

Impact Statement

Sera Todd, Grade 12

Broken But Bridged Forward, 2025

Watercolor, pen on paper, 12 x 18 inches

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Unsung Hero: Horace King

King was born into slavery on September 8th, 1807 in South Carolina. King was a bright kid and by the time he was eighteen he was a skilled carpenter and excelled in mechanics. His owner John Godwin treated Horace well and equal to his employees, although Horace didn't get paid. Nevertheless, Horace fought his way up in Godwin's business till he eventually ran many of Godwin's construction sites. Not long after this King was designing, overseeing, and building his own bridges, still under Godwin. Godwin praised King for his innovative structures and advanced technological ideas. Godwin eventually passed and in 1895 King took over the business. Claiming it is his own. He went on to build bridges all over the south; Alabama where he built over the Chattahoochee River, in Georgia, and Northern Mississippi. During WWII King shifted from bridges to buildings but even then, he was still highly praised. After WWII His business skyrocketed, ranging from bridges to mills to public buildings. His life went nowhere but up from there, he prospered and had even more success as well as a family free from slavery, and wealth to provide and pass down. I believe Horace King's story is exceptionally inspiring because in this time slavery was only growing and most free African Americans had to fight their way to freedom with force. Horace King was unlike any other man, he used his brain and scaled society through friendship and hard work. Horace King's history should be taught in school for the sole reason of resolution through peace. Slavery is a dark, long period of time in American history. Just as Rosa Parks' peaceful protest on the bus is famous in history books, so should Horace King and his excellence.

Horace King was loved by the people in Chesterfield District of South Carolina. Throughout his younger years and after his success with construction and monumental bridge builds. He was held very highly in the eyes of many people and that view even grew outside of South Carolina. When Horace was too old to continue construction, he passed down the business to his eldest son. Soon after his "retirement" he was elected into the house of representatives as a Republican for Alabama. People trusted his judgement and influence to help aid in ending slavery. Although he didn't get very much legislation passed the principle of his hard work, getting him so far in society and then far into politics spoke even louder than imagined. He may not have changed history through politics, but he did change the view of what were possible slaves, just as him. He definitely changed the way bridges were built, tested, and lasted for decades.

My vision for this piece was to portray Horace King and his Memorial bridge in light of the rule of thirds. This allowed me to create the bridge as a focal point as well as King. I chose to replicate the Memorial bridge in place of King's signature covered bridges, to show his impact. But also, to prove his capabilities in a more futuristic way. King was a proficient bridge builder for his time and broke through the chains of growing up in slavery. I chose to put King in a suit to portray his path up in society. Visibly he looks fit as a businessman, but small details in the suit like the abundance of wrinkles and the discoloration relate back to his struggle as a black man. Horace is positioned atop a rock standing proudly to give the artwork a sense of possession by Horace King himself. This also shows the value in King's achievements for all African Americans. I chose watercolor because I adore the ability of the medium to evolve. I was unsure what hue, value, and saturation of the colors would look appealing in the end. Ultimately, I decided I wanted to add a high saturated look to the greenery and the water. In order to contrast the abundance of brown and the array of black detailing. I use ink and pens on my watercolor to add intense detail and high level of contrast again. To me using black pen not only outlines but adds detail and extra depth. I always wait to add the pen detailing till every part of the watercolor is done. This lets me take in my art as an average watercolor and allows me to really appreciate my work after I add the dark details. The sunlight pouring through the diaphanous underneath of the bridge lightens the bottom third of the piece, leaving the piece bright and bold but not overpowering.

My piece and what I've learned through Horace King has changed my perspective. It's shifted, and now aims towards the bigger dreams I've had, but looked at as impossible. The issue with big dreams is we are taught we must take big risks or big steps or be great, in order to achieve them. Horace King is a great reminder that big dreams and greatness are capable and in everyone's reach. We do not have to fight or do big things to make those dreams come true. If you have a dream and it will fulfill you, does it matter how fast you reach it? If Horace king didn't become free in the first year of trying was, he supposed to just say "oh well I better give up" No he was resilient and took average steps to greatness. Horace King is the reminder I needed to not give up on the biggest of my dreams, and that if I take the small steps even when it's hard I'll still achieve my dreams.

References:

Agee, Heather. "Horace King (1807-1885)." *BlackPast.Org*, 1 Dec. 2008, www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/king-horace-1807-1885.