

Impact Statement

Gabrielle Thompson, Grade 11

No Job Too Big: The "Smallest Freedom Fighter", 2026

Acrylic, colored pencil, marker on paper, 30 x 40 inches

Rockdale County High School, Conyers, GA

Unsung Hero: Sheyann Webb

As a young person strongly passionate about advocating social injustices, exploring the life of a particularly impactful advocate was simply an implied must in creating this project. During a political period where there are so many issues affecting us, and simply not enough individuals to address them, it's disheartening to see leaders and policy makers disregarding a generation most capable of making positive changes by means providing a new voice and perspective. So, as I was researching potential subjects to depict in my work, when I came across the nickname "Smallest Freedom Fighter," I was immediately intrigued. Civil rights activist Sheyann Webb is courageous, passionately fighting against prejudice during a period where it was particularly unsafe to do so, not simply because of her race and her gender— but also since she was 8 years old.

Born February 17, 1956, Sheyann Webb grew up in Selma, Alabama amongst its civil rights uproar. As a child, she would sneak from home to go to civil rights meetings, where she would eventually meet Martin Luther King Jr. Growing up in a space around civil rights activists empowered Webb to be similarly vocal about the movement. She began to understand the importance of African American voting rights and urged those capable to use their influence for progressive interests. Despite her parents' protests, Webb continued hers. On March 7, 1965, Webb snuck out of her home once more, this time to partake in a freedom march. The march, now known as Bloody Sunday, would stick with Webb as she continued to fight for African American rights. Despite the fear struck by the event, Sheyann continued to participate in marches, including the March from Selma to Washington, demonstrating her bravery despite the hardships he faced. Her dedication is more so shown through her service beyond her adolescence, as she goes on to extend her activism through multiple published books and youth development programs.

In portraying Webb, I wanted to represent her journey as an activist throughout the years. In imagining the composition, I decided that the most profound way of marking her growth from a child to an adult would be by connecting it with one of the most defining moments of her life, that being the march from Selma to Washington. In incorporating the flowers from Martin Luther King Jr's Lei as symbolism of connection, respect and love, the piece is provided an element of altogether unity. I also wanted to emphasize Webb standing alone as an adult, rather than besides King, to represent a distinct break towards her own individuality and civil rights identity. In depicting the protesters as black and white rather than in color like the primary subjects of the

piece, my goal was to contrast historical censorship through photographers depicting the civil as earlier than it was with the reality of the time.

This project gave me the opportunity to explore a truly influential individual and her impact. In learning about Webb, her story gave me insight into my own journey to navigating advocating social injustices for the current world around me. Her intrepidity encouraged me to act on issues that challenge my ethics and integrity, despite social stigma. Sheyann Webb's impact has shown me, and countless other individuals, that staying true to one's moral compass can have a true, meaningful, and lasting impact.