

D. Summergrad, January 15, 2018,
Remarks for Martin Luther King Day in Needham

“Make nice, David.” That’s what my mother used to say to me. “Make nice.”

When I was a young boy, that was an expression that parents of some of the Jewish children in my neighborhood used to say: “Make nice.” When other children might say something mean or anti-Semitic to us, our parents told us, “Don’t cause trouble; *make nice*.” The idea was simple – don’t make things worse; don’t draw attention to yourself. Keep your head down; “Make nice.”

I’d like to suggest that what we need to do today, in the face of our national nightmare, is to **stop making nice and start making noise**.

In 2018, the climate change crisis goes beyond global warming and melting ice caps. Climate change today **is** real – the national climate of our discourse has become dangerously toxic. Hateful speech is not just tolerated, but endorsed. We live in a climate of graceless incivility – where ignorance is encouraged and inconvenient truths are called **fake news**.

Sadly, Needham is not immune from this kind of climate change. Hatred and coarse language cross state and town lines, and as we know we have experienced racist and homophobic graffiti in this very building. Beverly Daniel-Tatem famously said: Racism is like smog – we all breathe it in.

You and I are here today because we believe in the worth and dignity of every person regardless of their race, religion, ethnic background, gender, *and* country of origin.

For more than three hundred years, our great country - a land of opportunity for *some* - **denied justice** to those Africans who came here in chains. There was no justice in the triangle trade, no justice in the middle passage, and no justice in the bondage that Africans found in the colonies that became the United States. The foundation of our economy and our prosperity was built on the backs of slaves, thanks to slavery - America’s “original sin.”

With the Civil War and Emancipation, there was a new **promise of justice**, but that was **delayed** – in an era of Jim Crow laws and heinous lynchings and signs that said “Whites Only.” **Justice was denied** once again to our black sisters and brothers.

Let’s take a moment here, as we think of **justice denied**, to honor the memory of Recy Taylor of Alabama, who died last month at the age of 97. In 1944 she was the victim of a

gang rape, perpetrated by 6 white men who were never brought to *justice*. In fact, they were never tried at all, even though one of them had confessed; because **two** all-white, all-male grand juries refused to indict the men.

In our current era of #metoo it is more important than ever that women are encouraged to speak out and to be believed.

Those days were long ago, *when justice delayed became justice denied*.

But now, it is like we are living in a time machine, going back in time, watching the slow but steady progress our nation had made *toward justice* being reversed on an almost daily basis. In this national nightmare we have neo-Nazis and white supremacists carrying tikki torches in marches as they fill the air with hateful chants and Nazi salutes. **We have an ignorant dishonest racist in the White House**. As Dr. King told us, “Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity.” We have seen the clock turned back on civil rights for all Americans, and we have seen an increase in hate crimes and hate speech across the land. As a result, the most vulnerable among us are in a constant state of fear.

Dr. King often said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice,” and our Pledge of Allegiance ends with these words, “with liberty and *justice for all*.”

Yet - justice for all has been denied and delayed for too long. We need *justice now*. It is time for action.

Dr. King said: “In the end, we will not remember the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends ... the appalling silence of the good people.”

And he said: “**Our lives begin to end when we become silent about the things that matter.**”

So, on this day, marking what would have been his 89th birthday, let us take our cue from Dr. King. It is time to stop being silent and “making nice” and time to start “making noise.” What can you do?

- Protest peacefully as was done recently here at Needham High School.
- Raise your fist, or take a knee! (By the way, I have often wondered if Tom Brady and other white players had taken a knee alongside Colin Kapernick would the reaction against this protest have been so intense?)
- Hold a sign, attend a rally or a vigil, and make your voice heard.
- Make some noise for Recy Taylor.

- Make phone calls and sign petitions.
- Make some noise for Heather Heyer.
- Register to vote and then vote!
- Make some noise for a better United States and a better world.
- And one more thing - elect more women to office!

Dr. King used to lead a call and response chant when he was asked how long it would be before *justice for all* was a reality. People were tired of waiting. He used to say that justice was coming, and he would call out: “How long?” and the audience reply was, “Not long.”

Let’s close by echoing that chant. Today, I’d like to build on that rallying cry by trying this. I’ll call out: “How long?” And your reply is: “Too long! Justice Now!”

Ready:

How long? “Too long! Justice Now!”

How long? “Too long! Justice Now!”

How long? “Too long! Justice Now!”

Thank you for listening.