Our Pain

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Recommended Citation
Bentina Chisolm, Our Pain, 2 MICH. J. GENDER & L. 1 (1994).
Available at: https://repository.law.umich.edu/mjgl/vol2/iss1/1
When they called me a nigger I cringed.
When they found ways to keep us out I protested.
When I watched “Mississippi Burning” I screamed at them.
When the remarks were racially insensitive I corrected them.
And finally when they wanted to learn I taught them.

Because I know how to be an African American.
I know my story and the struggles of my people.
I know I deserve what I’ve worked hard for.

But when he smiled and called me “honey” I smiled back.
When he made advances I was flattered.
When he was easier on me I was relieved.
When he made me feel uncomfortable I left.
And finally when he pushed me I gave in.

Because I know how to walk the walk.
I know how to talk the talk.
I know how to stand there and look pretty.

But when I saw Hill and Thomas I ached.
When my brother called her a liar I was offended.
When my mother said it happens all the time I was amazed.
When he was given the post I mourned.
And finally when it was all over I realized.

Because I don’t know how to be a woman.
I don’t know how I can deal with sexism from them.
I don’t know if I can deal with it from us.

So I hear not only the cry of my people but also of my sisters.
And it’s so loud that at times it’s deafening.
It hurts to realize I must fight my own and that they will watch.

I’ve spent so much time being African American and fighting
racism and white people that I haven’t been a woman and
fought sexism and men.
Our situation seems so hopeless sometimes.
I can fight the white man because he's my enemy.
But how do I fight the black man when he's supposed to be my brother.

_Bentina Chisolm*_

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