

4/18/16

Reed Holwegner and  
Members of the Capitol Preservation Committee

After viewing the designs of the other finalists and re-reading the Committee's assignment to artists, we are concerned that the designs previously given the most votes by the Committee (#2 and #6) portray the least history, and do not seem to fulfill what the committee asked the artists to do. The Committee's challenge to the artists "to capture the landmark significance" of the Brown case reads:

"The mural will memorialize the landmark significance of Oliver Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka et al. by capturing its antecedents, elements and effects on Kansas, the United States, and the international community. It will be historically accurate."

We believe Wildcat's design best represents the assignment given to the artists to give a "historically accurate," artistic rendering of the Brown case - its historic "antecedents, elements and effects." Wildcat relies on historic photographs to ensure the "historic accuracy" required by the Committee assignment. We would like for the committee to consider our discussion of Design #1 (Wildcat's) and our critiques that express our concerns about Designs #2 and #6.

### **Design #1**

#### ***Antecedents***

Wildcat portrays the historical "*antecedents*" that preceded the five cases of the Brown case, not merely the legal cases that were antecedents to the Brown case in Kansas. Attorney Houston felt that litigation should do more than settle a case; it could shape society. Justice Thurgood Marshall said that "the real battle was for equality." These lawyers were the grandsons of slaves; they worked all their lives for equality in society. **Houston's and Marshall's vision informs Wildcat's design with this broader historic perspective.**

Wildcat present portraits and scenes in this narrative of the Spirit of freedom, equality and Justice moving slowing through history - from slavery, into the Abolitionist movement, the Underground Railroad and the Emancipation from slavery (1865). The Plessy v. Ferguson decision was a roadblock (1896) in this advance of freedom; it declared that "Separate is Equal" and unleashed the long and oppressive Jim Crow era. One woman from Kansas marches among others near Plessy in Wildcat's design, protesting the injustice of lynching. No further social advancement toward equality happened until the 1954 Brown case proclaimed that "Separate is not Equal." (1954).

#### ***Elements***

**Wildcat's design includes "elements" from three of the five cases that the Brown case included. To show the inequality of school facilities, Wildcat shows the real school buildings from the South Carolina case.** Black children of all ages stand in line to attend a one room wooden school house. In the distance the school for White students is a large three story red brick school.

In the center of his design, Wildcat shows Kansas' nationally significant history in one column of crusaders from 1854-1954. Each group of people stands on the shoulders of others, -- from the 1854 Kansas Abolitionists, to the students of the Virginia and Kansas cases, to the lawyers and Justices of Brown case in 1954, with the Spirit of Justice over all, streaming her light in this breakthrough moment of history. Even the central section of Wildcat's design alone shows the asked for "antecedents, elements and effects" of the Brown case (even without his historical narrative antecedents that 'frame' it).

Capitol Preservation Committee

Date: 11-29-16

Attachment: 3

## **Effects**

What happened after the Brown decision? What were its effects? Wildcat includes these (national and international) in his design; we feel designs #2 and #6 do not. The effects of the Brown case were and still are far reaching. Houston and Marshall's vision again informs Wildcat's design. Marshall said: "The real battle was for equality." Houston hoped the case would shape society, not merely integrate schools. Wildcat shows the dream of the Brown decision: in his design Black and White students, smiling and happy together, run out of a now integrated big red brick school house. And he shows some realities. Often integration did not happen easily or immediately; the dream often met resistance. Wildcat portrays scenes of Birmingham and Selma as these forces met. The Brown decision reversed hundreds of years of history and the "effects" of the case spread this Spirit of Justice, Freedom and Equality beyond the school house to the rest of society, as its lawyers had envisioned.

One of the Little Rock students tries to attend the White school, but is surrounded by angry White protestors who hate the idea of integration; sadly all are "historically accurate." To enforce the Brown decision, Eisenhower sent Federal troops to Arkansas to reduce tensions and enforce integration during this tense Cold War era because of his concern for how Russia viewed the U.S. scenes of conflict during integration. Wildcat shows the Brown decision's international effects.

The whole world watched this great American experiment and struggle to fulfill the Brown decision's promise. Wildcat's design portrays a panel of leaders, suggesting the national and international effects of the Brown decision, and the methods our society took to make it a reality: Ike, MLK, LBJ, Mandela and Malala. Ten years after the Brown decision, integration was not yet a reality. LBJ passed and signed the 1965 Civil Rights Act, Martin Luther King by his side. This Act was required to enforce the Brown decision; it denied federal funds to schools that did not integrate. Influenced by King's path of non-violent civil disobedience to enforce the Brown decision, Mandela led South Africa out of apartheid. Like some students represented in the Brown cases, Malala defied violent hatred in her pursuit for equality and education. Out of the struggle to fulfill the promise of the Brown decision, the "effects on the United States and the international community" were clear; society was changed. The Brown decision gave America the chance to fulfill the truths that we hold as self-evident, that "all men are created equal." Wildcat's design shows these "effects;" designs #2 and #6 do not.

## **Design #2**

Design #2 shows no identifiable people, no lawyers or Supreme Court justices, none of the people or other "elements" of the Brown case, none of the Kansas, national or international "effects" of the case. There are *no "antecedents, elements, and effects"* of the case shown, and none of the "historic accuracy" the Committee asked for.

The central scene shows a larger than life White teacher reading to a class of mostly Black students. This does not capture what the Brown decision called for, and does not "memorialize the landmark significance" of the Brown case. The central scene of Design #2, with the large White teacher seems to suggest that White teachers in classrooms are the solution that the Brown decision mandated. This is certainly not "historically accurate;" and it seems an insult to the qualified, dedicated Black teachers who earlier taught in segregated Topeka schools. This central classroom scene of Design #2 does not visualize the equality in the schools or the changed society that the lawyers worked their whole lives to bring about. This giant White teacher surely cannot be the lasting image that the Capitol mural will give to the public as they come to learn about this Brown decision.

## **Design #6**

Design #6 does not show the "antecedents" of the Brown decision or the "historically accurate" "effects on Kansas, the United States and the international community." The inequality and injustices of the

Jim Crow South cannot be captured merely by painting a crow or a caricature of Jim Crow, as Design #6 does. Although the lawyers and Justice Marshall are portrayed in this design, Houston's spirit is embodied in a tornado, which is usually a destructive force. The Brown children and their parents are depicted. The 'baby doll test' was important, but in design #6 they appear more like oversized babies who look strange sitting on top of a tiny Monroe school building.

Design #6 shows no "effects" of the Brown case for "Kansas, the United States or the international community." What happened after Brown? Design #6 shows only a **segregated scene** of the group of Black students walking **separated from the White students at their desks** by a blond White student who watches them. And towering over all others in Design #6, a Black girl sings or reads. She will become 8 feet tall if she is chosen for the Kansas Capitol. What does this mean in this design? Is this the artist's sense of the most important ramification and effect of the Brown decision?

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We read with concern a quote by someone from the Brown Foundation who spoke to the Committee (in the Committee minutes of November 2015):

*"The conferee concluded that what the Committee is attempting to do is difficult, because the story is so layered and there are so many elements which could be conveyed in one artistic rendering. **The final mural depiction may come down to something simplistic, instead of failing to capture everything that Brown encompasses.**"*

We hope the Committee selects and judges the designs based on the broad vision that they originally asked artists to paint for the Capitol. **We hope that we all agree that Kansas history and the Capitol deserve more than a mural depiction that comes down to "something simplistic."** We are concerned that Designs #2 and #6 do not do justice to the depth of the Brown case, the history that precedes it and its decision and effects.

In other minutes, Cheryl Brown told the Committee that her hope was that the mural would paint Kansas history, not merely the history of the Brown decision; she mentioned John Brown and the Kansas history from 1854-1954. Wildcat's design shows Kansas nationally significant history and many of the "firsts" Kansas has to be proud of.

As one of the four finalists, we send this letter to the committee to consider. Artists were told that finalists would have a chance to talk with the committee, and that the committee would ask for public input, at some time. We feel that the best time for input to the Committee would be before their considerations and vote at their next meeting.

We hope that the Committee will consider the points of concern in our critiques, and consider again the thorough historical narrative that Wildcat's design portrays. We hope the choice of a design does not "come down to something simplistic" but that the committee selects the design that does its best to capture "everything that Brown encompasses."

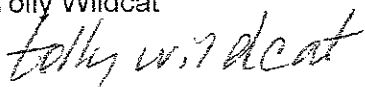
Wildcat's painting will provide the Capitol, Kansas and the nation a visual record that can educate generations. We hope for a kiosk to stand beside Wildcat's historic painting, to provide historical information. From these historically accurate narrative scenes, viewers at the Capitol can learn the context and need for the Brown decision and better appreciate the far reaching significance of this Kansas catalyst for human rights and a changed society that the Brown decision represents.

Sincerely,



Wayne Wildcat, Artist

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