Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes
ARTEFFECT

Impact Statement

Fadima Sidibe, Grade 12
Literary Liaison, 2026
Digital Art
Arts High School, Newark, New Jersey, USA
Unsung Hero: Lutie Stearns

The person I chose as my Unsung Hero is Lutie Sterns, Librarian, Women's Suffrage activist, and community reformist. Born on September 13, 1866, in St. Cloud, Wisconsin, Sterns grew up with the ethos that books let alone education could change lives. This is telling through her career of being a teacher in which she soon switched to being a librarian. This stuck out to me as a person who has grown up being supported by libraries, not only through books but the other things it offers like free breakfast & lunches, Job opportunities, and third space in a world where such privileges are declining. Knowing the future of libraries, she contributed to made me moved to choose Sterns.

There was a world where books were not free and accessible to all specifically women and children. Sterns not advocated for this through speeches despite her speech impediment but put her words into action by going to the very communities impacted by lack of learning tools Between 1895 and 1914 she initiated a traveling library system, meant to bring books to towns, farm schools, and even prisons. Helping deliver almost 1,400 books across the state of Wisconsin. Each collection of boxes contained a box of 25 to 30 books. Ultimately Stearn’s work impacted thousands of people, allowing them the choice to read. I wanted to exemplify such remarkable impact through my art piece by not only making Lucie Sterns the focal point of my piece but leaving small motifs of what she has done. I have executed this through making my piece collage-esque adding a portrait of her face. Furthermore, I included a graphic of the Milwaukee public library not only to show the work she has done, but to literally show the continuation of it into the future as well.

Towards the right you will see a letter written in cursive which is of her actual writing from a speech address she did during the 1894 Lake Placid American Library Association meeting to further exemplify her impact. Towards the top of the composition there are book graphics I placed as well as excerpts from sources giving physical evidence of the traveling library boxes that were utilized in getting books to thousands of people. Stylistically I added flower decals to convey the old-timey aesthetic nature of the piece, finishing off with some tweaks to bring warmth as well. In sharing this art piece with others, I hope not only to highlight the legacy Lutie Sterns brought to education for all but to highlight where we wouldn’t be without her as well. So, visit your local library and support.

References:

Alexandra Krainyukhova (Pexels), Anton Ivanov (Pexels)

Wisconsin Library Association, Dunn County Historical Society (https://heritage.wisconsinlibraries.org/timeline/traveling-libraries/)

Milwaukee Public Library (visitmilwaukee.org)