The First and Only Time I Stood in an Execution Chamber

all I heard was stillness and the soft
symphony of breath. We were a congregation
of lowered heads and sunken shoulders trying
to understand what gave this country the right
to kill someone in our name. The table was long
and blue, its leather upholstery covering
a thin layer of foam padding. There were seven
discolored brown and blue straps that stretched
across the width of the bed, each of them locked
and pulled tight. There was a small pillow at the top
of the table where the condemned was meant
to lay their head, and another set of straps that came
down over their shoulders. About a foot below
the pillow on either side of the bed was the place
where the soon-to-be-executed lay their arms.
On each of these arm-length extensions was a leather
strap meant to be tightened near the person’s elbow,
a faded blend of grey and brown, taut leather
that had cracked with age. The straps, and their
procession of small notches, dangled below the table.
At the foot of the table were two shackles, their silver
metal glimmering under the florescent lights.
I think of those sentenced to die by juries who looked
nothing like them. I think of those sentenced to die
who left their families behind. I think of those sentenced
to die for something they were too young to understand.
I think of those sentenced to die who did not do
what they have been told they did. I think of all
the ways this country failed them before they ended
up in this room. I feel the hot rush of blood behind my
ears, the shame of being alive in a room built to kill.