

Respectability

By Tina Boyer Brown

We ask our children
to act calm/nervous/whatever
innocent looks like when
some cop shows his badge/pulls his gun/slows his car.

We beg kids
to say soft *yes sirs*.
We beg kids
to get on the hood of that car/empty their pockets/shut up/put your hands behind your
head.


No is an existential threat.
No is an existential threat.
No is an existential threat.
No is an existential threat.

Never is an existential threat.
Never is an existential threat.
Never is an existential threat.
Never is an existential threat.

We dare ask for humility
in the face of this oppression?
We have no idea what the threat feels like,
but we know

Breonna
Rekia
Sandra
Nia
Bettie
Yvette
Miriam
Shereese
Ahmaud
Trayvon
Eric
Laquan
Michael
Philando
Stephon
Alton
Amadou
Akai
Quintonio
Rumai
John
Jordan
Jonathan
Reynaldo
Kendrec
Ramarley
Kenneth
Robert
Walter
Terence
Freddie
Samuel
George
Tamir
and more
and more
and more

There's no open wrist declaring our innocence that will confer peace
where innocents need.



Our children
stand in front of doors/pages/words/in the streets.
They shut down/they shut down/they shut down
the forces that burn against them.

Source: *Poetry* (March 2021)