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Rick Badie: King could handle the truth

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By Rick Badie

Here's a little tip for your next trip to the Rev. [Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site](#) in downtown Atlanta: Get there around 8 a.m. if you plan to tour King's birth home.

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Olivia, Lelia and I arrived around 11 a.m. on the last day of spring break. A sign at the ranger's kiosk stated all house tours had been booked for the day.

While disappointed, we did get to see the outside of the restored structure on Auburn Avenue. And while seeing the bedrooms and decor would have been great, we saw plenty of other historic gems: King's robe, his Bible, tie clips, cuff-links and such.

One photograph, though, stopped Olivia in her tracks. It was an archived photo of a black man, lynched, hanging from a tree. She was given a quick back story — what lynching meant, how thousands of blacks, primarily in the South, got strung up for reasons that, even if true, didn't come remotely close to the gross inhumanity and justification of such a horrific criminal act.

My daughter was transfixed on the face of one of the observers in the photo. It was a little white girl, smiling. She wanted to know how could that be, where was the joy in

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witnessing such a vile scene.

So I explained that there was a time in the South in which some whites treated lynchings like they were parties and picnics. That they'd cut off ears and fingers for souvenirs, just like she and Lelia bought books and trinkets from the gift shop. It's an ugly story, but still true.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. Locally, some concerns have been raised about the placement of a history marker to note the spot where the burning of Atlanta began in 1864.

The Georgia Historical Society erected the signpost to mark a turning point in that epic war. They placed it in front of the Georgia Freight Railroad Depot on [Martin Luther King Jr. Drive](#), which is said to be the historically accurate location.

Last week, this paper reported that the Atlanta chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People felt the location of the marker — smack-dab in the heart of the city's civil rights' district — is insensitive and inappropriate, regardless of its accuracy. The NAACP says it should be placed elsewhere. A historical society official has said his group is open to discussing the matter, even though the marker was erected with cement.

One has to wonder what the man whose name marks the street, who changed the world, would think about opposition to the marker's placement. King's words would be far more eloquent than mine, but I'd imagine they'd be synonymous with confused, troubled and spiritually disturbed.

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A marker could never be as powerful as a photo. Yet if it spells out the facts behind what transpired at that spot on that day, history, it shares something of equal value. The truth.

Rick Badie, an Opinion columnist, is based in Gwinnett. Reach him at rbadie@ajc.com or 770-263-3875.

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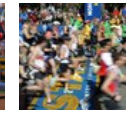
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