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It was finals week, but we weren't studying. At Stanford? Finals week? Students not studying? Nearly impossible to believe but this year, very true. Instead, students were gathering in response to what our nation was witnessing – two black men being killed by white policemen who not only went un-sentenced, but were not indicted to begin with.

It was awe inspiring to see the protests and marches organized by students, and abstaining was not an option. But come Thursday of finals week, I had to begin writing the term paper I had put off. I chose Green Library, but avoided the Coupa entrance and its temptations of stopping for a coffee. Walking into the foyer, I was determined to be disciplined and to momentarily shut out the injustices of the past few days and just get this done. But, perhaps appropriately, it was not my choice to avoid these realities. By the entrance to the Lane Reading room, a voice stopped me. It was a video from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1967 speech in our very own Memorial Auditorium, given a year before his assassination. 'Just a few moments of listening won't postpone me too much,' I thought.

The second reading today is what I heard, in which King describes a white man coming up to him in an airplane and saying that Negroes would succeed if they only tried, like he and his European immigrant ancestors.

I was horrified, but even more upset because *I have heard that before*. And not just in a speech from the 1960s. How can people still be saying, "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps", instead of acknowledging their personal role in the bootless reality of the majority of our country's citizens? How can the reactions to the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner be, "Well, you shouldn't have been selling loose cigarettes"??

How can the pain that King describes, the injustice he decries still be so relevant in 2015?

Watching Dr. King preach on that screen, he seemed so calm, so steady, so sure of his words, so convinced that the arc of the moral universe is long but it will indeed bend towards justice. But it's almost half a century later!!!! In the shadow of Ferguson and Staten Island, how can we say that anything has bent at all?

So writing that final paper was not going to happen. My mind spiraled into hopelessness. Opening my computer, my Facebook newsfeed refreshed to a post by Corey Booker, dated 1992, the year I was born. It was a picture of an article he wrote in our own Stanford Daily, decrying the recent beating of Rodney King by 5 police officers, all of whom were acquitted. "I am a black man," Booker writes. "I am 6 feet 3 inches tall and 230 pounds, just like Rodney King. Do I scare you? Am I a threat? Does your fear justify your actions?" My mind flasheed to a recent protest. My dear friend Elliot Williams, an incredibly talented poet and rapper and student leader, began the rally saying, "I am Michael Brown. I am 6'3" and 250 pounds and when I get dressed and look in the mirror, I wonder if these are the clothes I will die in."

King spoke 48 years ago, Booker wrote 22 years ago – why are Elliot's words the same in 2015?

As President of the Associated Students of Stanford University, known as the ASSU, one of the things I have been working on a lot this year is the problem of sexual assault on campus, a subject that has been in the news on many university campuses over the last few months. So, as I reflected on the enduring racial division in the United States, my mind turned to this issue. Thinking about our work on sexual assault this past year through the ASSU did not make me feel better. A few months ago, I had been proud of

our progress. After getting elected, we held town halls and compiled student research into what would become a 25-page proposal recommending improvements on support, education, and adjudication for sexual assault. But through our research, we learned about some disturbing realities.

Again, The Stanford Daily. This time, the year is 1978. That ASSU also created a task force on this issue, they also recognized that "rape is not a sexual act, but one of domination and violence", they also held town halls and attempted cultural and policy change. 37 years ago, an article described these events. The same article could have been written yesterday.

Flash to 1988, the Stanford Rape Education Project, created for students by students, was gaining momentum. They surveyed 2,500 Stanford students and found that "one in three Stanford women and one in eight Stanford men reported having been pressured into having sex against their wills". In 1990, responding to this survey, the university created a task force on sexual assault to recommend necessary changes for education, support and adjudication of sexual assault.

In May of 2014, the university created another task force with the same title, which I am co-chairing. This past week, I was fortunate enough to find out about the 1990 task force and to see a copy of their report of recommendations. Reading the introduction, I felt as if I was slipping into the TV show, the Twilight Zone, or that it was some kind of sick version of Groundhog's Day. The problems they identify are identical to what we have discovered over the past 9 months – survivors have to speak to as many as 8 different people before they are able to get help. In 1990, the task force identified that we need a streamlined, coordinated response; that we need prevention education; that we need to lower the standard of proof for adjudication. I was flabbergasted by the fact that the only reason we know about this task force and their

report is because we happened across a New York Times article that helped us find one woman who had this lying in a box in her garage.

Unfortunately, it appears that very few, of these recommendations were realized at that time 25 years ago, although at least two were. A major ask, as reported in a New York Times article at the recommendations' release, speaks to the need for a coordinator of all cases and systems pertaining to sexual assault. And in May of 2014, we were fortunate to find such an individual relating to Title IX, and that is important to recognize.

But there have been 25 years between when we identified these needs and implemented even one of the solutions. 25 years during which the experience of the survivors I have spoken with over the past 9 months could have been drastically different.

How, then, can we feel anything but hopeless? How can we not lose faith in change and the power of justice to win out? How can we believe that oppression will ever cease, or what we do now will matter?

The past few days, since reading that report, have been very hard for me. Escaping that feeling of despair, frustration, and hollowness hasn't been possible.

But I keep repeating the words of Dr. King, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice". King believed it, but how? After more research, I began to understand. There is more to that speech than the reading we heard earlier. We remember King through a few optimistic quotes, "I have a dream" and "I've decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear". Of course King must have been optimistic to do the work he gave his life to. But it is reductive to focus only on the positive. It does not tell the whole story and perpetuates an incomplete remembrance

of his teachings. They imply this eventuality of progress. But is time really the answer? Is progress really always on the horizon? Is that a legitimate take on his life and efforts?

Searching through King's writings to learn more about his understanding of time and change, I returned to that same speech I listened to in the library during finals week. King speaks of an incorrect "notion that only time can solve the problem of racial injustice... the notion almost that there is something in the very flow of time that will miraculously cure all evils." King's conclusion is that "Time is neutral. It can be used either constructively or destructively. Somewhere we must come to see that social progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability."

Our country, the United States, has a knack for optimism, especially when pessimism is more appropriate. Believing that the next generation will be better off, believing that the future will be brighter. It's fundamental to our national identity and culture. [sing] "The sun will come out tomorrow". And that belief, while sometimes necessary for survival, is dangerous unless it is active. King goes on to say, in that speech, that "[Change] comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated Individuals. And without this hard work time itself becomes an ally of the primitive forces of social stagnation. And so we must help time, and we must realize that the time is always right to do right."

King's arc is not eventual, it has a condition that bending happens only when people push on it. Knowing that we are pushing, we must take strength, not despair, from the disheartening consistency of the fight. Maybe then we can appreciate the role our generation must play in taking another step forward, even if it feels like the same step. Maybe then we can see the last 50 years as a reminder that we must help time to solve our problems.

That continuity can be motivating, not frustrating. A wise and kind mentor recently reminded me that King's belief in humanity had to have been more positive than reality showed him it was, that he was not always positive, but was able to return to

that positive space just enough to nurture him to go forward. She also said that they did not get all we needed before, and we will not get all we need in this moment, so we must find ways to keep that continuity visible and present to equip the next pushers as best we can. And then, perhaps at some point, a substantial bend will be realized by that collective energy and effort.

Originally, I ended my words for this morning right there. But it didn't seem right. It felt too 'tied up with a bow on top'.

At last Sunday's service, our Dean of Religious Life, Jane Shaw, shared a powerful message. She spoke about prophets not as mythical fortune tellers, but instead as those who tell the hard truths about the present. She then asked, what hard truth do you have to hear? And what hard truth do you have to tell?

The hard truth that I have to tell is that we knew how to solve the problem of sexual assault on our campus 25 years ago. We did not act then to our full capacity, and not knowing, we started from scratch 25 years later.

Ok, that was easy. I've been getting good at telling hard truths to others. But I asked myself the first question, what hard truth do I have to hear? Much harder, of course.

In reflecting on Dr. King's life and legacy, I believe it is this: recognizing that as a white person, I necessarily participate in racist systems, often unconsciously. I am privileged to lack an awareness that experience provides. I have the privileged of being shocked and angered by racial violence and systemic oppression, instead of being terrified. Reconciling this recognition with who I think I am is hard, but it's starting to make sense. On the one hand, we are all taught politeness. And in this age as an educated white person in a liberal state and university, that includes racial political correctness. I have been well-trained and know what to say and how to act, and I believe that does reflect who I am. But on the other hand, we live in a culture with consistent but subtle messages about racial inequalities that prolong and legitimize the status quo. We must acknowledge that we will – through structures and systems that we take for granted –

sometimes perpetuate those racial inequalities at the very same time that we are passionately engaging in dialogue and actions that will undo them.

Please, take today to hear and tell hard truths. That is how we can help time. And without it, those wheels of inevitability are rolling along, and the social progress and unity and justice that we need will not be on them.