

## Impact Statement

Gabrielle Thomson, Grade 10

***Daring Defiance: Determination Despite All Odds*, 2025**

Graphite on paper, 22 5/8 x 29 inches

Rockdale County High School, Conyers, GA

Unsung Hero: Clara Luper

I find it endlessly frustrating to see the lack of teaching about inspirational Black women in learning standards throughout public schools. In my experiences, it seems that the only time individuals like me are represented in curriculum conveniently occurs during either Black History Month or Women's History Month. This is why when I was looking through the individuals on the Unsung Heroes list, Clara Luper immediately stuck out to me. After researching her immensely enlightening experiences, I became determined to portray her impact through my art.

Luper's character quickly inspired me as I learned more about her experiences and acts of activism. Despite her many arrests, with a total of 26, she never became discouraged and continued doing what she believed was right. The courage and determination reflected in her actions serves as an example to us to stand up for what we believe is right, for her bravery as an essential leader in the civil rights movement has made a forever lasting positive impact on the society.

On May 3rd of 1923, being an African American woman, Clara Luper was born into a society evidently pitted against her demographic. However, regardless of the many firmly established barriers created to limit her, she worked never-endingly to overcome them. In 1951, she earned her master's degree from the University of Oklahoma and became the first African American to be accepted into its history graduate program. From there, she became the advisor for Oklahoma's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Youth Council, where she later conducted the various non-violent protests, including the Oklahoma City sit-in. Her advocacy and demonstrations helped end various aspects of segregation in Oklahoma, and although she passed away in 2011, her character survives through her lasting impact on society.

After delving into Luper's vibrant and fulfilling life, I began to seek images that depicted her in a manner that demonstrated her character and impact on society. Although most photographs I scanned through exhibited her disposition well, one photo in particular immediately attracted my attention and became most compelling for me to draw. The reference photo I used for this project depicts Luper, amongst many other men, defiantly facing a police officer, with a seemingly daring nature. While the other men are either looking away from the officer, or watching from the sidelines, Luper is shown front and center staring down the officer with visibly no intimidation. Additionally, I particularly

noted how the men surrounding her are either wearing sunglasses or no eyewear at all, while she wears her glasses. I interpreted such as Luper's acknowledgment of the issue of discrimination amidst bystanders remaining consciously passive, despite her solitude and the subduing threat of authority. I incorporated the Oklahoman to further emphasize her impact as an activist, particularly in her home state.

A further artistic liberty I incorporated into my project was the use of broken brick wall rather than the simplistic wall originally shown in my reference photo. My purpose for doing so was to not only demonstrate Luper's breaking through boundaries but to also reference graphic style design in terms of elements portrayed in superhero comics to further emphasize her heroism. I chose to use plain white paper and graphite pencils in the development of my work purely to represent the color barriers at the time. The contrast between the skin color of Luper alongside her African American counterparts and the officer and the other Caucasian individuals shows a clear distinction and an almost ying-yang like effect. I chose to demonstrate this concept to show that while the black and white in the symbol are represented as opposing principles, they also symbolize a complementary type of contrast and a sense of harmony. Similarly, at the time it was taken, Caucasian and African Americans were pitted against each other as opposing groups. However, despite this, Luper worked to break down the barrier between these groups to live amongst each other in unity.

The opportunity to learn about Clara Luper has altogether broadened my understanding of the power we have to make meaningful changes in the world despite adversary and the importance of persistent hard work. Her life and efforts have inspired me to incorporate the same quality of determination into my future experiences and to stand against presented injustice and prejudice. My goal for this piece is to influence others to adopt the same qualities that made Luper the exemplary advocate she was and to never forget the power of one voice.

#### References:

- The Black Wall Street Times. "Clara Luper, the Mother of Oklahoma's Civil Rights Struggle." *The Black Wall Street Times*, 17 Sept. 2022, [theblackwallstreettimes.com/2018/07/16/clara-luper-the-mother-of-oklahomas-civil-rights-struggle/](https://theblackwallstreettimes.com/2018/07/16/clara-luper-the-mother-of-oklahomas-civil-rights-struggle/).
- "Clara's Story - Clara Luper Legacy Committee." *Clara Luper Legacy*, [www.claraluperlegacy.com/clara-s-story](http://www.claraluperlegacy.com/clara-s-story).
- "Oklahoma Historical Society." *Oklahoma Historical Society* | OHS, [www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=LU005](http://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=LU005).