Nana Yaa Asantewaa
By Melz. (Melissa Owusu)

This song is about the power and strength of black women, in a time and a context far removed from the Western conceptualisation of ‘feminism’. It tells of a woman, Nana Yaa Asantewaa who told the men of her clan that the British had no right to their land or the fruits of their labour, and thus began the final Anglo-Ashanti war also known as The War of the Golden Stool, in 1900. This song explores how the Ashanti people were fighters and not prepared to give up the Golden Stool to Queen Victoria of Britain, as it was the single item that united the whole Ashanti Kingdom. Nana Yaa Asantewaa organised a sustained defence against the British colonisers, in which she held them in a fort and gained full control over them. It was only due to Nana Yaa making a decision to free the women and children from captivity that the defence fell. A letter was carried by a woman to modern-day Nigeria to alert other British colonisers that they were being held in captivity.

I wrote this song as a young Black British person, to reflect on our position in society. We are distinct from many black people in the Americas because our history in the West has been a far shorter one and therefore we have knowledge of the homelands our families came from. Yet, living in Britain, as generation to generation are born into this previously foreign land, we struggle to create an identity for ourselves. This song is the reflection of that identity whilst handling a very important topic of colonial rule, and my use of the South East London colloquial language is the expression of Black Britain for me in this piece. That I am Nana Yaa Asantewaa, as are my sisters, that on these shores, we will continue to fight the ills of neo-colonialism and racism that plague contemporary life. The central theme of this song is that Black women are incredible and have been for a long time, despite narratives and stereotypes that have risen in the West to suggest otherwise.
References


Nana Yaa Asantewaa
Warrior Queen of the Ashanti Kingdom
Nana Yaa Asantewaa
Fought the British when the men didn’t
Nana Yaa Asantewaa
Our history forgets we Queens like
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Imma tell you a story about the Gold Coast
Britain instated their rule
Pillar to post
They took slaves
Straight from Cape Coast
To Kingston Virginia
And who the heck knows
Anyway the place was formally known
As the Ashanti Kingdom
Where the fiercest rose
Everyone knew our Kente was dope
Festivals of yam, when the crop grows
They try tell us our culture was false
Sent missionaries, to change our moral code
Soldiers brought Kumasi to a halt
Searching, searching for all of our Gold
Something for their museums to hold
Yaa Asantewaa was having none of it though
She said if the men won’t fight
The women will take these colonial foes

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I’m a Queen like Nana Yaa Asantewaa
I’m a Queen like women all over Africa
God bless the Queens like my own mother
I see a Queen every time that I look in the mirror
You might say I’m gassed and that
That black girls shouldn’t think like that
So wait pass me the drink and that
So I can throw it in your face you pratt
Anyways, feminism didn’t come from white women
They didn’t come and give us the bring in
Yeah Sojourner came to speak Truth
To put a few dents in that glass roof
But we were doing this thing before Western ties
Western ties were our societies demise
We were doing this thing before Western ties
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So much black girl magic
When black girls back it
Fighting beauty standards
We don’t inhabit
When we come through best know that we clap it
Black women are beautiful across the plan
Them features, they used to tease us for in school
Have all of a sudden become the look that’s cool
You want them big lips
You want that big ass
You want them big thighs
You want to look nice
Ask Saartjie Baartman who paid the price
Exhibited in Zoos
Until she died
All for the features you now fetishize
Right?
Black women are beautiful
Black women are smart
Black women are Queens
Black women are art
She’s your mum, your daughter, your friend and your aunt
Love black women, black women are love.

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