



Impact Statement

Mia Li, Grade 11

The Rivers of Life, 2026

Charcoal, colored pencil, marker on paper, 14 x 19 inches

Great Neck North High School, Great Neck, NY

Unsung Hero: Dr. Charles Drew

Dr. Charles Drew stands as one of the most admirable figures in modern medical history, not only for his scientific brilliance but also for the courage he showed in the face of injustice and racial discrimination. Born in 1904, Drew was raised in a segregated America and grew to become a renowned surgeon and researcher. Educated at institutions such as McGill University and later serving as a faculty member at Howard University, Drew established undeniable credibility in the scientific community. His meticulous research on blood plasma preservation revolutionized emergency medicine, particularly during World War II, where his innovations enabled the large-scale storage and transportation of life-saving plasma across the Atlantic.

Even with such accomplishments, Dr. Drew faced immense racial discrimination. When confronted with the U.S. military's policy of racially segregating blood donations, Drew leveraged his authority as a leading expert to challenge it. After his protests were repeatedly ignored, he resigned from his position as the director of the American Red Cross Blood Bank program. Though his efforts were in vain, as the racial prejudices of America were far too deep, he demonstrated that true credibility is not merely earned through accolades, but through the courage to uphold integrity when it is most at risk. Instead of working a job that went against his morals, he chose to quit; supporting a discriminating force was never a choice. Drew dedicated his life to improving a system meant to preserve life at its most fragile moments, yet he had to confront a country that refused to value his work. The contrast is drastic: the same hands that developed techniques to save countless wounded soldiers belonged to a man who still had to argue for basic fairness. Dr. Drew's work is a testament to how someone can embrace both morals and innovation. His contributions altered the course of history, but his character ultimately elevated it.

In my artistic vision, I felt the need to present his entire story to the audience, not only that he was a revolutionary researcher. I wanted to express his hardship and lack of recognition along with his discovery and impact. With these goals in mind, I developed a layout that shows the progression of his development of blood plasma transfusion. Starting from the top right corner, I chose to depict Dr. Drew gently holding a blood vial, showcasing the discovery stage. He does not grasp it in victory, as that would suggest the vial was the solution—and it wasn't a solution for racism. The scene is then transformed into a blood vessel highway, as bloodmobiles race across the canvas. Motion lines were used to depict the desperation and need for the research done by Dr. Drew. The bloodmobiles then seem to reach a group of wounded soldiers on the

other side, symbolizing the safe transport of blood from America and other Western European countries to the front lines of WWII. The color choices used for the piece are immensely important. I decided to depict Dr. Charles Drew in charcoal and the rest of the art in vivid color to fully bring out the idea of Dr. Drew “working in the shadows” to develop bloodmobiles and blood banks. While he faced racial discrimination surrounding his work, hence the lack of color, he still brought life to those on the front lines, hence the appearance of color. The use and manipulation of color is one of the final strategies of an artist to truly bring out their ideas; as such, the colors of this piece were well thought out and planned to go hand in hand with the composition.

Through the research and development of this final piece, I’ve learned an immense amount about the accomplishments of Dr. Charles Drew and his character along with them. He is an inspiration that the younger generation should learn about and aspire to be. His strength in the face of racism will always be something incredible to me, as I also come from a minority background. Dr. Charles Drew is a man of science and integrity, a man of innovation and morality; he is someone who embraces all, and in doing so, saves many people on the brink of death.