

Impact Statement

Annah Brighton, Grade 12

Forward Into Light, 2025

Oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches

Washburn Rural High School, Topeka, KS

Unsung Hero: Inez Milholland

Inez Milholland was a well-known activist and suffragist who played a vital role in advancing women's rights and gender equality. She led thousands of women in the 1913 women's suffrage movement in Washington, D.C. What I admire most about Milholland was how devoted she was to the women's suffrage movement. Her constant efforts in striving for gender equality played a vital role in the advancement of women's rights.

Inez Milholland was a talented speaker and advocate for not only women's rights but also pacifism and socialism. She attended and graduated from Vassar College in 1909. She also earned a law degree at New York University Law School. Furthering past her education, she became a labor and children's rights attorney. Milholland later worked at the National Child Labor Committee as well as the Women's Trade Union League. Inez Milholland was recruited to the NAWSA Congressional Committee. In 1916, while delivering a speech in Los Angeles, she suddenly collapsed and was rushed to the hospital. She was treated for anemia but later died on November 25, 1916. Her last public words were, "Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty?"

Milholland contributed to the positive change in history by predominantly being a leading figure in this movement. She gave compelling speeches and rallied people for her cause. Her gender equality marches were a crucial moment in showing just how determined women were to assert their rights. She continues to impact the lives of others by representing resilience and courage to fight for what you believe in.

I knew before starting this painting that I wanted to incorporate her horse, Grey Dawn, and the attire she wore. Dressed in a white dress and cloak, she symbolized the "New Woman" of the twentieth century. I have redone this painting three times, to end up with what I think would give her the most honorable and heroic scene I could think of. I wanted to make it appear that the viewer was looking up at her, to show just how much of a charismatic leader she truly was. My teacher, Mr. Leduc, managed to get in contact with one of his former students to ask if I could take some reference pictures of some horses for this painting. Going to a ranch for these photos has greatly improved my understanding of the way horses behave, and just how big they are compared to a person.

I also experimented with how I wanted the lighting to look. I tried it from the left and from the right and decided that the right looked better. For the cloak, I wrapped a blanket around me to see how it would wrap around, and in some of my sketches, I made my sister pose for me. I wanted to embody Milholland's confidence and captivating feel of her personality, as well as sneaking in one of the sayings from the women's suffrage movement.

Inez Milholland's story inspires me to appreciate the power of standing up for what you believe in. I hope the viewer can recognize her dedication in helping secure the right to vote for women in the United States.