

For all that I have observed on the grounds of OPRF and in the domes of our capital, I will say this: yes, America has come far since the days of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A few decades ago, nine high school students from Little Rock, Arkansas received jeering, bricks and bomb threats along with their wish to learn. A few decades ago, Emmett Till could not find justice amongst an all white jury that acquitted his murderers despite explicitly incriminating evidence. Nowadays, if Dr. King could gaze into the halls of Oak Park and River Forest during a passing period or attend the inauguration of our nation's first president of color, I am sure that he would see us as the realization of his once impossible dream.

But stop and think for a moment, because those examples are only snapshots of our school and of our country. If Dr. King saw a film that went into the nadir of Oak Park and River Forest's classrooms, he would see students too caught up with being uncomfortable with the color of their skin, the slant of their eyes or the accent with which they speak instead of attending classes that suit their true interests and potentials. If Dr. King saw a documentary of select reactions to our president-elect he would find supremacists plotting assassination much like the ones that plotted his own. Yes, with help, Dr. King has bestowed legacies of trust, open-mindedness, understanding, and faith to our generation, but we cannot slip into nonchalance to think that those legacies are fulfilled. It is all right to gaze upon the victories with pride, but we cannot ever be lulled into a coma of satisfaction. Racism has a prettier face than it did yesterday, but it still thrives in the underground tunnel of the Blue Line station where I heard a man spewing racial epithets at a Black man last November or outside the railroad station of

Long Island where teenage boys brutally stabbed and murdered Marcello Lucero because he was Latino.

Dr. King once said, "Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so *we* must straighten *our* backs and work for *our* freedom." There are those who see change in racial fairness embodied in the spirit of one man who they think can quell the currents of whatever is left over from centuries of oppression and inequality. To those people, I can only say that change cannot ride on the back of one man without inevitably crippling him. I do not wish to address evidence of segregation at Oak Park and River Forest because I believe that every student and faculty member is well aware of the problems that keep us at what feels like two schools sharing a piece of property. I believe that we are all intelligent and conscious of the presence of such separation, but take little action to understand why it happens or to patch such a division. Action is found in the individual efforts of a population to initiate a departure from the status quo. Dr. King neither steered the bus boycotts of 1955 to success, nor did he single-handedly desegregate lunch counters across the country. The people that did so were the Americans of Montgomery, Birmingham, New York City, Nashville and Raleigh because "injustice anywhere is everybody's concern" in the words of Martin Smolin, a student at Columbia University during the sit-ins. Therefore, if a man like Marcello Lucero is murdered in Long Island because of his ethnicity, it should collide with the boundaries of your concern.

A revolution broods in our souls but is bound to stay there if we become complacent with the state in which we live. We cannot reflect on racial prejudice in one assembly period,

one day, or even one month. We have to examine its condition in every hour, minute and second of every relevant situation. We have to join hands with civilization, and make a conscious effort to wipe off what is left from the stains of inequality. Fifty years ago, the world was a completely different place. It evolved into the world which we know today not because of one man, but because of millions standing together to bring change even amidst police brutality, hate crimes and assassinations. Fifty years from now, the world could change once again, or it could stay as is, depending on what you, your friends, colleagues, neighbors and everyone you know determines to do. The umbrella term of “human” cannot be unfolded by merely one man; it can only be extended with the power of millions trying their hardest to establish equality. Figuratively speaking, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was not one man, but represented a mass of individuals striving for a common cause.

My message is simple. Do not be fooled into thinking that racism is a waning issue, and do not burden all your hopes of racial equality on the back of someone else. However, *do* take the injustice occurring in the dusty corners of the world as if it was occurring in your own home and *do* unite to make yesterday’s dreams tomorrow’s reality. More mending is needed before we can officially call America a mixed patchwork of democracy and it cannot happen until everyone picks up a needle to help.