

Impact Statement

Meze Ivit, Grade 7.

Claudette Colvin – An Unsung Hero, 2019.

Mixed media, 25 x 16 Inches.

Hallie Wells Middle School, Clarksburg, MD

Unsung Hero: Claudette Colvin

Claudette Colvin is an unknown name to many, yet it holds greater meaning. Claudette Colvin is a 79-year-old woman, the mother to two boys, lives in New York and takes the train every day. But little do people know that she helped the Civil Rights movement. At the young age of 15, Claudette refused to give up her seat on a Alabama bus 9 months before Rosa Parks. She was arrested and was one of four plaintiffs in *Browder v. Gayle*. It was ruled that Montgomery Alabama's segregated bus system was unconstitutional. That's what inspired me to choose her. She was known as a good, smart, shy, and quiet girl but when she stood up to white supremacy and refused to follow the rules people created to promote segregation, she was hailed as a troublemaker. This is one of the reasons why anyone barely knows her name.

To portray Claudette's character and her act I chose to paint a picture that symbolizes what she did and painted words to show her character. In my art piece (title) the background is a bus from Alabama during the 1960's that shows how the buses were segregated. White people sat in the front and colored people sat in the back, the areas were separated so nobody of the other color would sit near each other. In the middle of the painting is Claudette Colvin and underneath her are the words "Girl, Guilty in Bus Seat Case" which is to show Claudette Colvin made it into the newspaper because she refused to give up her seat. I wanted to make sure I captured the bus and Claudette. I used acrylic and oil paints. I used neutral colors for effect because what Claudette did was very brave and powerful. I wanted to be sure to express her bravery through the tones of the painting.

Claudette often is asked by people who know her what happened when she refused her bus seat. She often describes it that she was sitting in her designated seat with her friends but then a young white women came on the bus and the seats were the only ones available close to the white section. Her friends all moved to the back of the bus, but Claudette stayed in her seat. She describes it as if "Harriet Tubman's hands were pushing me down on one shoulder and Sojourner Truth's hands were pushing me down on the other shoulder." She felt "inspired by these women because [her] teacher taught [them] about them in so much detail." I realize that there are so many people in the past who have done heroic acts that have made my life and the lives of my peers easier, and they don't get the recognition for it.

We remember all of the famous people such as Rosa Parks, Gandhi, Martin Luther King and more courageous people by teaching about them in school, museums, memorials and showing them on media. But there are so many people who have done other heroic acts that helped the causes those famous people believed in such as Claudette Colvin, Sylvia Mendes, Dorothy Bull, Sheyann Webb and many more. Creating my art piece that memorialized an unsung hero and researching about Claudette Colvin has helped me realize that there are ordinary people we, children and adults, don't know much about who have helped change our world for the better.

We should recognize them and not dismiss them. People may view them as troublemakers, thieves, bad people but in reality, they were just ordinary people standing up for what is right. I will share my work and talk about who Claudette Colvin is through social media, at my school (Hallie Wells Middle School), and to my friends. My teacher will also display it in the main office of the school. I will also present it at our school's STEAM NIGHT.