

## Overview of alternative solutions and best practices for treatment of the Fletcher Memorial Murals, "The Ideals of Education", by Carl Hoeckner.

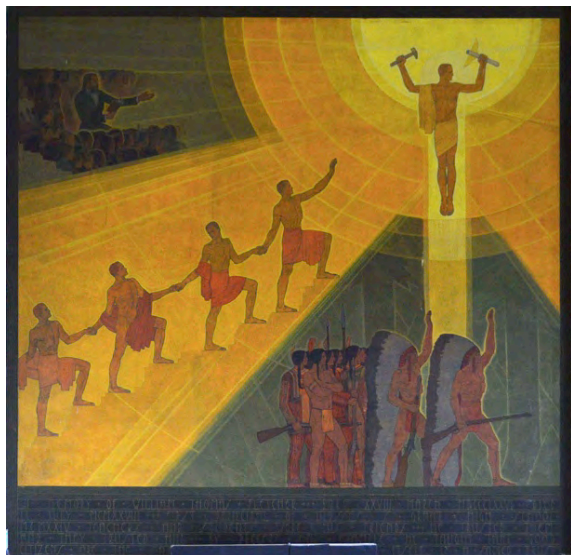
### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes the alternative treatment options to assist Portland Public Schools Board in their assessment of possible solutions to the case of the Fletcher Memorial Murals at Grant High School. Precedent resources and ethical considerations are discussed. Students of the GHS Indigenous People's Student Union (IPSU) have called on PPS to destroy or remove murals, and their request has been the focus of recent media coverage in the Portland Tribune (Feb. 12, 2020) and the OPB Think Out Loud segment (Feb. 27, 2020). Decision making and guidance on these subjects has traditionally been the realm of art curators in the sphere of museum presentation, but conservators are increasingly being called upon to provide guidance in the arena of public art management and stewardship.

The objection has been made to sections of composition in the lower center of each mural that depict Native peoples and pioneers approaching each other with their arms raised in acknowledgement. Each group holds rifles, but they are not drawn. The GHS IPSU objects to the symbolic scene as an inaccurate portrayal of history. Additional objection has been made to the portrayal of Native figures wearing war bonnets, which is considered a racial stereotype and an element of cultural appropriation.

It is a very complicated and controversial issue in any context, but especially since the murals are in a school where children are involved.

Furthermore, the significant cultural heritage collection of PPS comprises a number of paintings that would potentially be affected by any decisions that do not sufficiently address the historic preservation perspective, in both the philosophical and ethical aspects of the stewardship of publicly owned artwork.



*The Ideals of Education*, 1932. Oil on canvas, marouflaged to plaster. 20' x 25' each



## 2.0 DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 THE ARTIST

Carl Hoeckner (b. 1883 Munich, Germany–d. 1978 Hayward, CA)

In 1883, Carl Hoeckner was born into a family line of engravers, etchers and lithographers in Munich, Germany. Hoeckner studied at art academies in Hamburg, Cologne, Munich, Berlin and Brussels. He arrived in the United States in 1910 and worked in Marshall Field's Department store's advertising department throughout WWI. During this time, Hoeckner pursued fine art and became deeply political. His paintings express his feelings at the horrors of WWI and the rise of Fascism. His work is best described as a synthesis between Social-Realism and Expressionism. He aligned himself with the radical and avant-garde artists of the day, founding a group called the Cor Ardens (Ardent Hearts). In 1929, he became an instructor at the Art Institute of Chicago where he taught industrial design. He also served as the Director of the Graphics Division of the Illinois Art Project of the WPA. He exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Society of Independent Artists, NY, the Pennsylvania Academy, Philadelphia, PA and the National Academy of Design, NY. He died in Hayward, CA in 1972. (bio by Richard Norton Gallery, Chicago).

### 2.2 THE MURALS

The two large format murals are located on the proscenium walls of the Auditorium flanking the stage. The murals are known as the Fletcher Memorial Murals, in commemoration of William Thomas Fletcher, the first principal of Grant High School, and were dedicated September 24, 1932.

The Auditorium was a secondary addition to the original building, dating to 1925-1927, and was decorated with Egyptian Revival architectural details in the column capitals both outside the entrance (now gone) and within the Auditorium. The Auditorium is one of the few extant historic spaces in Grant following the modernization renovation that was completed in 2019. It remains unknown how Hoeckner received the commission for the Fletcher Memorial murals at Grant High School.

Hoeckner painted the two large scenes in oil on canvas, probably in Chicago or at another offsite location, and they were subsequently adhered to the plaster wall (marouflage). Once in place, open gaps between sections of the murals were patched and retouched. Each mural is composed of four sections of canvas, each shaped to follow the ductus of the composition, and measure approximately 20' x 25'.

To the trained eye, the artworks have features that immediately signal artistic quality, the hand of an academically trained artist, and they stand out for their inherent sophistication, craft and visual beauty. The murals were designed with a grand, dynamic composition that was conceived for the Auditorium space itself, part of the period of American Expressionism that was inspired by Diego Rivera and others. The use of large format murals to promote social ideals was a trend that swept the cultural landscape in the USA during the 1930s, creating a unique body of American art inspired by Mexican muralists, subject of a major retrospective exhibition currently at the Whitney Museum of American Art titled *Vida Americana: Mexican Muralists Remake American Art, 1925–1945* (February 17-May 17, 2020).



Hoeckner's design reveals a cultivated use of mythology, allegory and symbolism. Firmly embedded in the spirit of the Progressive Era (1890-1930), the murals thematically champion education: the youths ascend steps towards enlightenment. On the left mural, male youths ascend towards a figure from Greek mythology, Prometheus (symbol of knowledge used for the greater good) haloed in light, bearing a hammer and a staff; on the right female youths ascend towards another figure from Greek mythology, Athena, haloed in light, bearing a lamp (symbol of wisdom). The youths' robes recall ancient costume, suggesting a timeless scene of evolution of youth towards knowledge during their formative years. Their faces are rendered often in profile that echoes the ancient Egyptian style of painting that had become an inspiration for the Art Deco vernacular, set in motion by the 1922 discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb.

The murals were conceived and executed with a skilled use of line, geometry, color theory, draftsmanship and painterly application. The visually dominant compositional elements are the diagonal yellow rays and radial sources of light, that contrast with the darker grey elements that tend to recede. Enclosed within those golden rays are the figures of youths, painted with contours of blue and purple, that vibrate next to adjacent zones of yellow/orange through the optical effects of simultaneous contrast (use of color opposites). Much like the appreciation of quality literature and music, a primary source of fine art has the capacity to delight and visually inform students of both art and art appreciation. The sophistication of the mural is an example of intellectual creativity and complexity as well as technical mastery.

In the extreme upper corners, figures of modern American history emerge above fields of figures: on the left, Ulysses S. Grant, and on the right Susan B. Anthony. The overall theme is strongly influenced by the Progressive movement's commitment to education and egalitarianism. In the context of the mural's creation in 1932, U.S. Grant commonly represented the triumph of the Anti-slavery Union over the Confederacy, and a vision for citizenship for Native Americans, legislation for which had recently passed Congress in 1924. Susan B. Anthony represented the recently victorious Suffragist movement.

At the center bottom of the composition are two vignettes with groups of figures: on the left, a group of Natives, carrying rifles, spears and bows, and on the right, a group of pioneers, men and women carrying rifles, and children. The groups, each armed, acknowledge each other without their weapons drawn.

The murals are framed by marouflaged strips of canvas, painted black with thin stripes painted gold. Along the bottom edges, thicker bands of black marouflaged canvas are present bearing epitaphs, also painted in gold on a black background, that read as follows:

Left:

IN MEMORY OF WILLIAM THOMAS FLETCHER • BORN XXVII MARCH MDCCCXVI • DIED  
IX JULY MCMXXVIII • FIRST PRINCIPAL OF ULYSSES S GRANT HIGH SCHOOL  
MCMXXIV • TEACHERS AND STUDENTS WERE HIS FRIENDS • HE TRUSTED THEM  
AND THEY TRUSTED HIM • BY PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE HE TAUGHT THAT GOOD  
CITIZENS ARE THE NATIONS STRENGTH AND THAT LIFE ITSELF IS A SACRED TRUST

Right:

THE MEMORIAL OF VIRTUE IS IMMORTAL BECAUSE IT IS KNOWN WITH GOD AND WITH



MEN • WHEN IT IS PRESENT MEN TAKE EXAMPLE OF IT AND WHEN IT IS GONE THEY DESIRE IT: IT WEARETH A CROWN AND TRIUMPETH FOREVER HAVING GOTTEN THE VICTORY STRIVING FOR UNDEFILED REWARDS • HONOURABLE AGE IS NOT THAT WHICH STANDETH IN LENGTH OF TIME NOR THAT IS EASURED BY NUMBER OF YEARS

### **2.3 OBJECTIONS RAISED TO THE SUBJECT MATTER OF THE MURALS**

Students of the GHS IPSU raised objections relative to two vignettes that depict Native peoples and pioneers approaching each other with their arms raised in acknowledgement, with rifles down. This is considered an inaccurate representation of the history of western pioneer expansion, a distortion of the hostile and conflictual interaction between settlers and indigenous peoples.

Additionally, the portrayal of some of the Native figures is considered a stereotype due to the use of the cultural appropriation of the sacred element of war bonnets of the Plains Indians. The war bonnet is widely used to identify Native figures in western art and popular culture.

The figure of Ulysses S. Grant in the upper left corner is also considered a controversial figure due to his role in the war with the Lakota people and their displacement in the 1870s.

The dominant visual elements of the composition, the youths ascending toward enlightenment, do not raise objections.

### 3.0 ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT OPTIONS.

The issue of evolving societal perspectives and growing sensitivity to stereotypes and race identity in the arts is a problem facing the public globally. The recent and ongoing case of the murals by Victor Arnautoff, *Life of George Washington*, at Washington High School in San Francisco, is perhaps the best known and closest case that has been covered extensively in the media. Testimony from opposing sides of the argument were passionately made for over a year. The current position of the SFPS is to leave the murals in place. The NAACP supports leaving the murals, a group of Native tribal elders has stepped forward to support saving them, and a letter of from over 400 academics and researchers was written in support of the murals.

<https://www.sfexaminer.com/news/native-american-leaders-pressure-school-district-over-plans-to-cover-mural/>  
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Black-leaders-in-SF-support-saving-controversial-14284972.php>  
<https://nonsite.org/editorial/open-letter-on-the-proposed-destruction-of-a-mural-cycle>

Former SF Supervisor Matt Gonzalez was recently quoted:

"There has been an evolution of standards and how we think about things," Gonzalez said. "I do not believe that art is so pure that you can never take it down. I think that monuments to public figures should be revisited and make sure they're meaningful from our contemporary time and place."

He said that he was shocked, however, when he heard that some students were reportedly traumatized by the murals.

"But I wanted to be open to that. And I want to be sensitive that that could in fact be happening. But I also want to then try to step back from it and say 'what would be the rule that we adopt if we simply go with that one response to the murals.' I mean, are we going to impose a rule that says whenever a group of us are traumatized by something that we're going to tear that down?"

<https://sfrichmondreview.com/2020/02/28/13434/>



Scene from V. Arnautoff, *Life of George Washington*, 1939, GWHS, San Francisco. (NYT)





The Foundation of the American Institute for the Conservation states that their mission is “to save cultural heritage for future generations, protecting it from decay and destruction,” opposes the intentional destruction of cultural heritage sites.

The options provided below cover a spectrum of “tolerance” for the image, each with its pros and cons. Options 1-6 are with precedent solutions. Options 2-6 are presented in order of the least invasive to the most.

Option 7 represents an innovative custom treatment, that HCG supports as a compromise solution.

1. **Equity and Inclusion**
2. **Interpretation**
3. **Mitigation**
4. **Obscuration**
5. **Removal, Storage, Relocation**
6. **Destruction**
7. **Partial Obscuration**

### **3.1 EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

A fundamental first step to any solution would be to include Tribal representatives in the decision-making process on any interpretive text to discuss the core issues, and their perspectives on the potential use of the murals for educational purposes.

The Grant High School Indigenous People’s Student Union has provided their input. Further input should be sought from representatives of regional entities such as the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz.

**3.1.1 EXAMPLE.** HCG President Nina Olsson sought input regarding images of the 1940 mural by Erich Lamade, titled *Pageant of Oregon History*, from the Native American Youth Association (2007), and I.M.N.D.N., the nonprofit art organization headed by Native curator Tod Clark (2016) prior to initiating the recovery of this overpainted mural. Todd Clark provided a letter of support of the project, and will act as liaison to the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, and will be the major contributor to the interpretive text.

## 3.2 INTERPRETATION

One of the most widely implemented approaches is the contextual interpretation of subject matter, adopted in the museum field. Interpretation is considered a fundamental phase in the education of all art appreciation, to provide a lens of understanding that makes the artwork understandable and accessible. The intent is to provide historical context for the artist and work, as well as discussion of the specific core issues, in this case with the scope of providing insights into the inaccuracies of identity stereotypes, cultural appropriation, and inaccurate portrayal of history.

This approach is supported by innumerable art historians, historians and Native American studies scholars.

### 3.2.1 EXAMPLE: Diorama at the American Museum of Natural History, Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/20/arts/design/natural-history-museum-diorama.html> (May 2019)

This WPA-era diorama presented historically inaccurate information regarding early contact between Native peoples and early New World colonies. Interpretive text was mounted on the diorama's glass barrier, allowing visitors to simultaneously view the diorama and read information about inaccuracies.





### 3.2.2 EXAMPLE: Native Portraiture: Power and Perception | Tacoma Art Museum

A current exhibition at the Tacoma Art Museum specifically addresses the portrayal of Native peoples in works painted by European and American artists and contemporary indigenous artists. Two examples of interpretive text are included below.

"This exhibition seeks to continue TAM's work with tribal members to educate our visitors about the symbolism of the artworks and the historical contexts in which they were created."

<https://www.tacomaartmuseum.org/exhibit/native-portraiture/>

The poster has a light beige background. On the left, the title 'NATIVE PORTRAITURE: POWER AND PERCEPTION' is written in a large, thin, black, sans-serif font, stacked vertically. To the right of the title, there are three paragraphs of text in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom left, there is a small block of text in an even smaller font.

**NATIVE PORTRAITURE: POWER AND PERCEPTION**

When you look at an artwork do you believe it is an accurate and truthful image? Artists make choices about how to depict their subject matter, so it is important to question artworks in their original contexts for inaccuracies as well as historical biases. In particular, portraits of Native Americans are often misleading and perpetuate stereotypes. *Native Portraiture: Power and Perception* includes work by Native and non-Native artists to unpack the history of how Indigenous people and cultures are represented in art.

Contemporary Native American artists push the boundaries of portraiture to change perspectives about the people portrayed. This exhibition highlights work by Native artists who address issues of identity, resistance, and reclamation through their powerful portraits. These artists ask us to reconsider images of Indigenous people because certain recurring motifs have led to centuries of cultural misunderstandings.

Non-Native artists often depict Indigenous subjects in order to share the history and cultures of the western region. However, artists occasionally take creative liberties by altering the scene or adding historical props. Some artists disregard how Native people live their lives today and instead misleadingly show Indigenous people as relics of the past. The myth of the "vanishing Indian" and the stereotype of the "noble savage," among many other harmful depictions, are widespread in artworks by non-Native artists. Many contemporary Native American artists are able to counter these problematic narratives and offer empowering ways to resist fictionalized and romanticized depictions. We invite you to think critically about the representations of Native people, who made them, and their resulting impact.

*Native Portraiture: Power and Perception* was organized by Tacoma Art Museum.  
This exhibition was made possible through the generous support of the Haub Family Endowment.





## **Stereotypes, Appropriation, and Romanticization: Harmful Depictions of Native Americans**

Many Native American artists are creating important work revolving around complex issues of identity. By challenging stereotypes, cultural appropriation, and the romanticization of Indigenous people, Native artists are resisting and reclaiming their identities through their artwork.

Damaging stereotypes of Native Americans—from chief and princess motifs to warlike and primitive themes—are widespread in art. Portraits that convey these stereotypes can incorrectly shape perspectives about Indigenous people.

Similarly, appropriation leads to misunderstandings between cultural groups and contributes to challenging issues that Native people face in their daily lives. When applied to art, cultural appropriation is a term used to describe when an artist takes or borrows a visual reference from another person or culture, often without the consent of the owner. Appropriation is multifaceted, but a persistent example is the misuse of the Plains Indian war bonnet. Often shown with disregard for its cultural value, appropriating this important cultural object can be disrespectful to its sacred meaning. Only select groups of Native people actually create and wear war bonnets, but this ubiquitous symbol is incorrectly applied to Indigenous people across the country.

The romanticization of Native people is especially seen in works of art that are nostalgic about the past. These images lead to misperceptions about Native people. When artists focus on the realities of Native life, and not imagined or preconceived ideas, then more accurate representations are shared through art.

### 3.2.3 EXAMPLE: Ivan Bartlett, 1938 (WPA), Ada County Courthouse Murals, University of Idaho Law and Justice Learning Center, Boise, ID.



The murals were produced under the California New Deal Project, and later installed in the Ada County Courthouse in Boise, ID. The entire mural cycle spans three floors and 1000s of square feet. Numerous interpretive panels are present in the building describing the funding mechanism for the mural cycle within the New Deal projects, their authorship and subject matter.

From 2008 to 2014, the building served as the provisional legislative offices and congressional chambers during restoration of the Idaho State Capitol. By request from the Idaho Historical Society and Native tribes, the murals were left uncovered and were visually accessible to a great number of people that circulated within the building. Interpretation was considered an imperative. Regional

tribes (Shoshone, Brannock, Paiute) supported the interpretation of the murals for educational purposes. Tribes and the Idaho Historical Society co-authored text for the two interpretive panels that discuss the subject matter of two controversial panels that pejoratively portray "vigilante justice", and relations between early settlers and indigenous peoples.

<https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/northwest/idaho/history/article41563737.html#storylink=cpy>

## THE MURALS AND NATIVE PEOPLES


The two murals on this wall, depicting the hanging of an Indian man, have been the subject of controversy for years. A district judge once deemed them offensive and had them covered. When this facility became the Capitol Annex in 2007 to temporarily house the Idaho Legislature during the State Capitol's renovation, the Idaho Legislature, the Idaho State Historical Society, and representatives from Idaho's tribes all agreed that the murals should be preserved and interpreted.

Whether the murals depict an actual event is not known. But the scenes are consistent with the clash of cultures experienced in the Boise Valley, and the artwork tells us much about the times during which artists created the images.


To the California-based artists of the Great Depression era who completed this work, the murals represented their concept of how the West was won. During the 1930s, that difficult time in our nation's history, government-sponsored painters sought to portray strength and triumph, a nation overcoming adversity to conquer and settle a vast land. Surely we could also tame economic hardship.

From a Native American perspective, however, these murals illustrate the harsh reality of westward expansion and the systematic and oftentimes brutal removal of a people from their ancestral homeland. Shoshoni, Bannock, and Paiute peoples have lived in the Boise Valley for thousands of years. They thrived in this region of rich fisheries, abundant game, and good grass.

Today they continue to practice ancestral traditions passed down by elders, and visit sacred sites in and around Boise. While their vibrant culture still exists – for them, too, is a story of conquering obstacles – little visible trace of it remains in this valley. Their removal in the 1860s came after years of Indian people defending their valley against white incursion. Seen from this perspective, these murals symbolize how an ascendant culture forcefully removed the original inhabitants.



Shoshoni Indians on horseback hunt, 1878



Indian encampment along the Boise River

## A CLASH OF CULTURES

From the earliest contact between Indians and whites, occasional and sometimes violent confrontations occurred. As early as 1814 Indians attacked fur trappers trespassing on their land near present-day Parma, killing nine.


At first, though, local Indian people were generally cooperative with early travelers on the Oregon Trail. As more emigrant trains entered the region and depleted their food sources, Indians became increasingly alarmed.

Largely for self preservation, they carried out sporadic attacks on emigrant trains in southern Idaho. In 1854 near present-day Middleton, Indians killed eighteen members of the Alexander Ward party, some very brutally. In 1855, Army forces shot one Indian trying to escape during the ensuing trial, and the next day hung three more. Eventually, Army troops killed nine additional Indians in retaliation.


The rush to Boise gold camps increased violence, resulting in many deaths on both sides. "We long to see this vile race exterminated," wrote the editor of the *Idaho Statesman*. "Every man who kills an Indian is a public benefactor." Spurred on by such sentiments, as well as complaints of attacks on emigrant trains, mail lines, and mining camps, Colonel Patrick Connor of California tracked Shoshoni and Bannocks to their winter camp near Franklin in southeastern Idaho. His soldiers then executed an early morning attack on the quiet winter camp and massacred hundreds of men, women, and children in perhaps the bloodiest slaughter of Indians in a single encounter in the American West.

With the establishment of Fort Boise in 1863, Army troops methodically tracked down Indians in southern Idaho and eastern Oregon in what has been called the Snake War. By 1868, surviving Boise Valley Shoshoni, Bannock, and Paiute people assembled in camps along the Boise River, living in relative peace but under deplorable conditions. Growing pressure from white settlers caused the U.S. to establish the Fort Hall Indian Reservation in eastern Idaho. In 1889, the military removed Boise Valley Indian people to Fort Hall.

Today, the proud heritage of the Shoshoni, Bannock, and Paiute people still thrives at the Fort Hall and Duck Valley Indian Reservations. Their story is an important part of the mosaic of Idaho's past, present – and future.



A wagon train bear hunt



Fort Hall Indian Reservation, 1886





### **3.2.4 Fletcher Memorial Murals option**

Interpretive panels designed and mounted in the Auditorium should discuss:

- 1) Origins of the murals
- 2) William Fletcher
- 3) Progressive Era
- 4) Carl Hoeckner
- 5) Influence of Mexican Muralists on American Art
- 6) Ulysses S. Grant
- 7) Susan B. Anthony
- 8) Native and Pioneer relations during the western expansion
- 9) Racial stereotyping and cultural appropriation in portrayal of Native peoples
- 10) Treatment





### 3.4 OBSCURATION

Covering the murals visually obscures the offensive images. The obscuration of the images may be considered an ethical solution if conducted in a reversible manner. However, the obscuration of the image may be interpreted as censorship or erasure of a historic document, and would also impact the historic appearance of the Grand High School Auditorium. In practice this is what is currently implemented through use of the auditorium's retractable screens that are kept in the down position.

#### 3.4.1 EXAMPLE: Victor Arnautoff, *Life of George Washington*, WPA, George Washington High School, San Francisco.

SF School Board decisions to irreversibly impact the murals, either through destruction or overpaint were appealed with testimony from the African American and Native communities, as well as historians and scholars. A reversible solution to cover the murals is currently the Board's decision, although it has not yet been implemented. The SF Board has yet to determine a final decision.

**3.4.2 Fletcher Memorial Murals option.** If this solution is desired, a hanging system similar to the one pictured below could be implemented with minimal, reversible impact to the mural surface.









### 3.5 REMOVAL, STORAGE, RELOCATION

Removal of artwork has been implemented when the objects were at risk of vandalism or were under threat of destruction. Removal from a location of prominence symbolically diminishes their power, and preserves the object without destruction. However, removal also separates historic objects from their original context, and deprives the public of access.

**3.5.1 EXAMPLE: Grutas Park, Vilnius, Lithuania.** Symbols of Soviet system were removed from architecture and public spaces following liberation in 1990.



**3.5.2 EXAMPLE: Louis Bunce, Clifford Gleason, Alice in Wonderland, Arabian Nights' Entertainment, 1938.** Originally in Bush Elementary School, Salem, removed in 2005 in the context of demolition of the school, conserved and reinstalled in North Salem High School since 2006.



### **3.5.3 EXAMPLE: Removal of confederate monuments in Baltimore, Aug. 15-16, 2017.**

Following the mass shooting in Charleston, S.C. in 2015, and the violent clashes in Charlottesville, VA in August, 2017, many bronze sculptures were removed, principally to prevent further civic strife.

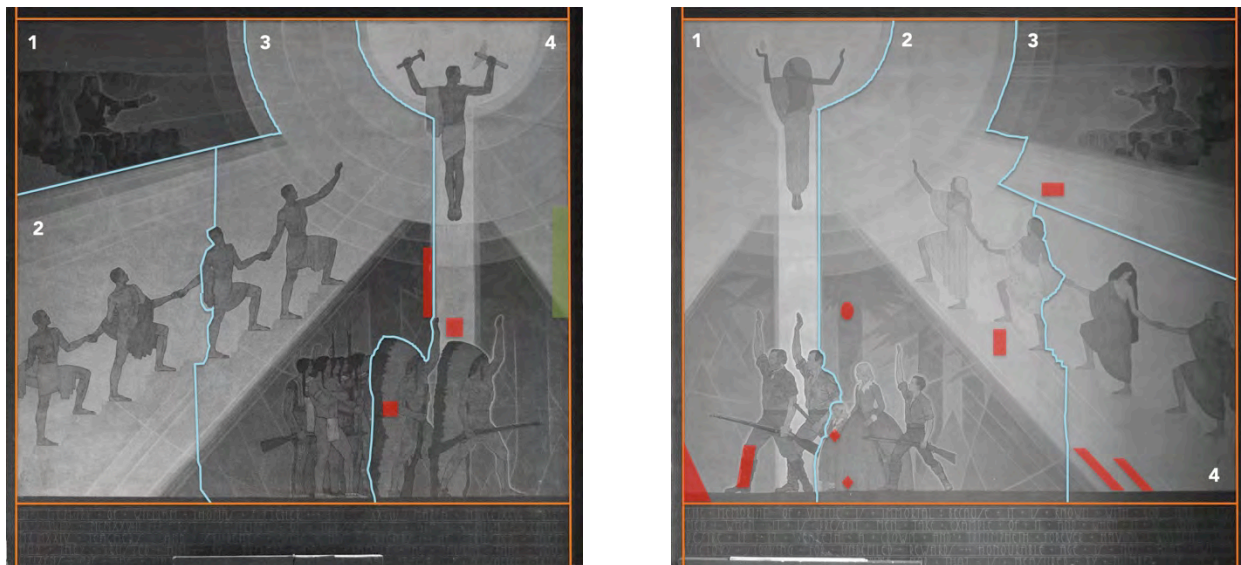
White supremacist groups had co-opted the monuments for their cause, and targeted them as locations for protests, resulting in sites where conflict with counter protesters would be likely.

Numerous articles have been published describing the pros and cons of removing the monuments from historical perspectives, ethical, moral etc.. In most cases, removal was hastily performed by municipalities as a safety concern to avoid further violence.





### 3.5.4 Fletcher Memorial Murals option



Safe removal of the Fletcher murals would involve formulation of protective measures and practices including the adhesion of a tissue facing to the entire paint surface, the labor intensive physical delamination of the marouflaged canvas from the plaster, custom scaffolding with hanging mechanisms to suspend wide diameter tubes on which the detached canvas is rolled onto as it becomes detached, and finally the manufacture of crates for transport and storage. The diagram above shows the outlines of the canvas pieces, which are irregular in shape.

Implementation of the removal approach must consider the impact on the Auditorium as a contributing historic feature. The Auditorium is the most important and one of the few historic spaces remaining at Grant High School after the renovation.

Any decision to remove the murals should also consider the realistic expectations for relocation of the paintings. Due to their size, relocation would be difficult. The mere size of the murals also translates to elevated costs of structural treatment and reinstallation. In essence the removal would effectively be relegating the works to oblivion, a form of cultural destruction.

### 3.6 DESTRUCTION OR OTHER IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE TO THE ART

The willful damage or destruction of cultural heritage occurs principally in areas of war conflict, due to religious iconoclasm, or as a result of vandalism. UNESCO published a declaration concerning the intentional destruction of cultural heritage in 2003.

A more recent brief issued in February 2020 articulates the position of the American Institute for the Conservation on the willful and intentional destruction of cultural heritage, citing articles III and VIII of the AIC code of ethics:

“While recognizing the right of society to make appropriate and respectful use of cultural property, the conservation professional shall serve as an advocate for the preservation of cultural property.

The conservation professional shall recognize a responsibility for preventive conservation by endeavoring to limit damage or deterioration to cultural property...”

#### 3.6.1 EXAMPLE: Buddahs of Bamiyan destroyed by Taliban in Afghanistan, 2001. (Wikipedia)



#### 3.6.2 EXAMPLE: A statue of Iraq's President Saddam Hussein falls in central Baghdad on April 9, 2003. (Reuters/Goran Tomasevic/file)





**3.6.3 EXAMPLE: The Confederate soldier statue pulled down in Durham, N.C., 2017.**  
(Reuters photo: Kate Medley)



### 3.7 PARTIAL OBSCURATION

Evolving perspectives towards artistic imagery have impacted paintings over millennia. Consequently, there is a long history of modification of paintings that have elements that are considered offensive or controversial, but where the artwork is still considered to have value. The aim of art conservation is to preserve the integrity of the art as well as the artist's legacy. However, prior traditional solutions may not be sufficient to address the complicated issues facing public art as societal perspectives change. Adaptation may provide an ethical and morally defensible compromise solution to effectively address the sensitivity of the subject matter while leaving the work in place, connected to the original architectural context.

#### 3.7.1 EXAMPLE: Masaccio, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, 1428, Brancacci Chapel, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.

Masaccio, a leading proponent of humanism in early 15<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance Florence, depicted Adam and Eve with realistic naturalism in pathos as they are expelled from Eden, breaking with more static portrayals of biblical figures in earlier eras. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, a censorious painter added "fig leaves" to cover the genitals. The paintings were conserved in the late 1980s, when the leaves were removed during cleaning.



Left: before restoration with overpaint with fig leaves applied; Right: after 1991 cleaning.





### 3.7.2 EXAMPLE: Ivan Bartlett, 1938 (WPA), Ada County Courthouse Murals, University of Idaho Law and Justice Learning Center, Boise, ID

The murals were produced under the California New Deal Project, and later installed in the Ada County Courthouse in Boise, ID. The entire mural cycle spans three floors and 1000s of square feet. Within that context, two scenes portraying a pejorative “vigilante justice” have been considered controversial. From the 1990s, partial obscuration of the two objectionable scenes was implemented with American and Idaho State flags hung over them as banners.

From 2008-2014, during the period that the building served as the provisional legislative offices and congressional chambers during restoration of the Idaho State Capitol, and by request from the Idaho Historical Society and Native tribes, the murals were left uncovered and were visually accessible to a great number of people. In 2014, the building was leased to the University of Idaho Law School as its new seat in Boise. Since 2015, the murals have again been covered with flexible panels that can be raised to view the murals, and supplemental interpretive panels below describe the historical context of Idaho.





HERITAGE CONSERVATION GROUP, LLC  
2359 SW PARK PLACE • PORTLAND, OR 97205  
[WWW.HCGPORTLAND.COM](http://WWW.HCGPORTLAND.COM)

### 3.7.3 Fletcher Memorial Murals option

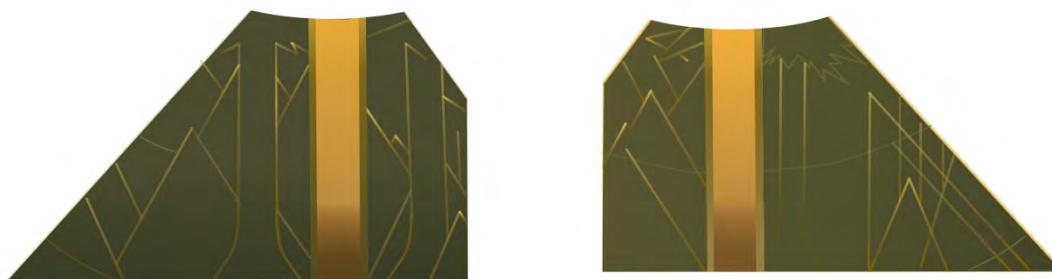
Since the dominant compositional elements of the Fletcher Memorial murals are the renderings of youths ascending towards enlightenment - not the depictions of native people - and since the native/pioneer figures are discreetly contained within pyramidal fields, an innovative concept of masking the objectionable groupings with a reversible panel may be applied. The masking would be produced from high-resolution photographs of the original section of mural with figures and background. The two figural groupings would be selective removed with digital alteration (Photoshop), to accurately reconstruct and imitate the appearance of the stylized forest background, in terms of linear elements, palette and tone. The image would be digitally printed onto a canvas, and mounted onto a rigid substrate. The masking panel would be mounted in a reversible manner, utilizing either bolts or magnets positioned where gaps in the original mural canvas are present.

Numerous museum curators, conservators and art historians have reviewed this proposal, and find it an elegant solution to a moral dilemma.

Supplemental interpretive panels should be installed in the Auditorium. A rough sketch is provided below.



C. Hoeckner, *The Ideals of Education*, oil on canvas marouflaged to plaster, 1932, GHS.



Concept sketch of masks to be created to cover bottom vignettes of the murals seen as objectionable.



Concept sketch of how murals would appear with masks that partially obscure the murals.





## 4.0 CONCLUSIONS

Various arguments surrounding the issue have been discussed, without a single, clear solution. Precedents and traditional approaches provide references, which may or not be sufficient to address the district policy to provide a healthy learning environment for students, while also equipping students with critical thinking skills, and preserving the memory and place of the school within the community. And finally as an important consideration within the discussion is the component of cultural heritage preservation, which reflects society's obligation to reconcile history with the present and the future.

Below are summarized the pros and cons of each approach.

1. Equity and Inclusion
  - a. Pro – Brings Native input into the interpretation of the subject matter
  - b. Con – **LOW**- Requires time and effort to create the outreach, and co author text
2. Interpretation
  - a. Pro – **HIGH** -Provides fundamental knowledge about the issues
  - b. Con – May not be sufficient to reduce harm to students
3. Mitigation
  - a. Pro – **HIGH** - Brings to the fore more current perspectives on Native identity
  - b. Con – Costs, art management policy
4. Obscuration
  - a. Pro – Removes from view the objectionable image in ethical reversible manner
  - b. Con – Removes from view the entire mural, which impacts the interior design of Auditorium.
5. Removal, Storage, Relocation
  - a. Pro – Removes from view the objectionable image in ethical manner
  - b. Con – **HIGH** : Costs, impact on historical Auditorium interior design, and may not consider realistic expectations on relocation.
6. Destruction
  - a. Pro – Removes from view the objectionable image, lower costs than removal
  - b. Con – **HIGH**: Moral and ethical dilemma of erasure of history, irreversible impact on historical Auditorium interior design
7. Partial Obscuration
  - a. Pro – **HIGH** - Removes objectionable portions of image in ethical manner while retaining rest of mural
  - b. Con – Custom solution that may not be applicable in other instances.

## 4.1 HCG RECOMMENDATION

The Heritage Conservation Group recommends solutions that avoid irreversible actions, and a balanced strategy that addresses the inadequacies of any single approach.

1. Equity and Inclusion. As defined in 3.1.1
2. Interpretation. As defined in 3.2.4
3. Mitigation. As defined in 3.3.2
4. Partial Obscuration. As defined in 3.7.3