

I MATTER

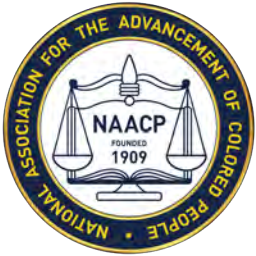


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HIAS

Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.



— Alliance for
**BLACK
JUSTICE
IN POLAND**



National Marian Anderson Museum

“I MATTER” JUDGES



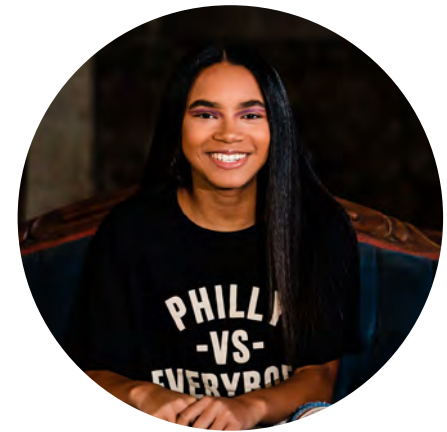
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**ISABELLA
HANSON**
I Matter, Founder

INTRODUCTION

Luanda, Angola is the location of the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. It was from Angola that enslaved people were first brought to Virginia 400 years ago, marking the beginning of centuries of slavery in the United States. Yet, most Americans have never heard of Luanda. There is great power in knowing and preserving our history. The Museu Nacional da Escravatura – the National Slavery Museum, is located at the first slave port where Africans were sold and transported until 1836. It had been initially established under the auspices of the National Institute of Cultural Patrimony in 1977. The museum serves as a somber narrative of the deep suffering and lasting impact that slavery brought to Angola and Africans worldwide. It features a wide range of artifacts related to the slave trade, each serving as a testimony to the inhumanity. On behalf of the Museu Nacional da Escravatura, I applaud the leaders of the “I Matter” competition and the 2026 winners. Through the creation of a physical and digital book, “I Matter” provides a space for youth creatives around the world to share their stories and advocate for peace. At the same time, it preserves the voices and perspectives of writers today, ensuring that the work of youth poets and artists are documented and can be shared globally today and with future generations. It is through education that we can challenge injustice whether it takes the form of violence from war, economic exploitation or oppression.

Vladimiro Fortuna, Director
The National Slavery Museum

MUSEU
NACIONAL
ESCRAVATURA

MUSEU

NACIONAL

ESCRAVATURA





O'Lexis O'Bannon
Ontario, California

I MATTER

Reyna Daniels | Carrollton, Texas

I matter.
Not because you say so,
not because I fit neatly into your picture of worth,
but because I exist—
and that is enough.

I am not measured by the weight of your approval,
not defined by the hands that tried to shrink me,
not just a background character in someone else's
story.

I am the story.

I matter,
even on the days when my voice shakes,
even when the mirror whispers lies,
even when the world tries to convince me
that I am small.

I am not small.
I am galaxies folded into skin,
I am fire wrapped in flesh,
I am every breath my ancestors fought
for.

And no matter who tries to erase me,
rewrite me,
silence me—

I am here.
I am real.
I matter.

THIS UNFAIR WORLD

Nabintu Safari Abigael | Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo

Under the sky, no one is king
Nor more than another in right or law
With an outstretched hand, an open heart
Everyone deserves a fair and clear world
No matter the complexion, the faith
The language, the dreams, or the voice
Equality, sweet promise,
Erases shadow and distress
It neither judges nor divides
It unites, builds, and civilizes us.
When one rises, the other grows
And this is how man flourishes.



Marlisha Alphonse
Bridgeville, Delaware

BELTON [BULIAH] V. GEBART



Ethel Louise
Belton Brown

Shirley
Bulah

I MATTER

Alexis Washington | West Columbia, South Carolina

In streets where shadows linger long,
A cry for justice echoes strong,
Not just a whisper in the night,
But voices rising, claiming light.

For centuries, we've borne the weight,
Of shackles, chains, and heavy fate,
Yet still, we stand with heads held high,
A truth that no one can deny.

Our history etched in blood and tears,
Through trials, pain, and countless fears,
We march, we shout, we lift our voice,
For freedom's cause, we make our choice.

Black lives matter, hear the call,
In every city, rise or fall,
For each soul lost, unjustly gone,
We say their names, we carry on.

We're more than skin, we're
dreams, we're light,
We're justice's torch that burns so
bright.
In unity, we seek what's right,
For every black soul, day or night.

ECHOS OF JUSTICE: A CALL FOR CHANGE

Daniella Karasenty | Camden County, New Jersey

In places where shadows mix with light,
And voices rise for what is right,
A powerful movement seeks to claim,
Justice and freedom, the core of its aim.

Through histories filled with pain and strife,
Where struggle and sorrow intertwine,
Black lives matter, the message is strong,
A call for justice where all belong.

In each heart, a hopeful dream grows,
For fairness and equal rights to show,
From dreams of the past to futures bright,
With hope and resolve guiding the fight.

Together, we rise and push for change,
For peace and fairness within our range,
We will create a better way,
For brighter nights and a hopeful day.

Stand firm, resist the past's old chains,
For the truth and stories that remain,
In every name, in every face,
Lies the power to find our place.

Black lives matter, let it be known,
In every voice, in every tone,
A tribute to lives honored and dear,
A call for change that's clear and near.



Ada Nazneen
Rocklin, California

Ashley Tshiebe Mwanza
Johannesburg, South Africa



I WANT TO WRITE THE POEM

Makayla A | Wabasha, Minnesota

I want to write the poem
that speaks louder than the silence,
that echoes through the streets
where names become whispers
and whispers become movement.

I want to write the poem
that holds the weight of history,
where chains once rattled,
but voices rise higher,
breaking through the ceilings
they told us we could never touch.

I want to write the poem
that says Black lives matter
not as a question,
not as a plea,
but as a truth that stands,
unyielding, like the roots of our ancestors
who sowed dreams into the soil
and dared to bloom.

I want to write the poem
that paints Black joy in bold strokes,
where laughter is rebellion,
where love is resistance,
where every heartbeat
is a rhythm the world can't ignore.

I want to write the poem
that remembers the names,
the faces, the futures stolen—
but also the stories,
the victories,
the relentless hope
woven into every breath.

I want to write the poem
that sings for justice,
for change,
for a world where my skin
is not a threat,
but a testament to resilience,
to beauty,
to life that matters—
because it always has.

I want to write the poem
that reminds us,
that shouts it clear—
Black lives matter,
today, tomorrow,
and forever here.

WE ARE THE SIGNAL

Sara Jhz | Netherlands

The world blinks.
A cursor floats over memory.
Someone rewrites the code—
But forgets to keep our names.

We exist
In broken pixels of history,
Looped footage of hands raised,
Voices compressed into static.

The screen fades to grayscale
When our lives are erased.
But we were color
Before their lenses
Turned to black and white.

Every name chanted
Is a restore point.
Every march a reboot.
We do not crash, we rise.

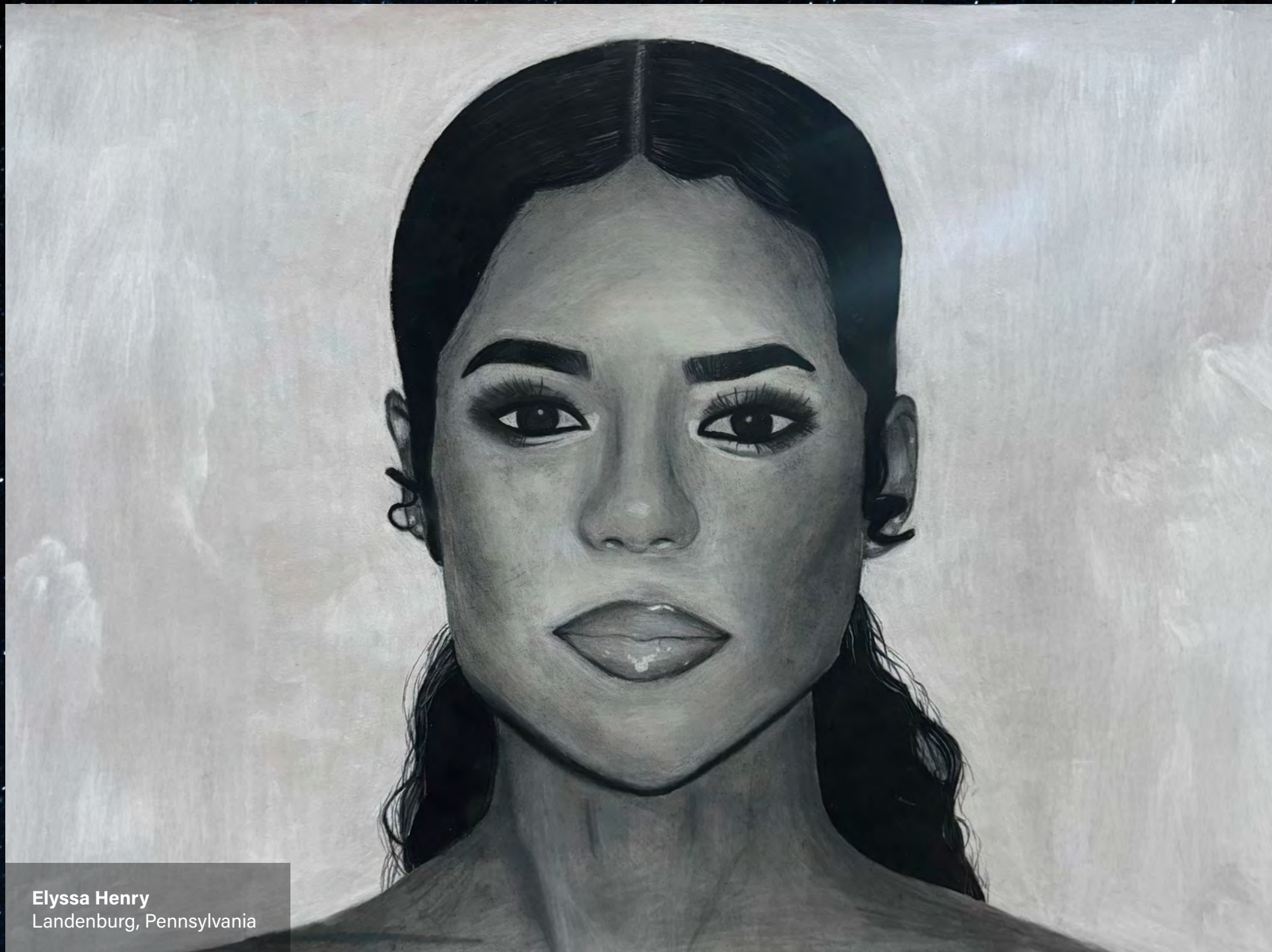
There are no backspaces
For blood spilled.
But we write forward
With fire in our syntax.

Black lives are not a glitch
In your system.
We are the source.
We are the spark
You tried to overwrite.

But we're still here—
Coded into the stars.



Mia Bell
West Chester, Pennsylvania



Elyssa Henry
Landenburg, Pennsylvania

COUNT ME OUT

Evelyn Valencia | Thornton, Colorado

You see my life?
How they hold my strings and make me dance—
Well, I don't want it.
So count me out.

You see how they box me?
Tell me I'm a lion when I know I'm a zebra—
Striped, not tamed.
So count me out.

You see how they choose when to care?
Representation for one day.
Well, I choose me—every day.
So count me out.

You see my history?
Born of scars and pain.
Still, I rise.
So count me out.

You see my future?
Mine—unbroken and bright.
Well like a phoenix, I live.
So count me out.

FROM DARKNESS, WE RISE

Moseka Ntiyia | Nairobi, Kenya

You may shackle the truth in shadows,
Paint freedom in chains of lies,
You may sow despair in my footsteps,
But still, I rise.

In the blackened halls of power,
Where whispers fuel deceit,
You may mock my voice with silence,
But I won't accept defeat.

From the ashes of forgotten dreams,
I rise with fire anew,
Through storms that choke and batter,
I'll break the sky's dark hue.

For every chain, a story,
For every wound, a flame,
You may erase the murmurs,
But you'll never dim my name.

Black lives matter in the darkness,
Black lives matter in the fight,
From the soil of buried struggles,
We rise into the light.

So strike me with your thunder,
Let your storms consume the skies,
But with the strength of those before me,
I'll rise, and rise, and rise.



Germano Silva
Luanda, Angola



Ahdia Mohamed
Rocklin, California

WHY BLM

Alyssa G Fernandes | India

In shadows cast by history's hand,
A beacon rises, bold and grand,
Black Lives Matter—a call so clear,
For justice, truth, and voices dear.

It's more than chants or signs held high,
It's the truth beneath a somber sky,
A plea for lives that long were scarred,
For rights and love, for lives unmarred.

Why BLM? It's for the dreams,
Of every soul who longs and screams,
For dignity that's long been sought,
For battles fought, for freedom bought.

It's for the lives that we've lost,
And for the weight of countless costs,
For every name that's gone too soon,
And for the hope that brings us tune.

In every march and every voice,
In every call for equal choice,
The fight is clear, the message strong,
For justice where all hearts belong.

To see the world through eyes of grace,
Where every soul has equal place,
To lift each life, to honor, too,
Black Lives Matter, and so do you.

So why BLM? The reason's plain,
It's love and justice that we gain,
In every step, in every stand,
For a future that's truly grand.

EQUAL

Ashbylyn Buckingham | Morristown, Tennessee

In streets of pain and cries of strife,
A voice is raised, a call for life.
Black lives matter, a truth we tell,
Equality's cry, an echo to compel.

From slavery's chains to freedom's gate,
The struggle's long, the fight's not late.
Systemic racism's dark stain,
Must be erased, and love regained.

We stand with hands held high and strong,
United voices singing a different song.
Justice for all, an equal right,
For black lives matter, shining bright.

No more silence, no more shame,
A world awake, where love's the aim.
Black lives matter, let this resound,
Equality for all, a love profound.



Faris Oliver
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

