

Impact Statement

Ashton Fields, Grade 12.

Beyond The Sickness, 2023.

Oil, acrylic on paper, 24 x 36 inches.

Washburn Rural High School, Topeka, KS

Unsung Hero: Annie Dodge Wauneka

Looking through the Unsung Heroes pre-approved list I found that there were few Native Americans on the list. So, I began to look for more names till I came across Chase Iron Eyes, a current-day Native American activist and educator. He inspired me to look closer at Native history and it led me to Annie Dodge Wauneka. Annie Dodge Wauneka was a three-term tribal council member of the Navajo Nation and health care activist, who sadly passed in 1997. She was also the first woman to be voted on the Navajo council in 1951. She made a long-lasting change in the way Navajo Nation's Medical Programs work and in the United States itself during the tuberculosis outbreak in the 1900s.

Once I chose the unsung hero that I felt deserved to be highlighted, I started my research by finding as many articles as possible on the subject. There was little to no documentation that detailed Annie's timeline or her work. At the time of my research, there were only two videos available on the internet, that I could find, that were of any use on this topic; one being an interview with Wauneka in 1958 discussing the changes that must occur in the Dine people's ways to help with the betterment of the Nation. Most websites honor her as an essential contributor to the small field of Women's history. Two websites were designed to tell the Navajo history and give a better understanding of her life and why she decided to go into the medical field. The articles on the sites tell the story of her years in a boarding school on the reservation and how the influenza epidemic hit her school when she was eight years old. During the epidemic, she contracted a mild case, leaving her immune to the virus, but her classmates were not as lucky. Wauneka would watch them die while waiting for a doctor from off the reservation to come and save them. At that moment, she realized that the Navajo people were not valued in the United States. She set out to dramatically change the medical programs for her people and the country. Wauneka would go on to achieve the following:

- Being the first Native American to receive Josephine B. Hughes Memorial Award in 1959
- Indian Council Fire achievement award 1963
- Navajo Medal of Honor 1963
- The Presidential Medal of Freedom 1963
- Arizona Woman Of The Year 1976

This remarkable history that was left behind by Wauneka led to my interpretation. I wanted to bring her extraordinary life and contributions into the much-deserved spotlight. I went with a bold, colorful, and yet simple look to the piece making the viewer look at what they have in front of them.

The layout of the piece was heavily influenced by the Dine People, their culture, and the significance of the placement of the reservation. There are four mountains or the four peaks within the Navajo Nation that are important to the Dine people. Each peak is placed in the North, South, East, and West. In the valley among these mountains is where many dances and rituals take place. When looking at the Navajo Flag you can see these mountains on it in secret colors. Each color has its significance in representing the peaks and I wanted to bring that to the piece. You can see those colors by the lower half of the figure. The use of neutral earthy tones within the figure against the bold background pushes the subject to the front. The halo around the figure's head helps with the flow of the piece. The corn stalk is important to the Dine, it is commonly used as a metaphor for life or man's development. Eagles are also highly praised such as Annie so not only is the eagle there to symbolize Annie's importance but also as a way to balance the piece.

Annie showed that if you want something to change you have to go and be part of the change. This mindset is famously stated by her, "I'll go and do more." She did not fear what may or may not happen but prevailed over all obstacles in her way, like many heroes and memorable people in history. Wauneka devoted all of her years to helping others and making sure they all had the same care as the more privileged people outside of the reservations. I made sure my fellow students got to know Annie Dodge Wauneka and her life by putting this piece up in my school to reach a young audience in the hopes they would do research for themselves to discover more about this amazing individual.

An important and known fact about Wauneka is she was the daughter of Henry Chee Dodge who was one of the first statesmen of the Navajo Nation when the reservation was first formed in 1868. When practicing medicine, she would travel throughout the Navajo Nation visiting with families and patients that were bedridden, caring for them at their homes, and teaching the families how to keep the home sanitary. Annie knew that the Dine people would need to change some of their understanding of how diseases and illnesses work to better their living situations. As of 2021, the Navajo reservation had a 49% unemployment rate, an 8,000-house income, and a 39% poverty rate. They had the strictest covid guidelines, only allowing people through the reservation to travel on interstate highways and making no stops within the Nation. The Dine people are one of the few tribes that have a non-voting representative office in Washington D.C.