I MATTER
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THANK YOU TO THE “I MATTER” REVIEW PANEL

Carolyn Crawford
Danyale Davis
Enoch the Poet
Victoria Hanson
Sophia Hanson

Jamee Joppy
Jay the Poet
Vera Portier
Nimah Smith
Venus Snead
“I MATTER” JUDGES

ROBERT CONVINGTON
NBA

MO’NE DAVIS
Little League Trailblazer

MALCOLM JENKINS
NFL

ISABELLA HANSON
I Matter, Founder
On May 25, 2020, my life forever changed. When I stopped at the red light at 38th and Chicago in Minneapolis, I looked to my left and saw the police interacting with a young man named George Floyd. God made me stop and start paying attention. As I exited my car, I knew something bad was about to happen. I was the first witness on the scene. While they carried him to the police car, I tried to comfort him by talking to him. Soon other people came to try to help, but ultimately we were unsuccessful. I never could have guessed that this interaction would have resulted in this young man’s death or that the tragedy would unite so many people to demand change in the world.

On April 21, 2022, I was visiting the George Floyd Memorial site when I had the opportunity to meet Isabella Hanson. She was dropping off copies of the “I Matter” book at the site and she presented me with a copy. I was moved by the poetry and artwork that students from around the world created in honor of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many others to support social justice. We continue to see violence increase in our communities, but I look to our youth with hope for a more united country and a more united world. To this year’s participants and winners, I offer a heartfelt note of congratulations!

Charles McMillian
Key Witness from the George Floyd Trial
George Floyd Memorial
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Charles McMillian and Isabella Hanson
George Floyd Memorial Site
Minneapolis, Minnesota
Awuku Darko Samuel
Ghana, West Africa
I am the Black Mennonite Poet
The poet that rose from the ashes of the 2020 reckoning
Lineage traced to eight generations from the deep, dark south
A place so deep no one dared to ask who, what or why

I am the older sister of a gymnast
There to support her as she kips, tucks, leaps and flik flaks
As she moves, I watch ever so closely with a parentalesque eye

I am the lover of all animals and the mother of two sweet rescue cats
Simone, my longhaired cat, named in honor of the musical prodigy Nina Simone
Ivy, my shy gray cat, who emerges each night for her nuzzles and snuggles

I am grown, but I am grandmom's baby
The bond created the day that I arrived in Hershey, Pennsylvania
A birth location that reflects my Mennonite roots and my commitment to chocolate

I am the family stylist who is known for being a keen shopper
An introductory-level seamstress
Who enjoys thrifting, mall shopping, online shopping, even grocery shopping

Who am I you ask
I am a friend to all and the enemy of none
The quiet and focused listener being there for you in your moment of need

I am a leader, a writer, a reader and an independent thinker
I am the dope poet, the feminist poet, the sister poet and the sista poet
I, am the Black Mennonite Poet
I Am
Mila Hollis | Chicago, Illinois

We were stalled
Delayed and held back
They cut the link
But never freed us from our chains

We matter because we choose to
We have to make the choice
Release ourselves from our mental
prisons
Allow our ancestors to rejoice
Make them proud
Not just whispering Black Lives Matter
But saying it loud
We matter because we’re human

We matter because we’re no longer
Our own set back
We are set on steps forward
Reprogramming our minds
While becoming programmers and Engineers
Healing our hearts
While becoming Heart Surgeons and Doctors

I matter because I became bigger
Than the box they put me in
I set the new standard
The standard decades in the making
I matter because I am
Maryam Ismayilova
London, England
Mikhi Drayton
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
The blood of my child flowed down the stairs of time
Before it was human
Before me
Closed
my child
Cultivated in the roots of my ancestry
Grew inside not me but my suffering
my child
Of history and pain
Forgotten and ignored

Grew
But time
Life
Was not what I birthed
Not what I gave
my child
Hope
A gift
A purpose
my child’s name was hope
And I watched as man spilled its blood
All across the stairs of my time
Our skin is never a liability,
It’s enviable, one of most desirability
Our skin holds stories,
Ones of bravery, perseverance, and all the greatest glories
Our skin is unafraid,
Courage in the most alluring shade
Our skin is immutable,
Forever stuck this beautiful
This question is genuine,
How can you hate our skin?
I MATTER

Black Lives Matter

Justice 4 Her

Julianne Park
San Ramon, California
Each day as I rise my mind questions
Will I live to see another day or is it my time to go?

There was a time where I couldn't care less if I lived or died because I knew that when I died I would have birthed another little black girl with the same smile as mine. This lack of care was just an illusion. After 2012 I walked on the sidewalk anxious and scared with the only thought, no kid should be shot.

Holding a pack of skittles
Shot for existing
What am I missing?

Nine years later my morning routine is the same.

Wake up
Manifest and pray
I am black and beautiful, I am black and proud
Look up and hope they let us live another day

For the past two years I've tried to not let the isolation get to me, constantly wondering if I was born to be a target or if I'm just letting social media get to me.

Being a black woman in the United States scares me.

Every time I see the police I feel like I can't breathe.

I can't let the trauma posts numb me.
Tuesday they posted a black box and told me they cared for me

The next day it was deleted from their feeds

Getting out of bed has been hard for me as I watch my world crumble at my feet.

But my hope has not yet faced defeat as I rise the next day

I know I matter, that will never change
I call upon the terrestrial kingdom
to hail an imperial race-
an illustrious clan poised
with grandeur and grace.

Inhale the love
exhale the hate
acknowledge black royalty,
let’s celebrate.

We are wrapped in the garb
of the skin that we’re in,
the world is our kingdom
we’ll forever reign within.

Our heads are shielded
by our crowns
of hair
majestic coils of thread
to be handled with care.

Our treasures are our talents
we are living fountains of art
the blueprint of civilizations;
our creativity has lived from the start.

We feast on the knowledge of
those before us
our success-our empires,
thrive as we maintain our focus.

Our conquests are our dreams
of which we have taken charge
Black Kings
Black Queens
we are royalty at large.

Our value is incalculable
our lives like golden scepters
should be protected by the kingdom
and preserved by ink and paper.

Take a look around at all that we create
inhale the love
exhale the hate
acknowledge black royalty,
let’s celebrate.
Ask Me
Rachelle K.
Springdale, Maryland
I am capable and compassionate
I wonder if I will get out of Philly
I hear gunshots
I see jealous people look at you when you have nice stuff on
I want to be able to play on my block

I am capable and compassionate
I pretend that I live in a nice neighborhood
I feel uncomfortable when I go outside
I touch my mom's heart
I worry if my family will stay safe
I cry for Lil Larry

I am capable and compassionate
I understand that my brother acts goofy inside our house but acts hard outside the house
I say, "I am going to get out of Philly"
I dream about living where I can play with my baby brothers
I try to keep my mom happy
I hope my family's dreams come true

I am capable and compassionate
Even whilst we were turned down by society, torn into pieces never re-attachable, whipped by the words and actions of those around us.

We stood strong. In our words, our beliefs, and in each other.

The seeds planted by those before us allow us to move forward. To take a leap into the world, without worrying about how others think of us.

Though we aren't where we used to be, we still have quite a long way to go.

But thanks to the history running through our veins, the culture of our community will never struggle to thrive.

Because we, the people, make Black history matter.
When I walk down the street, I know it could be my last day.
As I make my way to school, I know it could be my death.
Every time I go to bed, I recall the people I love.
Will I see them tomorrow? Will it be their last day?
When I gaze at my reflection, I see millions of others,
Those who have died before me, those who have made their mark,

Those who never deserved it, those who suffered unjustly.
But despite my worries, I refuse to live in fear; but instead, live in hope.
Hope that one day, people may no longer see me for what’s on the outside.
Hope that people will see me for what’s within.
For that’s what truly matters.
A Justice Parade
Samiha Ahmad
Elmhurst, New York
A knee to a neck
Is as damaging
As a gun to a temple

Death swallows us whole
As a bullet leaves a hole
We chant as we hold each other

Tell our children to be careful because our lives lack value
In the eyes of the holder

A mic in a hand is the only way a voice is heard
Amplifying the crowd like a ball being thrown
That’s when the eyes turn and ears listen

We chant I Matter
Because we believe it’s true
We must
Our culture is the foundation of a country
Who doesn’t love us

Our shattered bones
Scars that never heal
Matter

A world made up of matter
Spectacles in a delusion of our imagination
Can’t love each other

But we believe
Ancestors did
So we don’t waiver
Harriet ran so we still do
Still chased by the misfortune of our history
By the guns that create wounds
We run and chant

I MATTER
I MATTER
Because We DO.
These tears always stay flowing down my cheeks, Why do person's criticize me for my skin that they see? Being told in a restaurant that this is not the right place to eat, or using a different restroom unlike other humans who don't like me.

Sometimes I wonder, should I change my complexion? Hmmm, does it make sense to change what God made a blessing? Will others really soon see the real me and would I ever walk the streets? Freely.

The times I tried to fight negativity over and over, My world starts to sink and it feels like it's going to turnover. I'll state a fact for others to see, that Black Lives Matter and we already made history. Independently.

We are protesting on sidewalks together as one. Being chased by policemen with weapons that would make us run. George Floyd and more lost their innocent lives. I thought we were supposed to be safe in our countries, right?

Children of color want to play, however they are treated in any type of way. They want to play hopscotch with the others outside, but are criticized after they don't have a color of Snow White. That's not right.

Why does Black Lives Matter? It is not just a skin color, but it should never be a block in the way of being kind and equal to one another. Let us stop the racism in these beautiful streets, then finally we can all live. Freely
.Equals
Addi DeVall | Whitefish, Montana

Equals
In the world
We are all beautiful
We are all beautiful inside
And out

Right now
We need some love
Everybody needs love
We need unity and respect
Right here

We're here
Here together
I love everyone's life
In the world on the planet
We're now

Respect
We have power
But we need unity
Respect, we need respect in life
Value

Like you
Like everyone
Everybody on earth
Call people family, like they are
People

Equals
Ahdia Mohamed
Rocklin, California
Bianca Chiorescu
Botosani, Romania
The Magic Inside
Noémie Munnings | Tampa, Florida

The Magic Inside
You can straighten my hair
You can call me mean names
You can take away my voice
You can put me in pain

Although I personally can’t dance
You can take away my hips
You can try to remove
My beautiful lips

You can attempt to erase
The curve of my butt
You can try to take away
The pride in my strut

You can push you can pull
You can turn you can twist
But you just can’t remove the magic in this
So why not embrace us
And shorten the list?