

Impact Statement

Julianna Notom, Grade 11

Mrs. Luper, 2025

Acrylic on canvas board, 14 x 18 inches

Me Hopewell Valley Central High School, Hopewell, NJ

Unsung Hero: Clara Luper

Clara Luper is a significant figure in the Oklahoma Civil Rights Era, yet she is not properly appreciated for it. She was courageous, dedicated, articulate, passionate, and kind. She significantly impacted the Oklahoma region of the African American justice movement from the 1950s through the 60s.

She dedicated her time to performing sit-ins with her family that eventually led to overturning segregationist policies. She advocated for African American education, led her local chapter of the NAACP, and participated in the 1963 March on Washington. Although sit-ins appeared to be relatively tame, participating in one required an immense amount of bravery. Often, at these nonviolent protests, opponents of the protesters would verbally and physically harass them. In addition to civil disobedience, Luper taught for forty years, further impacting the education of countless students. Without her contributions, segregation might still be in effect in Oklahoma, the NAACP wouldn't have had such a great leader, and thousands of students wouldn't have had her as a teacher. Often overshadowed by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, and W.E.B. Dubois, her efforts should be celebrated and recognized.

When planning my painting, I wanted to portray all of Clara Luper's accomplishments within the composition. I chose to illustrate a portrait of her, the sit-in she organized at Katz Drug Store, an African American person with a mortarboard, and the 1963 March on Washington. I sketched several thumbnails of these components to get a composition I liked. Then, I moved on to the canvas board. I laid down a wash of neon orange acrylic paint to establish a ground, and once that dried, I used a white charcoal pencil to sketch my drawing onto the canvas. After that, I started blocking in the large shapes of the composition before honing in on the details. For my color choices, since my reference photos were all grayscale, I chose to use bright, funky colors when painting from reference. I'm proud of my use of neon orange, pale yellow, turquoise, and dark blue to jazz up my interpretation of the reference photos. Once I was happy with those main components, I filled in the blank spaces of the composition with scenes of crowds marching and students graduating. All in all, I wanted to portray the sheer quantity of lives she improved with the crowds of people dotting the composition.

Now that I've dedicated my time to leading this artwork to fruition, I am inspired to explore the 1960s Civil Rights Movement further, as well as social justice in our

contemporary era. Now, it is more urgent than ever to engage in solidarity with others who are threatened by the state. Also, with this process, I learned about how much impact a single person can have on a community. Although there is great strength in numbers, one person can inspire others to fight for justice. I hope that when people view my painting, they are inspired by curiosity to further research Clara Luper's life and legacy. I want my viewers to feel overwhelmed by how many lives she has reached and the changes to society her actions led to.