

**Shnayjaah Jeanty**

Age: 16, Grade: 11

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

Educator: Kristy Modia

Category: Poetry

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## 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