

Shnayjaah Jeanty

Age: 16, Grade: 11

School Name: Charles W Flanagan High School, Pembroke Pines, FL

Educator: Kristy Modia

Category: Poetry

Patent Pending

before you name my mother *nigger*, christen her *inventor*
my name,
the lightbulb—
 the mechanical sun—
built by petty fingers of a woman who wanted to snap america's opening the same way i did hers, wet and
thunderous
my name,
the telephone—
 the travelling conversation—
each warped tongue salivates in reparations
phonetic retribution for men with palms and teeth like westward expansion
praying is a lot like missed call, so mama learned to worship the dial tones
before you call my name *ratchet*, label it *legacy*

my name,
malcolm x—
 reclamation "by any means necessary"
violent graphite protest against looseleaf sheets
pariah of its own motherland
don't you know that securing liberty has never been peaceful?
the rubber bullet aftershock of my name should shatter crowds
reminder of what that dark skin girl with that "tacky" name is capable of

my name,
langston hughes—
 a lettered representation of exactly what happens to a "dream deferred"
my name is gold, god, and glory
each vowel plaited between escape routes and rice grains
stolen african literature swelling your tonsils into freedom bell
america is the doorstep to a room that never asked to be opened and our names reinforce locks
my name is black excellence
is being related to martin luther king, jr. and harriet tubman
because every slave heir is your brother and sister
is the scion of a culture that speaks more cemetery than english but still remembers to live

before you *shoot* my brother, *look* at his hands

black names,
 the only adjectives capable of describing this black magic—
for black boys with apostrophes freckling their names
which is to say, that black boys are folded into contractions
which is to say, that black boys are something that needs to be shortened

the police academy is training assassins
primed to sever each syllable into staccato
translating my government name into a death wish
the education system fails african-american students in more ways than an F
most of our high school careers don't receive a suffix
instead we hold vigils for the people we could have been

i am still struggling to find a name for a country that spits in the faces of the people who invented it