

Impact Statement

Josie Paull, Grade 11.

"My Soul Still Feels Like Marching", 2023.

Oil painting, 22 x 28 inches.

Columbus High School, Columbus, GA

Unsung Hero: Sheyann Webb

I chose to paint Sheyann Webb, a young civil rights activist from Selma, Alabama. At the age of 8, Sheyann began attending daily meetings at Brown Chapel and became moved by the speakers' words. She was the only child who regularly attended these meetings, she eventually began participating in them by singing. Sheyann began participating in marches around the area and fully understood the dangerous risks that came with it, but her courage and conviction was greater than her fear. She inspired many people around her to advocate for their rights including her own teacher. On March 7th, 1965 at the age of 9, Sheyann Webb courageously marched alongside over 600 others led by activist John Lewis starting at Brown Chapel walking to Montgomery, Alabama. She was the youngest activist to participate in this march. While attempting to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were stopped, gassed, and beaten by Alabama state troopers. This event is known as "Bloody Sunday". Sheyann's parents had warned her to be cautious about her protesting, but she joined the march against her parents' wishes. When leaving her house, she left a note stating, "I am marching for our freedom". Sheyann marched across the bridge again alongside Martin Luther King Jr. and when told she had done enough, she stated, "My feet and legs may be tired, but my soul still feels like marching.". Sheyann understood and witnessed firsthand the risks involved with protesting, but at her young age she believed she was not just fighting for her own freedom, but her family's freedom as well. She demonstrated such selflessness and valor for something she wholeheartedly believed in. Her undaunted courage truly inspired me to create a painting honoring her. Sheyann Webb Christburg, now 67, makes yearly trips back to Selma to revisit the site where risked her life for freedom. Instead of letting this horrific experience stop her, she saw it as a reason to continue to fight for freedom.

I painted Sheyann Webb's portrait standing on the Edmund Pettus Bridge where she courageously risked her life for what she believed in. I included faded figures behind her to represent the 600 other brave protestors. I chose the specific reference photo of Sheyann from around the time she participated in the march to show how young she was when she participated in this protest. I placed her portrait in the center of the canvas because she is the focus of the painting. I used real photos of people who participated in the Bloody Sunday march as reference images to demonstrate that people of different backgrounds joined together in this event, including Martin Luther King Jr. I painted Sheyann in the center by herself to represent the fact that she made the decision to march by herself, nobody was forcing her. She risked her life because of her own personal conviction.

I wanted to convey Sheyann's courageousness and how so many other advocates risked their lives as well fighting for freedom. I attempted to express that in my painting by placing Sheyann in the center and including multiple figures behind her. I included a highlight outlining Sheyann

in my work to further place emphasis on her and represent that she was and continues to be a light inspiring others.

After researching her story, I was truly inspired and impacted by Sheyann Webb. She demonstrated so much courage and strength at such a young age. Learning about what she fought for then and comparing it to the present day shows how far our nation has come and yet we still have a ways to go. Her strength and determination have inspired me to fight for things I believe in and start making an effort to make a positive change in society. Her story is so inspiring I will share her story and her courageous character throughout my community. I will use my painting to shine a light on her story and what she fought for.