

Trijae Johnson, Bradley University







 Fri, 3/13 1:58PM  10:08

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

names, lizzy, mother, family, kunta, property, stripped, denise, born, john, master, slaves, owned, white, johnson, slave, williams, blake, owners, meet

SPEAKERS

Trijae Johnson

-  **Trijae Johnson** 00:04
In 1850, the US Census didn't list a person's property, just the names of slave owners and the number of the slaves.
-  **Trijae Johnson** 00:19
My mother's maiden name is Battie spelled, B-A-T-T-I-E. Her family is from Mississippi. My grandmother's name is Betsy Battie. Her mother, my great grandmother's name's Elizabeth Battie. Her mother, Ida was born on the first day of April in
-  **Trijae Johnson** 00:37
1845.
-  **Trijae Johnson** 00:43
The reason I knows is 'cause Miss Lizzy told us so when we were set free. And that Mommy and Pappy and all of us children belong to the Drexler's master Jonathan you must call, Master John and his wife Miss Lizzy. 
-  **Trijae Johnson** 00:57

'Cause us didn't have no last names like that. My surname Bowean is puzzling,

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Trijae Johnson 01:03

when a Harvard student inquired about my name it was clear she was trying to better understand my background.

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Trijae Johnson 01:11

This is a common occurrence. Notice how when they conquer the land

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Trijae Johnson 01:18

they name it.

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Trijae Johnson 01:21

Same thing goes for our people.

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Trijae Johnson 01:24

Ownership. Elizabeth Beaty spelled B-E-A-T-Y owned over 50 slaves.

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Trijae Johnson 01:34

And I wonder if this is the same cotton plantation

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Trijae Johnson 01:40

my family roots grew from.

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Trijae Johnson 01:53

During transatlantic slavery, white owners found ways to keep track of their acquired property for bookkeeping purposes. So as they stripped them of their humanity, they simultaneously stripped them of their names, giving them a biblical first name and the same last name of the plantation owner. Activist, Nora Jones the 3rd reminds, "if you aren't black, you've probably never considered what it feels like to walk around the US carrying the mark of your family's slave master generations after slavery ended." Malcolm

X furthers this in his 1963 statement, "When you meet a negro man today by the name Johnson. If you look back into his history, you will find his forefathers were owned by a white man named Johnson. And the scars of our masters still mark us today." So to the poetry "Unnamed" by Porsche O, "Last Names" by Alicia Wise and "Milania-Luisa" by Milania-Luisa. Drama "Get Rid of Your Slave Name" by Wake Up Nation, "Substitute Teacher" from Key and Peele and Alex Haley's 2016 adaptation of Roots, an interview from 100 slave voices, an article from the Chicago Tribune and my own poetic testimony.



Trijae Johnson 03:01

After years of struggling to understand my family name and identity,



Trijae Johnson 03:07

I have decided to legally change the last name passed down to me with full support of my family.



Trijae Johnson 03:13

And the new name I choose will be from me, for me.



Trijae Johnson 03:18

All right, I'm your substitute teacher Mr. Garvey, don't fuck with me. Let's take roll. Jakequaline?



Trijae Johnson 03:25

Jakequaline, where is Jakequaline at?



Trijae Johnson 03:38


Do you mean Jacqueline? Ohhhhhhhkay, well played. Okay, I've got my eye on you Jakequaline.



Trijae Johnson 03:50

I explained to the young curious student, Bowie is from a small town in North Carolina. She responded I know some Bowens from North Carolina but they're white.

- T Trijae Johnson 04:04
Some Southern African Americans struggled with literacy after emancipation so
- T Trijae Johnson 04:09
names, sometimes the spellings. I remember all the names: Jane, Lucy, Ellen, Bob, Solomon, Albert, John, and I'm the youngest of the whole lot.
- T Trijae Johnson 04:25
And the owners sometimes give slaves last names according to what they do. Our names are a historical leash. Williams is the most common last name for black folks. JOHN Williams of Louisiana plantation owned over 218 black people. After Williams there's Johnson, then Smith, Jones, Brown, Jackson, say your name so you know this ain't Africa
- T Trijae Johnson 04:53
Balakay? No, Balakay here today?
- T Trijae Johnson 04:59
Yes, sir.
- T Trijae Johnson 05:03
My name is Blake. Are you out of your goddamn mind? Blake? Do you wanna go to war Balakay? Because we could go to war.
- T Trijae Johnson 05:20
One morning, Miss Lizzy come out the house and say this
- T Trijae Johnson 05:23
they done set us free. And then she opened up the book and tell us when us was born and how old us am so us has a record of ourselves. Racial traumas and triggers are a form of grieving. When we call our oppressors' names to introduce ourselves.

- T Trijae Johnson 05:41
Every time I meet a black person with the last name Battie I wonder if we are finally attending the family reunion.
- T Trijae Johnson 05:49
Every time I meet a white person with the last name, Beaty I wonder if they know what their family has done. I wonder if they know that's not your name. I stood staring at the college student with the sophisticated name.
- T Trijae Johnson 06:04
I am descended of people and slave people and I've never been ashamed.
- T Trijae Johnson 06:12
Yet, it is these so innocent moments when the trauma strikes, what a privilege to know which end of the whipping whip
- T Trijae Johnson 06:22
has your name on it to know exactly what your name is attached to. And people wonder about black names. Why the runaway syllables aren't easier to catch, why our names try to make music when they traverse between homes about
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- T Trijae Johnson 06:39
why we name our children after cars, after movement, after freedom. Say the name your owner's wife chose for you. I goes to Nashville in 1869 I was in the army
- T Trijae Johnson 06:52
they asked me my name and I say I'm just 19 and 1/4 quaters years old and I belong to Miss Lizzy.
- T Trijae Johnson 07:03
They asked me my name and I said Kunta Davis cuz I know Mr. Jefferson Davis down the president so I figured this is a good name. De-nise?

- T Trijae Johnson 07:12
De-nise.
- T Trijae Johnson 07:22
I swear to god If one of y'all say some silly ass name,
- T Trijae Johnson 07:28
this whole class is going to feel my wrath.
- T Trijae Johnson 07:33
now.
- T Trijae Johnson 07:35
De-nise?
- T Trijae Johnson 07:39
Do you mean Denise? Son of a bitch! You say your name right, right now.
- T Trijae Johnson 07:45
Denise, say your name right, Denise, say it right, Denise,
- T Trijae Johnson 07:49
say your name right. Denise Kunta, say it right. Denise Kunta, say your name right, Denise Kunta, Denise Kunta, Denise Kunta.
- T Trijae Johnson 08:00
Now, I'm gonna give you one more chance to do this.
- T Trijae Johnson 08:03
She got one too strong. So you watch her.

- T Trijae Johnson 08:08
Now all you have to do is tell me your name.
- T Trijae Johnson 08:15
That's not your name.
- T Trijae Johnson 08:19
Say it to me
- T Trijae Johnson 08:22
This is Virginia and you are the property of John Waller, just like the hogs, and the horses, and everyone!
- T Trijae Johnson 08:32
Now say your name, so you know what you ARE!
- T Trijae Johnson 08:55
My name is Kunta Kinte.
- T Trijae Johnson 09:04
My name is Trijae
- T Trijae Johnson 09:08
and I am not born of Johnson but of my mother and she is not born of Logan, but of her mother and she is not born of Bradley but of her mother.
- T Trijae Johnson 09:22
The stripping away of our names was just a clever agenda to strip us of our deities. So now I call myself God it is the closest thing that ever felt like home.



Trijae Johnson 09:34

Watch it grow its own food, cure its own cancer, become its own master.



Trijae Johnson 09:46

How gracefully how they colonized my name



Trijae Johnson 09:53

out your fucking mouth.