

Impact Statement

Sarah Diekevers, Grade 12

Women in Space, 2025

Acrylic, colored pencil, graphite, marker on paper, 18 x 24 inches

MOC - Floyd Valley High School, Orange City, IA

Teacher: Roberta Pottebaum

Unsung Hero: Jerrie Cobb

Geraldyn “Jerrie” Cobb was an aviator who worked at NASA in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1959, she set the world record for the longest non-stop flight and set an altitude record in 1960. She was the first female astronaut trainee in the United States and underwent NASA’s Mercury 13 space program in 1960. During her training, she did the same psychological tests as the male astronauts and excelled at them. She learned how to control a spacecraft while in unstable situations. However, she was denied the chance to attend training in Florida because all astronauts had to have military flying experience. At that point, women still weren’t allowed to be jet pilots in the military. Jerrie even testified before Congress in 1962 to try and achieve her dream of going to space. In 1963, NASA decided not to send female astronauts into space, and Jerrie was never given the chance to go. That same year, she published her autobiography, *Woman Into Space*, and earned numerous pilot awards throughout her career in aviation. In 1981, she was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for her work at NASA and as a pilot. She also received the Amelia Earhart Award and Medal. She spent time flying humanitarian aid missions, including in the Amazon Rainforest. In 1999, Eileen Collins became the first woman to pilot a shuttle in space, and Jerrie was on hand to help run the mission. She died in 2019 at the age of 88.

Despite never making it to outer space, Jerrie Cobb paved a path for women like Eileen Collins to become prominent astronauts. Her record-setting flying skills, passion for space travel, and humanitarian work led her to advocate for women, making her a powerful, yet underrated hero of the women’s equality movement. She battled sexist ideas of the time, the claims that women were not psychologically or physically strong enough to handle space travel. Regardless of societal limitations, she chased her dreams and encountered heartwarming success and purpose despite laws that tried to work against her.

My artwork includes a colored pencil portrait of Jerrie Cobb in a pink coat. A sky gradient going from light blue to outer space fills the background, showing the skies, both where she flew her planes and where she wanted to be: space. I included the United States Capitol building along the bottom. This is significant because Jerrie testified at Congress trying to change laws regarding women in space. Launching from the dome of the Capitol is the Mercury 13 rocket. A pink ribbon is wrapped around the

rocket, which represents the women behind the space travel efforts for the mission. This also ties back to Jerrie's pink coat because of her influence on the space program.

When I started creating this piece, I didn't know what direction I wanted to go with the art. I started with Jerrie's portrait but couldn't decide on a background. But as I learned more about her story, I knew I wanted to do something with her speech in Congress, so I drew the Capitol building. To implement more meaning into the piece, I added the Mercury 13 rocket and finally the pink ribbon to tie it all together. Before, I hadn't realized the difficulty women had trying to become astronauts. The fact that discriminatory laws existed so recently, just a few years before my parents were born, changed my perspective. As a kid, I knew I could be an astronaut if I wanted to, and didn't realize what a journey women had to go through to reach this point. I'm grateful for the women like Jerrie who made an impact on the country to make things better for women and girls like me. The piece will be displayed at my high school's art show, along with a short summary of what Jerrie Cobb did so that others can learn about her impact.