buying into the American dream. Instead, they found a nightmare. You hear the voices of the "Other America" from the Tea Party and to the Occupy Wall Street

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Movement. The two groups may be politically polar opposites, but they share the same frustration of being ignored, of not being heard, of unequal tax laws, unequal opportunities and unequal treatment. "But we must see that the struggle today is much more difficult," King said. "It's more difficult today because we are struggling now for genuine equality," he said. "And it's much easier to integrate a lunch counter than it is to guarantee a livable income and a good solid job. "It's much easier to guarantee the right to vote than it is to guarantee the right to live in sanitary, decent housing conditions. "It is much easier to integrate a public park than it is to make genuine, quality, integrated education a reality. And so today we are struggling for something which says we demand genuine equality." Those words spoken 35 years ago, unfortunately, still ring true today. The Dream is still a dream. Each year we remember the great Martin Luther King, but today, we still have to turn those inspirational words into acts and facts. Then, we don't have to talk about the Other America. We can all live in One America. Let's get to work. Glover is the County Supervisor for District 5. Reach him at district5@bos.cccounty.us.



