

Student Work

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Forgive Us

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Forgive Us

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Erica Hughes

I have to remind myself the racism around here is not malicious,
Although the pain from it makes me want to impose a motive.
That's what ignorant racism feels like—an evil motive.

Two white hands reach for my head like I'm an animal they've never seen before.
I remind them of the people they see on T.V.—except this one does not curse every other word,
Not like the women speakin', "Ain't nobody got time for dat."
Black-skinned people are presented as weaklings.

Like they brought the slaves over on a boat, people bring black children over on planes,
Hoping the Black-Americans won't want them to explain why there is a death wish on Black-American
Children.

People would rather I go unheard—especially when speaking of oppression.
They say, "We've got African children; their pictures are on our walls,"
Drawing lines between racism with good intent and racism with no intent at all.
Black people no longer walk around with physical scars: The Massa' ain't makin' us bleed no more.

I watched hot tears stream down her face
Because the issue of race makes black people want to hate everybody with a white face.
Not because it's nature, but because lack of pigment make all perspectives of history erase,
And Empathy's spot is replaced by hostility and an open Bible.

Like the slave Massa' preached to my ancestors, White people keep telling that I should be grateful.
But my heart bleeds from the statistics that tell me who I am:
I'm only 48 percent likely to receive a college diploma.
I'm 50 percent less likely to become a man's wifey.
Black woman make up 13 percent of the female population and have 36 percent of all American abortions.

So, I cry.

I cry because it was a Dutch man who recited the Heidelberg catechism who helped me out of spiritual
prison.

So, I weep.

I weep because it was a white-Calvinist woman who met with me each week, so I wouldn't lose my feet in
the arena we call academia.

So, my confusion stems from the White people who abuse me and the White people who show me love.
My Native, African, and, more than likely, European blood are at war within me,
And this sea of face has no empathy.

And I have never felt so black in my life,
Fighting back pent-up anger and strife, when a man yelled at me in class, like,
"What are you doing for your people!"

Since when did all dark-skinned people become mine?
Did I make them, shape them, die for them?
There has never been a time when I owned myself:
I belonged to my English granddaddy Hughes and my Dutch granddaddy who named my mother Eiland
Because he didn't want to give her his name—so we might be cousins.

So, once Abe Lincoln signed the emancipation that would later take his life,
To the ghetto and hoods, the rejected and free niggers marched.

Again and again, they marched.

Like they marched, I do.

I march to class, hoping the professor doesn't bring up racism, homosexuality, and immigrant minorities:
Because I'm pretty sure someone's going to say 400 dollars a month is enough to feed a family,
Because I'm pretty sure someone's going to say the issues in the ghetto only happen because black
people act a certain way,
Because I'm tired of getting emails after I comment that black men are 21 percent more likely to be shot
dead.

No wonder black spirituals sing renditions of "Lord have mercy on us!"

Because our brothers have forgotten us.
Our brothers have taken away the sanctity of the very humanity God bestowed on us.

Why God—why am I left in this predicament?
I am less than human.
All we are used for are slam-dunks, booty-drops, and music.
Why does the world use us? Kill us? Excommunicate us?
There is no place in the pews for us.

And I watch the people, the ones Christians call mine, smoke weed trying to find healing for the scars left
on our minds.
Lord, they tell me slave mentality is a choice and not reality.

I'm so tired of being spoken to for 20 minutes then being asked if I'm Kenyan.

Please, come and protect me from the comments—
"I didn't know the niggers work here,"
"I just lump all black people together,"
And "Come, let's put them in a closet so that their teeth and eyeballs gleam"—
So I won't be tempted to smoke a blunt just so I can cope with the fact that I have black skin and a vagina.

Instead, let my words be a witness to the Son who was brown and who made me.
Jesus, lead us back to your Tree, and let us ring the bell of freedom;
So that people from every nation, tongue, and skin color can have a place in the family of God.
Lord Jesus, take me past the anger, the tears, and the pain.
Let me bear your marks—
God, you did not bear my shame in vain.
Bring us closer to each other, teaching us that suffering exceeds skin color.
Help me bear with my sister, my brother—no matter her or his skin color.
Holy Spirit, Our Father, Lord Jesus, bring us to our knees.
Please—forgive us.

About this post

[SpokenWord](#) poetry is a type of poetry that is meant to be orated, so the depth of this piece may not explode off the page. This piece was originally written and performed for the Dordt College community on Wednesday, April 1, although it does draw parallels from current and historical events. Come back to iAt on Friday to hear Erica Hughes share this poem in her own words.