

Impact Statement

Madison Greenwood, Grade 11.

Florence Kelley's Lasting Impact, 2023.

Oil on wood panel, 11 x 14 inches.

Columbus High School, Columbus, GA

Unsung Hero: Florence Kelley

Florence Kelley was a women's suffrage and rights activist, labor rights activist, and African American rights activist. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she was raised by her activist parents and at 16 years old started studying at Cornell University. She greatly impacted and shaped the modern-day United States and was the catalyst for many human rights campaigns. I was inspired when I read about her on Lowell Milken's page for underrepresented figures in history and decided that she would be the hero that I would memorialize in a painting surrounded by her major achievements. I focused on her most impactful achievements; however, there are countless others that she had throughout her lifetime and some that only came to fruition many years later that she had set the precedent for. She inspired me because not many people during that period were activists who were willing to stand up and fight for the rights of all groups of people including minorities, women, and children. Her ideals consisted of freedom and equality for all, and she accomplished many things that aided her in this fight.

One of the organizations that she helped to found was The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This organization was a civil rights group formed in 1909 advocating "to disrupt inequality, dismantle racism, and accelerate change in key areas including criminal justice, health care, education, climate, and the economy" which is still around today (NAACP). The main founder of this was W. E. B. Du Bois whom I pictured to the right of her in my painting. Additionally, she founded the National Consumers League (NCL) in 1899 which is an American consumer organization to improve working conditions for laborers across the country. This organization would assess different factories and businesses at the time and deem them clean and safe for the workers or not. If they were then a seal of approval would be granted to these organizations. This helped to inform consumers about how businesses treated their workers and aimed to motivate them to only buy from places that had this seal of approval.

In my piece, I depicted this stamp in the top left corner. Also, Kelley lobbied Congress to pass the Keating-Owen Child Labor Act of 1916 which banned the sale of products from factories that hired children 13 and under. In my piece, I depicted two children who were working in harsh conditions in factories. They worked long hours and had hard work for very little pay. Furthermore, she was a part of the National Woman's Suffrage Association (NWSA) founded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. In this organization, Kelley advocated for all women's rights, which include African American women and not just white women. Lastly, she aided in the creation of the Brandeis brief which was a pioneering legal brief used in *Muller v Oregon* that limited hours for laborers due to illnesses related to overworking. The Brandeis brief was the first-time scientific evidence was used in a court case which changed the way court cases are ran today.

Depicted in the oil painting, I painted Florence Kelley in the center. I wanted to use the composition to emphasize how she was in the middle of all her achievements. She was someone who initiated change when she saw that change was required. To her right, W.E.B. Du Bois is shown because he was the main founder of the NAACP, written on the banner below him, and she aided in its creation. To the left of Kelley are two working children, they symbolize all the child laborers who were being exploited in factories by big businesses. Above them is the NCL stamp that was awarded to fair and just brands that treat their workers with fair conditions. Finally, the NWSA banner shows how she was a strong advocate for all women's suffrage. In this movement, she made it clear that she supported all women, including African American women should have the same rights as everyone else. In my composition, the juxtaposition of Kelley and her achievements surrounding her symbolized how she set the precedent for many activist groups and modern-day equal civil rights. The background is a light, cool pink to represent how she aided the women's rights movement as a woman herself. Her fight for women's rights, specifically all women's rights, was a philosophy held by a small minority group of women during the time and she was a leader of this group who wanted to make a change. Overall, I wanted to memorialize her image as a person who stood up for many minority groups and was a leading activist for her time.

This project facilitated me realizing how many people do amazing and praise-worthy actions that do not get deserved recognition. However, this made me contemplate how fame does not equate to change and important moments in history may be the ones that are never truly recognized. Thus, to make an impact on the world, people simply need to make an effort in achieving their dreams with the hope that someday their efforts will actualize even if they were only the steppingstone to the larger issue. I plan on posting my work on my Instagram account and providing a short description of her achievements to increase awareness about Florence Kelley as well as display it at my school so that other students can learn about her. In summary, I believe that we have a lot to learn from Florence Kelley and the way she sought a change in corrupt systems. These core values and hardworking drive can be applied to modern-day situations in many ways to improve the lives of others.

Works Cited

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