



Impact Statement

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***American Photographer and Photojournalist Overview*, 2026**

Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 16 inches

Redmond High School, Redmond, WA

Unsung Hero: Margaret Bourke-White

My introduction to Margaret Bourke-White wasn't through her name, but through her images. In my AP World history class, we were analyzing WWII photographs in the LIFE Magazine Archives, and one image in particular stood out to me: a group of prisoners pressed behind barbed wire at the liberation of a concentration camp during World War II. Their expressions were haunting, unfiltered, and impossible to ignore. This photograph changed my understanding of concentration camps from something I had only read about in my history textbooks into something I could actually see and feel. I remember thinking at that time, who was behind these images? After all, if it wasn't for the photographer themselves, I wouldn't have been able to see beyond the words in a textbook and truly grasp the reality of what happened. That question led me to Margaret Bourke-White, and I came to see that the way we understand history is deeply influenced by those who have the courage to document it.

Margaret Bourke-White was an American photojournalist who broke barriers as one of the first female war correspondents and the first woman accredited to fly on combat missions during World War II. She captured critical global moments, including the liberation of Buchenwald concentration camp, the Soviet response to the German invasion, and the partition of India, where she famously photographed Gandhi hours before his assassination. Her photographs were often taken under dangerous conditions: flying in military aircraft, entering active war zones, and witnessing the events of human suffering up close. On the surface, it may seem like these wartime photos are just there to capture the moment. However, people often overlook the fact that by making the courageous decision to stand in those dangerous wartime environments to capture them, Bourke-White helped bring the harsh reality of war to people who were too far removed to fully understand it, ultimately exposing the cruelty and human cost. Just like what I experienced, Bourke-White's photos allowed many people in America to gain a clearer understanding of what war actually meant—it no longer was just a word that described simple combat with other nations but something defined by real human suffering, fear, and loss. I wanted to connect my experience of encountering her work with the reality of what she courageously endured to create it. The scene in my artwork draws directly from the types of moments she photographed: aerial combat, destruction, and the human impact of war. This piece is intended not only to celebrate her impactful photographs, but most importantly to recognize Bourke-White's perspective and the bravery behind her work as a wartime photographer.

When creating this piece, I focused on accurately representing both Bourke-White's presence and the environments she worked in. To do that, I studied her photographs from the liberation of Buchenwald, which helped me understand how she framed large groups of people and captured expressions of exhaustion and suffering—this directly influenced the repeated faces in the newspaper collage. I also looked at her LIFE Magazine photo spreads to guide the layout and style of the background elements. To depict her accurately, I studied reference images of Margaret Bourke-White, paying attention to the practical clothing she wore in the field and the type of camera she carried. The warplanes were inspired by her time flying on U.S. bombing missions during World War II, and the smoke and fire reflect the destruction she documented across Europe. Inside the camera lens, I painted silhouettes of soldiers to show how the moments she captured became the way people understood war. I used a sepia-toned color palette based on her archival photographs, with stronger contrast in the fire to make the scene feel more immediate.

Creating this piece changed the way I think about both art and storytelling. It made me realize how easily people, including myself, consume images without questioning where they come from or the conditions in which they were created. Margaret Bourke-White's work reminded me that every photograph is the result of deliberate decisions—where to stand, what to include, and when to capture the moment. As an artist, I've come to understand that those choices are just as important as the final image itself. In a world where media is constantly consumed at a surface level, taking the time to recognize the person behind the work—their perspective, context, and intention—is what allows us to fully understand and appreciate it.

I plan to share this artwork in exhibitions and within my school community as a way to spark discussion about the role of media in shaping historical memory. By highlighting Bourke-White, I hope to bring attention to individuals whose contributions are foundational yet under recognized. Additionally, sharing this work online allows me to reach a broader audience, encouraging many others to reflect on how history is visually constructed. Ultimately, my painting is not only a tribute to Bourke-White's courage and influence, but also a reminder to people that the act of sharing witnesses—of choosing to see and to show—has the power to shape how the world understands itself.