



Impact Statement

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Captured Truth, 2026

Charcoal on paper, 14 x 11 inches

Eagan High School, Eagan, MN

Unsung Hero: Margaret Bourke-White

My Unsung Hero is Margaret Bourke-White. I chose her because she used her camera not simply to take pictures, but to expose truth, document history, and give people around the world a chance to witness events they might never otherwise see. She was one of the first female war correspondents, the first foreign photographer allowed into the Soviet Union, and the photographer of the very first cover of *Life* magazine. At a time when women were rarely given equal opportunities, she entered dangerous and male-dominated spaces with courage and determination. What I admire most about her is her fearlessness, persistence, and commitment to showing reality, even when it was uncomfortable or heartbreaking.

Margaret Bourke-White had an enormous impact on journalism and history because her photographs became evidence of the human experience during some of the twentieth century's most important moments. She believed photography could educate people and inspire change. In my project, I focused on four of her most famous photographs that are included in my drawing. The first is her portrait of Mahatma Gandhi sitting beside his spinning wheel in India. This image became one of the most recognizable photographs of Gandhi because it captured both his peaceful strength and his connection to self-reliance and simplicity. This photograph showed the dignity of a leader who changed history through nonviolence.

The second image I included is her documentation of the Buchenwald concentration camp after World War II. Bourke-White was one of the first photographers to record the horrors of Nazi concentration camps. Her photographs showed starving prisoners, survivors, and the cruelty of what had happened. These images were difficult for the world to see, but they were necessary. They helped provide undeniable proof of the Holocaust and reminded people of the dangers of hatred and dictatorship.

The third image is "There's No Way Like the American Way." This photograph shows African Americans waiting in line beneath a billboard of a smiling white family celebrating the "American Dream." The contrast between the advertisement and the reality of segregation is powerful. It exposed racial injustice in the United States and challenged the idea that prosperity and freedom were equally available to everyone. The fourth image is the first cover of *Life* magazine, featuring the Fort Peck Dam in Montana. This was historically important because it launched a magazine that would shape visual journalism for decades. The image itself shows strength, progress, and modern industry. It also symbolized her groundbreaking role as a woman succeeding in a major professional field.

To create my artwork, I wanted to show Margaret Bourke-White at the center because she was the observer and storyteller behind all of these photos. I drew her portrait large in the foreground so viewers would immediately recognize that these famous scenes were captured through her eyes. Behind her, I placed the four photographs like windows into history. Each frame represents a different kind of truth: political leadership, human suffering, racial injustice, and industrial progress. I also included barbed wire crossing the composition. This symbolizes conflict, oppression, and the dangerous environments Bourke-White entered to tell the truth. It especially connects to her concentration camp photographs, but it also represents the barriers she broke as a female journalist. In the lower corner, I added the words "*Jedem das Seine*" (to each his own), the phrase displayed at the Buchenwald concentration camp, to remind viewers of the cruelty she helped expose. I used graphite pencil because black and white connects directly to historic photography. I carefully blended shadows in her face to make her expression look calm but determined. I used darker values in the background images and barbed wire to create a serious mood and guide the viewer's attention.

Margaret Bourke-White's story influences me by reminding me that one person can make a difference by telling the truth. She did not ignore injustice or fear danger. Instead, she used her talents to inform others and preserve history. Her life encourages me to be brave, curious, and willing to speak out when something is wrong. I hope to share this artwork with classmates, teachers, family members, and my community so more people can learn about Margaret Bourke-White. Many people know the photographs she took, but fewer know her name or the challenges she overcame. By creating this piece, I want others to recognize her legacy and understand that courage can come through creativity as well as action.

References:

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Margaret-Bourke-White>

<https://www.life.com/photographer/margaret-bourke-white>