

Impact Statement

Catalina Rivera, Grade 9.
The New Woman, 2023.
Ink on paper, 9 x 12 inches.
Heights High School, Houston, TX
Unsung Hero: Inez Milholland

My chosen unsung hero is Emily Newell Blair. While studying this suffragist, I uncovered an incredible list of accomplishments that deserve vast recognition. Blair was a strong leader in the suffrage movement as well as a writer, editor, and publicity chair for the Missouri Equal Suffrage Association, and she even went on to be one of the first women to hold the high position of vice chair for the democratic party. Blair used her position to organize democratic women's clubs and establish political schools for women. Blair's writing career began in 1909 when she published "Letters of a contended wife". She began writing every day, as well as looking after her kids and being the ideal mother figure of this time. All of this writing experience ultimately led to her strength in writing speeches, and articles for the suffrage movement. She had spent lots of time learning exactly what a suffragist was, and the more knowledge she gained, the stronger her interest and passion for the movement became. Blair was not bothered when the Suffrage Amendment was defeated in 1914, and in turn became the first editor of the magazine, "Missouri Women" which discussed suffrage issues. I find every suffragist from this movement very heroic, however, I am astonished by the courage of Emily Newell Blair to create such a name for herself in what would be considered a very controversial move, and such a crucial part of the overall Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-1960s. She has not only left an impact on me, but an impact on every woman in the United States today.

At the Democratic National Convention, held in 1916, a well-known woman in the suffrage community asked the women of Missouri to come up with an effective, and peaceful way to protest and urge delegates to consider the suffrage movement. Blair's idea was, "a golden lane of women dressed in white dresses with yellow sashes and parasols to line the streets in complete silence." I made exactly that.

I wanted to create a representative piece of art that uniquely demonstrates Emily Newell Blair's role in the suffrage movement, and her vision for the clothing of the suffragettes stuck out to me the most. I find clothing to be a crucial part of history and find it extremely interesting to see how the way people have dressed over time creates specific imagery of what is and is not acceptable at the time. It also portrays how clothes were used in modern-day life. Women specifically have come a long way from how they dressed in the 1900s to how they dress now. For this specific project, I have recreated Blair's idealistic "suffragette uniform", using a newspaper to highlight Blair's career as a writer, and keeping it white, with a yellow sash and even adding a parasol.

The complete process of this dress has opened my eyes to the beauty of fashion creation and given me insight into what kind of hard work goes into creating such intricate designs. This journey has opened new doors for me and given me a brief intro to the world of fashion and design.

Creating this dress has most importantly led me to think about the life of suffragists in the early 1900s. The whole process has completely changed my perception of how lives are different now from the way they were a century ago. It has genuinely inspired me to be more valiant in my community and make a change in any box where there is room for it. Suffragettes protested in the same, full coverage uniform no matter the conditions, and were frowned upon for showing little to any skin. This did not stop them, and they continued with courage and lots of pride. In today's protests, and movements there are no uniforms, and protesters just wear what is most comfortable, and suitable for the weather. Suffragettes were not given this luxury, however, the unification of women's outfits in the movement was a powerful statement, creating lots of change and Emily Newell Blair deserves a great amount of credit for this.

To share my artwork with my community, the dress will be displayed at our local museum, The Norton Art Gallery at the front door for visitors to come inside and view, along with a brief summary of Blair, so they get to learn more about her.