

‘Thrilled’: Brown v. Board mural-ist shares his story at the State-house

PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 28, 2025 BY BRYAN RICHARDSON



Michael Young, left, speaks with Linda Jeffrey in front of his Brown v. Board mural Feb. 28, 2025, during a live interview for the Kansas Oral History Project. (Credit: Bryan Richardson)

The Brown v. Board mural on the Statehouse’s third floor was the hangout spot for lunch hour Friday as Kansas City artist Michael Young spoke about his life and the creative process.

Retired attorney Linda Jeffrey conducted the Kansas Oral History Project’s first live interview with Young, whose mural has graced the wall outside the Old Supreme Court Room since 2018.

Afterward, Young told State Affairs it felt “really good” that his words will be preserved along with his art for future generations.

“I didn’t really expect this, but I’m glad it happened,” he said. “Just thrilled by it actually.”

Around 100 people — a bipartisan gathering including lawmakers, Statehouse employees and other adults and children — sat and stood in front of the mural painted in honor of the landmark 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision that ruled racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

Young hoped the takeaway from his interview would be the journey that led him to the point of creating the mural.

“Even though you don’t start off being a good artist, it can evolve in time,” he said. “If it happened to me, it can happen to others.”

The leadup to the hourlong interview included words from various elected officials.

Sen. Jeff Klemp, R-Lansing, referred to the gathering as “a testament to the unity that drives us towards building a brighter future.”

“Art’s beauty lies not only in the outcomes, but in the very fact that it requires human creativity and imagination to come to life and to stir our emotions,” he said.

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Topeka’s place in history as the epicenter of the Brown v. Board of Education case is an example of what makes Kansas “the heart of the Heartland,” said Senate President Ty Masterson, R-Andover.

“Kansas has had a long history of fighting for freedom, and I couldn’t be more proud of that,” he said.

Gov. Laura Kelly said Young’s interview would keep his legacy alive for generations.

“Today’s interview with Michael Young will serve as a lasting resource for K-12 teachers, helping them bring history to life in their classrooms,” she said.

Joan Wagon, the project’s treasurer, said the video and transcript from Young’s interview would be posted in the coming days on the Kansas Oral History Project website. She said it would take longer to prepare the smaller clips that would be sent to teachers.

Dave Heinemann, the videographer, said the project’s plans include more live interviews.

“Why not? Don’t limit yourself,” he said.

Have questions? Contact Bryan Richardson at brichardson@stateaffairs.com or on X @RichInNews.