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Prisoner of America

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I wrote this the night after the Presidential election. I was obviously very surprised by the results. I did not think in 2016, we would elect someone who despises the people who make up this country. The day after the election, the campus was very quiet. I was among a few friends who felt similarly disheartened. Then that night about 50 students and I sat in the Intercultural Center to talk about a protest that we had been planning for a while. The protest was not about the election. It was about getting professors cultural competency training. I sat in the room and heard all the stories these students had experienced on campus with other students and faculty members. They've experienced microaggressions, racism, sexism, and more. Being a first-semester freshman, it was crazy hearing the horrible things my peers have had to go through. I left with a broken heart. I was inspired by all of their stories, and I wanted to share their feelings with others. The poetry slam was the next day, so I knew this was a great opportunity to use my platform in a positive way. So I got home and I wrote. I wrote a little bit of my story and a little bit of theirs. It turned out to be one of the most powerful poems I've written.

At first, I talk about being locked away for committing a crime. The crime was “living while color.” This reference also alluded to the mass incarceration of people of color some of whom have been unjustly put away simply because their skin color did not fit the status quo. I then include my own experience of wishing to conform and be just like my white friends and classmates, but no matter how hard I tried I was denied. I then speak about what many people, especially on this campus, are afraid to say. Racism is still a prevalent part of our society. It was never supposed to be like this. As a child, hatred does not run through our body naturally in the way blood does. Hatred is learned over time and can be passed down through generations. I then started making it more personal to this campus to show its relevance in this community. I called out President Farish for not asserting his power as President to make a difference, comparing my experiences to a Shakespearean tragedy. I also called out the professors at the university. I wanted to emphasize that, contradictory to their purpose of helping students learn and thrive, some are actually making it harder for us to prosper. I wanted to expose the fact that many understand that we do not live in a just world but they do nothing to fight against it either, which makes them part of the problem. It just shows that you can know something is wrong, but if you chose not to do anything about it, then you have sided with the oppressors.

I'm locked away in this cell

Wondering what the hell even happened to me

How could I let this be?

Now these bars that hold me back are my oppressors

They keep pushing me back into this corner

Yelling at me to keep quiet, stay silent
While I watch this country get more violent

See I'm conflicted by my conviction
And I don't understand how I couldn't have seen this prediction
the Simpsons did
I mean all I had to do is look at this country's history
But people have been trying to hide this evidence like it's a big mystery
So what was my crime?
Living while color
All of this evidence was not hard to discover
I mean I knew this shit since I was 5
Damn at 5 I was able to realize that I would have to hide the culture in me

Just picture: 5-year-old you asking what you did wrong
And you're willing to do anything just to belong
So you try talking like them, dressing like them, acting like them, thinking like them
But they still won't accept you
So you're on your knees begging God "Please let me be like them"
But they all just turn on you
Calling you illegal, immigrant, illiterate and they keep questioning your citizenship
You cannot count the number of times you have been told to go back to your country
As they look down upon you and give you the 3rd degree
So you're crying your eyes out
Enough water is shed to fix California's drought

See I'm a restless rebel of my youth
I be resting less since I know the truth
Call me Sherlock Holmes because I'll be the sleuth

Let me assess the whole situation

So I've done my research and according to my calculations

There is racism in this country

There is racism in this state

There is racism on this campus

See all this malice was practice

We weren't born to hate we were taught this shit

As humans we were born to love

But for some reason this country wants to get rid of

People who fall somewhere on the spectrum outside of the norm

We are treated like shit because we refuse to conform

This is reality not TV

This is my tragedy

Seems like Shakespeare wrote this scene perfectly for me

I wonder how many deaths will occur in this play

President Farish do you have anything to say?

I'll wait

I mean I've been waiting 18 years what's another 4?

You've made so many others wait

They've already graduated and still waiting for the day

When you decide it's time to change

I'm tired of you talking the talk

It's time for you to walk the walk

See I've been quiet for too long

I've always sat back and held my tongue

But I'm sick and tired of being the one to explain diversity

or what it is like to be a minority
We should all be taught this and not by me

I mean why do you think we are in college
We're supposed to be here so we can acquire knowledge
But it seems that I'm more woke than some of these professors
Who keep laughing at diversity as if it's a court jester

But my education is no joke
Come on, we millennials should unite
Be ready to fight for a better life

I will be heard loud and clear
I'm here
And best believe this will not be the last you see of me
Because I'm not just here for myself
I'm here for all the girls who don't get to go to college
I'm here for all people of color who are told they can't do it
I'm here for a collection of people who refuse to "fit in"

We were not born to hate we were taught it