

Impact Statement

Jannate Raesah, Grade 11

***Equality Through Aviation and Aerospace*, 2025**

Acrylic on canvas, 16 x 12 inches

West Anchorage High School, Anchorage, AK

Unsung Hero: Jerrie Cobb

Through my fascination with human flight, I learned about many pioneers, engineers, aviators, and astronauts who made flight possible from the sky and beyond. I was especially drawn to the women who carved their way through the male-dominated aviation and aeronautical industry to make an impact. When I delved deeper into the stories of these pioneers, I noticed how they challenged the norms of society to pursue their dreams, regardless of race, gender, or circumstance. Countless people have big dreams like these, but in reality, very few have given it their all to achieve them. An extraordinary example of someone who embodied this level of determination was Geralyn “Jerrie” Cobb. I felt inspired by Jerrie Cobb’s achievements and courage to do what she does, because as a girl who wanted to fulfill my dreams of being an aviation engineer, I was shy about making my moves. I wanted to learn from Cobb, so when I heard her story, I knew she was the hero I wanted to represent through my art.

What fascinated me about Cobb was how strong her passions are and the extent of her dedication to show the world that she was meant to be an aviator and an astronaut. Cobb knew from a young age that she wanted to be a pilot. Many people, including her parents, criticized that women can’t be aviators, since it was unusual for girls in the 1950s-60s to pursue aviation. However, this didn’t stop her, as Cobb earned both her private and commercial pilot’s license, became a flight and ground instructor to teach men to fly, and delivered military aircraft to bases around the world. Cobb faced a lot of discrimination from men for her pursuit, but she carried a lot of courage and will to overcome such obstacles to make these feats happen. When she was elected into a private women’s space training program called Mercury 13, Cobb knew she was meant to go to space, saying, “I have this feeling that life is a spiritual adventure, and I want to make mine in the sky.” Through the intense physical examinations, she demonstrated her outstanding abilities to prove that she was extremely qualified to be an astronaut. Unfortunately, at the time, the United States Congress still didn’t allow women to be astronauts, even if Cobb proved it was possible. Her achievements, however, had opened a gateway for more men and women alike to strengthen the fight for equal opportunity. Even though her dreams were halted, Cobb continued her aviation career and used her passion for flight to contribute to humanitarian missions by plane. I deeply admired the commitment that Cobb had to fulfill her dreams, and the effort she put in to make it happen. I wanted to honor the legacy of Jerrie Cobb and represent the values she possessed through my piece to express to the world the power of true passion.

When creating my piece, I considered representing Cobb's story through symbols of the fight for feminism. I intended to show a theme of hope and ambition in the entirety of my vision. I represented Cobb in her astronaut flight training attire as she is looking up at the moon to portray her ambition and hope to achieve her dreams. I wanted to interpret Cobb as a rising leader of the movement she ignited: the fight to send women to space. The moon is lit in a dawning sky because the transition from dark to light symbolizes the anticipation of a bright future for women in STEM. I included some members of Mercury 13 holding symbols of space exploration because they represent the growing movement Cobb influenced through her determination to enforce equality in STEM fields. The Mercury 13 space shuttle was influential in putting into my piece because it represents Cobb's exemplary effort to prove women's worth to be astronauts. I highlighted Cobb's signature BN-2A Islander airplane because her immense dedication and achievements in aviation shouldn't be overlooked but instead connected to the theme of Cobb's ambition and the fight for women to be recognized in these male-dominated fields. Both the shuttle and airplane represent Cobb's challenging the social norms to achieve what she wanted to be, bringing forth the feminist movement.

As I researched Jerrie Cobb, I found an obstacle in approaching how to create my piece. Almost all the primary sources of Cobb's and related topics were in black and white because of the time they were taken. I overcame this limitation by using what the few colored sources portrayed but also taking advantage of overall color tones to exemplify my theme. Creating the piece in warmer tones and hues contributed to the themes' ambition and hope to represent Cobb's traits. I also took the time to address a weakness in my painting skills, which is the difficulty of creating smooth gradients with acrylic. I incorporated techniques of using a sponge to graduate the background and used dry brush blending to paint the plane. While painting, I improved my skills in incorporating color and value according to my vision, which helped me develop as a painter and an artistic composer.

Learning and representing Jerrie Cobb's story made me realize how influential passion is and inspired me to work towards overcoming challenges to make my dreams a reality. Cobb's actions and fight for equality in STEM fields encouraged me to influence my community and proved to me that I have the power to lead more people, regardless of race, sex, or background, to fulfill their passions just as Cobb has done. I plan to share my art publicly and educate my school about Jerrie Cobb's story, especially in the programs I'm involved in. As an Air Force JROTC cadet and a member of FTC Robotics, I will show these values through not only my ARTEFFECT piece but also my actions and leadership. I aspire to uphold Jerrie Cobb's legacy and inspire the people around me to work hard and aim high for their goals.

References:

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