

Impact Statement

Katelyn Lowe, Grade 11.

A Woman Ahead of Her Time, 2024.

Colored pencil, graphite, marker on paper, 11 x 14 inches.

George Washington High School, Belle, WV

Unsung Hero: Jackie Ormes

As a biracial female teenager, it did not take too long to decide on Jackie Ormes as my Unsung Hero. As a self-taught artist, I was mesmerized by her artwork in the Torchy Brown in Dixie to Harlem comic strip and the Patty-Jo 'n' Ginger cartoons. As the first Black woman cartoonist published in newspapers, she portrayed the actual issues of racial segregation and discrimination in real-time. Her characters advocated for women's rights, the ceasing of sexual harassment, and what was happening in the United States' foreign policies. She gave a strong voice to black women during the Civil Rights movement. She was the first black woman to have a regularly published comic strip. She was quoted as saying "[she] never liked dreamy little women who can't hold their own." Her creations allowed her readership to see strong models for what the next powerful generation could become.

So my research began with not only the website bibliography of Ms. Ormes, but also with Nancy Goldstein's, *Jackie Ormes; The First African American Woman Cartoonist*, published in paperback in August 2019, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor. Once I read about her heroines, including Torchy in Heartbeats, and saw how strong and independent these women were, including being socially and politically aware, I could not wait to draw what I thought Jackie encompassed with her cartoons and journalism. Her heroines faced contemporary issues for their times and no matter what the deception, they always came through in the end. You could root for them and aspire to like them in a precarious time. She also drew them as real African American women and not as a "Mammy" or "maid," but rather attractive and fashionable. I so admired that she was fearless and took on so many subjects that I am sure were taboo at the time.

As mentioned previously, I am a self-taught artist like Jackie Ormes. Obviously, I wanted my artwork to depict as much as I could of what Jackie Ormes had created in her career. She took everything on from race to sex to environmental pollution. All of her life, she was personally involved in humanitarian causes, so I wanted to encompass that Jackie never chose her comics as a persona to hide behind. So, in essence, I wanted her to contrast with the background as much as possible to be the main focus of the project. I also desired to maintain the vibrant color scheme she chose for her comic strip that included both bright and pastel colors. Although upon completion I realized the artwork dedicated to Jackie would be incomplete without her signature autograph which can be found on the corner of her easel. It would be neglectful of me not to mention that because of Jackie's passions for some of her ideologies for freedom and civil rights, it led to an investigation by the FBI. Of course, this was a time when many were subjected to investigation.

In conclusion, I believe learning about the talents and strengths of Jackie Ormes has allowed me to see the future of how one can believe in one's self. I have also learned from Jackie that

art can hold a certain type of power that words cannot express. Nevertheless, even after her passing, Jackie's work was not left unrewarded because, in January 2014, she was inducted into the National Association of Black Journalists Hall of Fame. However, I believe her story should not stop there and must continue to spread throughout every community. With all the information I have gathered, I plan to spread her story among my community by exhibiting my art of Ms. Ormes and her unique cartoon characters.