

First Place Senior Poetry  
Areen Syed  
Norfolk Academy, Mrs. Elaine Denson

Why?

i pledge allegiance to the flag of the country that stole my ancestors'  
lives  
the country that continuously denies  
my opinion.  
the country that took away my voice the country that told me i didn't  
have a choice that i wasn't enough.  
the shackles my ancestors wore  
left marks on *my* hands  
the houses klansmen burned  
scarred *my* skin  
the nooses around my brothers' necks  
took all *my* air  
i can't breathe.  
the winds of injustice are suffocating me i drink the same water  
why not from the same fountain?  
i eat the same food  
why not at the same table?  
i walk on the same earth  
why not on the same side of the road? all these people telling  
me:  
separate but equal  
but what i really see is you compromising black people. what have i done?

why does my color define who i am?

why was i dealt the lesser hand?

what happened to my rights?

eighteen years of war.

for what?

we fought against taxation without representation well, this is

discrimination with justification

we live in a nation built on segregation.

Hughes said: I, too, sing

but clearly that message didn't ring

how many years do i have to keep fighting?

for you

my country

to realize that my voice sounds the same as those white men up in the capitol building all these rules they make

are doing more hurting than healing

treating our feelings like they're some plaything

don't you remember?

my brothers have helped you win wars

my ma did your chores

my people swept your floors

for what?

i'll tell you

how much it hurts to tell your child

“always listen to what the white people say”

and even then there's no guarantee we'll live another day whether it's getting shot  
or being told you're a criminal  
when you're not  
it kills us.  
but i still have faith  
for this is the nation of the strong and the great i'll be your guide  
show you what life's like on the other side  
i'll sing for you:  
amazing grace how sweet the sound  
of all the promises you made me  
bravery is rewarded with liberty  
but all my men still aren't free  
i know you're lost, my country  
i know you're blind  
but i see  
i see

*The first place poetry award in the senior category is dedicated to the memory of former Holocaust Commission Chair, **Linda Epstein Belkov**, by her family. Linda was dedicated to Holocaust education and was a talented writer who championed the abilities of students.*

