Two years before he was murdered in Los Angeles, Senator Robert F. Kennedy made a trip to South Africa. He traveled to the country in June 1966 during the worst time for the people living under the brutal apartheid regime. The oppressive government of South Africa did not want to allow Kennedy into the country, and did so only because they feared he might well end up as the next President of the United States.

I just heard Kennedy's daughter, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, talking about this trip on a moving segment of NPR's "All Things Considered." She was joined by Larry Shore, the director (along with fellow CUNY Professor Tami Gold) and producer of an upcoming documentary called "RFK in the Land of Apartheid: A Ripple of Hope." The film contains never-before-seen archival footage of the trip along with new interviews conducted both here and in South Africa. Even though Kennedy's visit is barely known about in this country, the film opens with a reminder of just how important it was for countless Black South Africans. About 40 men, born in the years following RFK's visit, introduce themselves. Coming from different parts of South Africa, they all have one thing in common: their first name is Kennedy.

Robert Kennedy's "Ripple of Hope" speech is the second most quoted speech in history (after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream") yet few remember that he gave the speech during this trip at the University of Cape Town. The film shows Kennedy debating with white Afrikaans students at a pro-Apartheid university, traveling to the black township of Soweto where he called for a free South Africa, and meeting with Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Chief Albert Lutuli, who was under house arrest in a remote rural area. Courageously, Kennedy openly challenged the U.S. government's support of the South African regime because of its strong anti-Communist stance and boldly asserted that other factors must be considered in America's foreign policy.
The NPR segment brought tears to my eyes, not because I have some idealized hero worship of Robert F. Kennedy. I know he had his faults, but it's hard to imagine any politician today taking the risks that Kennedy took in support of his beliefs about justice, goodness, and humanity. When he returned from the trip, Kennedy wrote an incredible article for Look magazine called “Suppose God Is Black.” You can read the whole article here. Again, can you imagine any of our current political candidates showing this much strength of character regardless of the consequences?

I was eight years old when Robert Kennedy was gunned down at the Ambassador Hotel the night of the California primary. My entire family was devastated. It was such a horrible year of murders and assassinations and unrest that we thought the world was coming to an end. It’s tempting to play the “what if” game and to try and imagine the ripple effect on history had Kennedy survived and won the 1968 presidential election. We’ll never know how it might have turned out. Still, for all the dichotomies and darker sides of the Kennedy legend, I will always admire the amazing person that Robert F. Kennedy was. I can’t wait to see this film.

Take a look at the trailer:

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1. Rise of the Planet of the Apes -- $54.8M
2. The Smurfs -- $20.7M
3. Cowboys & Aliens -- $15.7M
4. The Change-Up -- $13.5M
5. Captain America: The First Avenger -- $13M
6. Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2 -- $12.4M