

Impact Statement

Grace Lee, Grade 10

L. Alex Wilson: The One Who Walked the Walk, 2024.

Graphite on paper, 19 x 15 inches.

Seckinger High School, Buford, GA

Unsung Hero: L. Alex Wilson

The Cambridge Dictionary defines unsung as “not noticed or praised for hard work, courage...” and hero as “a person who is admired for having done something very brave...” I believe these two words are strangely interwoven to create a unique title that can only be placed on a few. L. Alex Wilson, an African American journalist, was just that. Our education system places heavy focus on the “Sung Heroes,” like Martin Luther King Jr. or Harriet Tubman; however, I was drawn to the story of Wilson as I looked through the Lowell Milken Center’s Unsung Hero Projects. In a strange but meaningful way, I liked how unknown he was. It made it a challenge to create an artwork that would capture his story—one that resembles perseverance and irrefutable courage. Most people, in the face of conflict and violence, would run away to save themselves. I would also be in that group of people. L. Alex Wilson, on the other hand, decided to play his role and stand up for those who couldn’t. Having been inspired by him would be an understatement. Throughout this assignment, I’ve grown to realize the importance of focusing more on the collective good rather than personal recognition or accolades. My chosen unsung hero for this assignment was not random. As I mentioned before, it was important to me that L. Alex Wilson stood his ground and chose not to run away. In this day and age, it’s easy for us to get overwhelmed with even the slightest change to our normal routine and yet Wilson found his role in creating a just society more important than his own life. Upon researching my Unsung Hero, I was able to find that he was a major black journalist who shed light on the lynching of Emmett Till. This heavily influenced people to be more proactive in advocating for civil rights. As we know, change can often cause conflict. But Wilson was quoted saying, “Any newsman worth his salt is dedicated to the proposition that it is his responsibility to report the news factually under favorable and unfavorable conditions” (Wilson). His unapologetic approach to creating change but not running is the most important trait Wilson was attacked verbally and physically, and I wanted to express this in my artwork by showing him getting kicked and choked. Despite the countless stopping points he must’ve had, my Unsung Hero proved that it’s possible to live for something greater than the self. I admire how “Wilson refused to show fear” because of his firm desire for justice and for what he believes is right.

To display my interpretation of my Unsung Hero’s story, I started with Wilson in his office at the Chicago defender. His serious expression shows his passion for just journaling meanwhile, the scattered newspapers resemble his complete devotion in his

work for equal rights. But we know that L. Alex Wilson's life was not all about his work in his office. So, I added two drawings of Wilson being attacked by mobs of men, portraying the physical effort it took to make a difference. I then drew my attention to a major event at the time that fueled the desegregation movement: the Little Rock Nine. The drawing of the Little Rock Central High School is to represent the location of which Wilson was able to really "walk the walk" and stand up for the nine African American students at the school, putting down his paper and pen. Below the school campus is a drawing of school children and their teacher. This is a testimony of the unsung impact Wilson had on the desegregation of public schools. through each of these drawings, my vision was to create an artwork that highlighted those who work behind the scenes. A spotlight was not the only way to change—L. Alex Wilson was never put in the spotlight, but that did not change his resolve to fight for justice. I believe my vision helped me portray the lack of fame for Wilson while also exemplifying what it means to be dedicated and fight for what you believe in.

As I was creating this artwork, I was reminded that making an impact is not dependent on a person's level of fame. Every component of the work, by itself, could not have any significant meaning; however, a bird's-eye view would soon show that it takes a collective effort to make change and find solutions. This brings a newfound level of confidence to hopefully in my time here without any regrets. L. Alex Wilson was able to channel his courage and infect others with it throughout his life. I too wish that my life would be, not famous or full of riches, meaning fully spent positively impact those around me, rather than being caught up on grades, my dream job, etc. I believe that this change in how I should live starts now. My artwork of my Unsung Hero is a great conversation starter for when I display it at my school's art shows or private viewings for my friends and family. But I plan to make sure my experience with creating it—the realization of how I should really be living—speaks volume to those around me. L. Alex Wilson has laid a perfect stepping-stone for people like me. His story is one that the average person should be constantly reminded of. I am very grateful for this opportunity to learn more about Wilson's courageous life and story, while also seeking a way to live.