



Impact Statement

Karen Zhou, Grade 8

Double-edged Blade of Art in Activism, 2026

Colored pencil and alcohol markers on paper, 14 x 19 inches

Jericho Middle School, Jericho, NY

Unsung Hero: Corky Lee

Activism has always been prevalent in the USA. With every injustice comes a form of protest, which is why I chose to portray Corky Lee as my Unsung Hero. Born on September 5th, 1947, in Queens, NY, Lee comes from Chinese descent, with immigrant parents. I decided to choose Lee because I saw myself in him, as I lived in Queens for the majority of my elementary years. Although I have the privilege of being born inside the United States, I come from Chinese immigrant parents who are incredibly hardworking. Lee increased visibility and showed representation for Asian Americans as an activist and a photographer. He informed people of their rights, and it was incredibly inspiring seeing how he photographed protests and rallies, using a borrowed camera, displaying endurance and activism even through financial hardship.

Lee came from a very modest family. His mother, Jung Ping Hung, and his father, Lee Yin Chuck, emigrated to the United States in 1925, welcoming Lee into the world in 1947. When growing up, Lee was molded by his surroundings of prejudice, civil rights movements, and stress related to the Cold War. He and his three brothers were proven to be appropriate to be drafted for the Vietnam War. Lee was allowed as a VISTA volunteer to delay serving military time and help other struggling families. Through learning and educating myself on Lee's way of advocacy, I was drawn to how he used a camera and himself to seize the grueling truth, racing against the bias and intolerance. When flames ignite, Lee shows up with his intent and his camera, soon labeled as the "Undisputed, Unofficial, Asian-American photographer laureate". As an Unsung Hero, Lee gave Asian American people acknowledgement, shed light on the anti-Asian sentiment and violence, and helped American society view Asians as human.

When starting this project, I knew that I wanted to use alcohol markers and colored pencils on paper, as I am proficient in these areas. But choosing an adequate composition was truly puzzling. I wanted to convey Lee's legacy and impact, so I drew Lee with his camera in front of his past work and photos, showing how he dedicated parts of his life to taking pictures showcasing real problems. Behind Lee, there is a banner with the words "END ALL OPPRESSION" in both English and Chinese. This expresses his ambition for equal rights and justice. In the background, behind himself, his camera, the banner, and the photos, there is an American flag and a Chinese flag, formed into a star by the foreground subjects. This all indicates how everyone can be an American and how no one should be separated by flag, culture, or color. In the art piece, only Lee and the star are in color, which shows the impact he made and how he worked for equality.

Making this artwork has definitely changed my perspective. It has inspired me to stand up more, and it has impacted the way I go through life. I will strive to be more thoughtful and courageous. I am very grateful for researching the unsung hero, Corky Lee, and I hope my work will inspire others in the future.