

## Impact Statement

Zoe Spikerman, Grade 12.

***Separate Will Never Be Equal***, 2021.

Mixed media on paper, 12 x 10 Inches.

Parker School, Waimea, HI

Unsung Hero: Sylvia Mendez

"Separate is not Equal," quotes my AP United States History teacher as we discuss the reform movements of the early 20th century. "Brown V. Board," the revolutionary Supreme Court case that abolished racial segregation in schools, illuminates the chalkboard.

That day in class, I learned of the awe-inspiring activists who redefined American policy through powerful and passionate calls for equality.

But I did not learn of "Mendez vs. Westminster," a noteworthy court case that preceded "Brown v. Board," until I found Lowell Milken Center.

There, I discovered Sylvia Mendez, a young girl who bravely challenged centuries of institutionalized racism and malicious segregation through her persistent demands for justice. "Mendez V. Westminster," Sylvia and her family's courageous court case, victoriously ended segregation in Californian schools. Inspired by Sylvia's ground-breaking accomplishments, I was motivated to research her history in order to uncover her triumphs. (I highly recommend the sensational documentary Mendez vs. Westminster: For All the Children/Para Todos los Niños.)

While researching Sylvia, I learned what "bravery" truly meant.

At the height of "Mendez V. Westminster," Sylvia Mendez was only a child, only an eight-year-old elementary school student. I can only imagine the pressure she faced as the center of California's de-segregation movement and the primary target of xenophobic attack.

Yet Sylvia Mendez, heroically refusing to surrender to racism, proudly bore her incredible fervor for justice. Sylvia bore this fervor while leading the desegregation initiative, while courageously speaking in court, and even while her new white 17th Street Elementary classmates ridiculed her ethnicity. Sylvia Mendez stood strong, confidently championing equity.

To artistically honor Sylvia Mendez's achievements, I chose to recreate an iconic photograph of 8-year-old Sylvia wearing the Presidential Medal of Freedom, a notable award she righteously achieved in 2011, decades after "Mendez V. Westminster."

A background of books surrounds Sylvia's portrait to emphasize the importance and power of education. After all, education not only offers opportunities for self-growth, but education challenges ignorance, offering avenues for widespread social change.

A road made of collaged newspaper articles that celebrate "Mendez V. Westminster" and "Brown V. Board" frame my painting of Sylvia. I intended to showcase how Sylvia--and the

Hoover School (located on her right) --paved the way for tangible reform in the Supreme Court (illustrated above her).

Surrounding my drawing of the Supreme court is a diverse group of united schoolgirls who embody Sylvia's kind spirit and our globe's ongoing campaign for equality. They stand on a streamline of gold, showcasing the glory of diversity.

Sylvia Mendez inspires me not only as a woman who desires to lead, but as a student who desires to improve our society. Sylvia's story reaffirms my ability to evoke real change, to propel ground-breaking progress, and to rewrite history. Today's Civil Rights Movements mirror Sylvia's revolutionary battles against bigotry. Because of Sylvia, I now see myself not as a bystander to these movements, but as a young girl capable of leading our culture's current fight for fairness.

Sylvia's story urges me to unapologetically speak up against discrimination, to challenge harmful conventionality, and to fearlessly protest injustice.

I aim to spread Sylvia's bravery and indispensable message. As leader of my school's National Arts Honors Society, I plan to share Sylvia's legacy with my club and my school. Hopefully, through the National Art Honors Society, I will be able to showcase my artwork and research at my town's local gallery, the Waimea Firehouse Gallery! Furthermore, I've already published my project in Parker Press, the literary magazine I co-founded, to share Sylvia's inspiring influence with student readers and parent subscribers.

I hope Sylvia will inspire my audience just as she inspires me every day!