Second Daughter’s Second Day on Earth

Jacquelyn Woodson

My birth certificate says: Female Negro

Mother: Mary Anne Irby, 22, Negro

Father: Ja Ausin Woodson, 25, Negro

In Birmingham, Alabama, Martin Luther King Jr.

is planning a march on Washington, where

John F Kennedy is president.

In Harlem, Malcolm X is standing on a soapbox talking about a revolution

*Outside the window of University Hospital,*

*Snow is slowly falling. So much already*

*Cover this vast Ohio ground.*

In Montgomery, only seven years have passed

since Rosa Parks refused

to give up

her seat on a city bus

*I am born brown-skinned, black-haired and wide-eyed.*

*I am born Negro here and Colored there*

and somewhere else,

the Freedom Singers have linked arms,

their protests rising into song:

*Deep in my heart, I do believe*

*that we shall overcome someday.*

and somewhere else, James Baldwin

is writing about injustice, each novel,

each essay, changing the world.

*I do not yet know who I’ll be*

*What I’ll say*

*How I’ll say it…*

Not even three years have passed since a brown girl

named Ruby Bridges

walked into an all-whit school.

Armed guards surrounded her while hundreds

of white people spat and called her names

She was six years old

*I do not know if I’ll be strong like Ruby.*

*I do not know what the world will look like*

*when I am finally able to walk, speak, write…*

Another Buckeye!

*the nurse says to my mother.*

*Already, I am being named for this place.*

*Ohio. The Buckeye State*

*My fingers curl into fists, automatically*

This is the way, *my mother said*

of every baby’s hand.

*I do not know if these hands will become*

*Malcolm’s—raised and fisted*

*or Martin’s—open and asking*

*or James’s—curled around a pen.*

*I do not know if these hands will be*

*Rosa’s*

*or Ruby’s*

*gently gloved*

*and fiercely folded*

*calmly in a lap,*

*on a desk,*

*around a book,*

*ready*

*to change the world…*