



Impact Statement

Kalynn Huang, Grade 12

Origin of the Stroke, 2026

Ceramic sculpture, 4 x 4.5 x 5 inches

Castro Valley High School, Castro Valley, CA

Unsung Hero: Jackie Ormes

Jackie Ormes is considered the first African American cartoonist. Though she isn't the first African American to have fought against the stereotyped and racist conceptions of the Black community in the 1900s, Jackie Ormes uses her pen as a sword to draw out the unprejudiced version of Black Americans she wishes to share with the world. As an artist, I find that art is easily undervalued, even more so the farther you stray from the fine arts. Comics are one of the things I'd consider stray far for exactly that. Often, they are seen as meaningless but entertaining drivel, so I find it inspiring how Ormes uses it as a medium to provide commentary on the issues that she cares about and succeeds at doing so.

Ormes started off her career as a proofreader and started writing her own, freelance articles on issues that mattered to her, some of which included human rights, police beats, and court cases. She eventually started her cartoonist career drawing comics for the Pittsburgh Courier and also drew comics for The Chicago Defender a few years later. Jackie Ormes' two most notable comics were Torchy Brown and Patty-Jo. Her first comic was titled Torchy Brown in Dixie to Harlem, and it featured a young and fashionable Black performer named Torchy Brown. She was headstrong and independent, which at the time broke the stereotype for black women, who were only depicted as overly emotional, drug addicts, and lustful. Her second notable comic, Patty-Jo 'n' Ginger centered around an eleven-year-old African American girl and her elder sister. She later became so popular that Ormes was asked to design a doll of her. The Patty-Jo doll was the first doll depicting a black child without racist stereotypes. She often talked about current issues she felt strongly about in the comic, some of which included war, bigotry, and racism. Her criticisms of the government and their actions eventually resulted in the F.B.I. collecting 287 pages of information on her.

For this piece of work, I wanted it to resemble a bottle of ink that might have been found on Ormes' desk as she worked, whether it be on her comics or her articles, which could be considered one in the same. I limited my color palette to black, gray, and white as a call back to how her comic strips had to be limited to the same colors for newspaper prints. After completing the build of the bottle in clay, I glazed it and used sgraffito, which is etching off some of the glaze layer to reveal the clay beneath it, to replicate how her art mainly utilizes lines and blocks of colors. On one side of the label I tried to replicate Ormes in a style that you might see on a comic strip. On the other side of the label, I depicted Ormes' pen to represent her career as a

journalist and cartoonist. On the side of the labels, I hatched and also tried to recreate a screen tone to replicate how artists had to depict gradients or shading in comics.

I will share this work in an exhibition that my class is hosting along with this essay in hopes that her story will reach more people. I hope that learning about her legacy can make people stop and think about how the art and media we consume day to day can inspire and change the beliefs of many. Additionally, I also wish that many others, like I, will come to see how Jackie Ormes was an artist that made her mark on the world through the strokes of her pen.

References:

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