

Impact Statement

Allaina Wagner, Grade 8.

History Had Her Glued to Her Seat, 2016.

Charcoal, colored pencil on paper, 15.5 x 12 Inches.

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Unsung Hero: Claudette Colvin

Immediately when I saw this project I thought of someone who started a chain reaction in Black History, Claudette Colvin. On March 2, 1955, four teenage African-American girls sat in the middle seats of a bus which was reserved for white people. They were heading downtown in Montgomery, Alabama and the bus was becoming more crowded. When it was full, a white woman approached the four girls, expecting them to give up their seats and move to the back. Three of the girls moved, but Colvin stayed. The bus driver saw the scene and called the police, who addressed the situation. They dragged her off the bus while she stated, "I paid my fare and it's my constitutional right." She was arrested at age fifteen, taken to an adult jail and charged with assault and battery, disorderly conduct and defying the segregation law. She paid bail, but was later put on probation.

Nine months later Rosa Parks, 42 at the time, did nearly the exact same thing in defiance of segregation laws. At the time, Rosa was an officer in the NAACP and worked for the civil rights of African-Americans. However, when Rosa was arrested, it was staged and Claudette's arrest was used as inspiration. Rosa had predicted the impact she would have, her spot in history was bookmarked, but what Claudette did was unadulterated and unassuming. Claudette's act was one of her own free will, one that she knew she had a right to. Her act was not performed to prove something; she acted on instinct and it was more powerful than she would ever know. By not knowing how many lives she would change and problems she would solve, Claudette Colvin embodies everything that a hero should be.

To encompass the dignity and modesty of Claudette, I wanted to create a powerful piece that could speak on its own. I recreated a portrait photo of her peacefully looking to the side because I believe it conveys more emotion than any other image of her. The portrait was drawn with charcoal and in black and white to represent the history that follows her. In the time that her arrest occurred, color photography was not popular, therefore I decided that the lack of color in the portrait would be symbolism of the past. In addition, I chose to recreate a more recent photo to represent how she became slightly more recognized when she was older. Her act was only known decades later because civil rights activists felt that she would not be the best symbol for the Montgomery Bus Boycott, considering she was only 15 at the time. Therefore, I chose a recent photo to capture the age at which she had gained credit for her impact. After much research on her scarcely told story, I decided to put something that could explain her story in the background of the artwork. When learning about her, I found the headline of the newspaper her arrest was written on. The major headline states, "Negro Girl Found Guilty of Segregation Violation" which to me shows the contrast of how we saw African-Americans from back in the 1950s to now. This headline is extremely significant in that sense, so I knew that I had to use it. I also made it stand out by using an ombre red outline to represent its significance in Claudette's

story. Under the headline is the only other part of the newspaper that I could find, and it described how Claudette's original trial went and who was her attorney.

Overall, Claudette indirectly changed the lives and helped gain the rights of millions of people. Her one act sparked the idea that eventually caused segregation on buses to end, and in the trial that decided the end of segregation she was the star witness. By causing this, attention was gained for the rights of African- Americans and now we live with equality between races. Claudette Colvin is my hero because her arrest, which was entirely honest, allowed the rights of so many people to be where they are today. To me, she deserves one hundred times more credit than she has received, and, more than anything, for her story to be out there for people to learn. By her one act of bravery and humility, Colvin truly exemplified the characteristics of what a hero is to me.