

## Impact Statement

Amy Tan, Grade 12.

***Hope, Determination, and Song***, 2021.

Mixed media on paper, 15 x 12.5 Inches.

Pioneer High School, Ann Arbor, MI

Unsung Hero: Miriam Makeba

In the U.S, the fight for social justice has become a long struggle for women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community. With Asian and black hate crimes gaining mainstream recognition and rising youth activism uniting communities, Miriam's story and accomplishments will only bolster the world's drive to undertake injustices. Unlike most notable civil rights leaders, Makeba was a talented female musician forced to defend her country from afar, ultimately becoming Mama Africa. Despite her struggles, she, like an amazing mother to her children, selflessly represents the struggles of oppressed groups to remove discrimination. Mariam Makeba is a role model who deserves to be glorified through creation like mine for her unforgettable voice and heroism.

Living the majority of her infant life in a jail cell, Mariam Makeba resiliently and patiently strived to protect the next generation from injustice and social imprisonment. She fearlessly defied the discriminating apartheid government leading her to be banned from entering her homeland. With the Civil Rights Movement flourishing in the U.S. and South Africans, the world listened to the voice of Mama Africa in admiration, resonating honorable words of wisdom and hope outside the borders of her home. She soon became the first South African musician to spread traditional African culture to the western world. To this day, Makeba should be recognized for uniting diverse populations and driving the flame to attain equality. Being part of a minority, I am inspired by Makeba's optimism through her fight as a woman and dark-skinned, having the heart to manifest the world with her strong beliefs in the greater good. She is the embodiment that there are no excuses to ignore or flee from atrocious systems. Makeba's legacy still lives on and cannot fade.

As Makeba once stated: "There are three things I was born within this world, and there are three things I will have until the day I die-hope, determination, and song."

In my piece 'Hope, Determination, and Song,' I portray a young and older Makeba, connected by the thread of young Makeba's mic to elderly Makeba's finger. The young Makeba in the background illustrates her bright spirit as she endured her agony and exile from South Africa to motivate others to attain equality peacefully. The fading bars behind young Makeba signify Makeba's angelic voice leading her people out of imprisonment to happiness. The elderly Makeba is portrayed singing from the motherly heart, spreading her hope for peace and passion for music till the end. Her advocate Nelson Mandela smiles solemnly from afar, admiring Makeba. When isolated from her homeland, Makeba's bravery and smiles make her a light in the darkness of racism and violent opposition. The line of musical notes displayed is from the piano part of one of her hits "Pata Pata" that correspond to the lyrics "Saguquga sathi bega" translated as "So we grooved and said: 'Check it out!'" This cheerful, positive verse further ignites hope and optimism among Makeba's supporters.

As for the small scenic details, I attempted to capture the lush, breathtaking landscape of South Africa, referenced the South African painting 'Song of the Pick' by 20th century artist Gerard Sekoto to convey the apartheid, and incorporated the fervent peaceful protests of Makeba's era. In addition, the colors of the South African flag (red, green, white, yellow, blue) significantly influenced my color palette. I spent hours researching the apartheid and Mama Africa through documentaries, historical photographs, cultural artworks, social media, and articles.

Makeba's ability to endure prejudice and opposition inspires me to express my capabilities to the fullest to eliminate the flaws in society. I share many of the same views as Mama Africa but have lacked the confidence to take action. She shows everyone that even disadvantaged black women can be a savior of the suffering. I have no excuse to give up on difficult, rewarding desires.

To spread Makeba's legacy, I resorted to social media platforms, encouraging others to share my Instagram stories about Makeba and starting conversations relating to Makeba and her extraordinary contributions with groups on Discord. I was baffled that no one knew who she was until I introduced her "hope, determination, and song." I also display my work and ask peers to analyze the meaning and concepts, hoping to inspire them like Makeba has inspired me to take action. In the future, I plan to present my unsung hero to children in the Peace Neighborhood Daycare Center I volunteered at to spread Makeba's message of peace and love to future generations. I will request my school's library to order books about this unsung hero and include her in my school's black history month assembly. To try my best to follow Mama Africa's footsteps, I will diligently strive to be an active member of social justice organizations such as Dear Asian Youths and an avid supporter of Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ, etc.