

THINKING OUTSIDE THE (WOODEN) BOX: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE
ETHICAL COMPLEXITY OF THE UNCLE JACK STATUE

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ABSTRACT

GRETCHEN KLOBUCAR: Thinking Outside the (Wooden) Box: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Ethical Complexity of the Uncle Jack Statue

The life-sized bronze statue variously known as “Uncle Jack” or the “Good Darky” has been subject to protests and numerous relocations. Currently located in Baton Rouge, Louisiana at the Louisiana State University Rural Life Museum, the statue continues to be a source of controversy as an artifact with shifting “use” and “value” over the last 84 years. Based on the statue's sculptured body, the wooden box covering the original inscription, and the interpretive placard, I argue that the ethical complexity of past racial relations and the racial anxiety the statue continues to provoke are framed by the museum either as problems of the past or as problems deferred indefinitely to the future. This critical analysis assesses the rhetorical and ethical consequences of the statue and the way the museum has framed it, and demonstrates why prescriptions to destroy the statue are ill-considered.

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The Louisiana State University Rural Life Museum in Baton Rouge, Louisiana is home to a controversial statue variously referred to as “Uncle Jack” or the “Good Darky.” After being subject to multiple relocations throughout the state, Uncle Jack is currently located in the museum's outdoor preservation area between a Baptist church and a cemetery.¹ Both the museum's “most important artifact” and its albatross, the statue continues to be a source of controversy within a history wrought with racial tensions (Floyd). Commissioned in 1927 by Jack Bryan, the bronze statue atop a limestone base depicts an elderly African American man with his head bowed, shoulders slouched, tipping his hat (Figure 1 and 3). He holds a hat in his right hand between his thumb and index finger. Uncle Jack's face features a somewhat solemn, relaxed expression. Crows' feet near his eyes, wrinkles in his brow, and the balding on the top of his head reveal his “age” (Figure 2). The original plaque, found on the concrete base supporting the statue, read, “Erected by the City of Natchitoches in Grateful Recognition of the Arduous and Faithful Services of the Good Darkies of Louisiana” (Louisiana State University). This original plaque gave the statue its nickname “Good Darky.” In response to a 1989 letter from State Representative Raymond Jetson protesting the words “good darkies” on the original plaque, LSU president Allen Copping wrote:

It was not possible to completely remove the inscription without damaging the plaque and the base of the statue. Instead, the staff constructed a wooden frame to cover the entire inscription. I am confident that the modifications made to the base of the statue have eliminated the possibility of anyone being offended. (Ohlsen)

A second plaque, erected in 1972 when Jo Bryan Ducournau donated the statue to the

museum, provides a dedication inscription. This plaque was removed from its position above the original inscription on the base of the statue and screwed into the wood now covering up the original plaque (Figure 4). In 2000, the museum decided to erect two interpretive placards near the statue to chronicle its history (Floyd). The message from the original plaque can be found on the interpretive placard titled “Uncle Jack” near the statue (Figure 5).

Given the statue's character and locale, Uncle Jack has garnered a surprising amount of attention and has been the subject of some critical scholarship. Kirk Savage briefly explains that the statue is “best understood as a former slave—one who has survived emancipation but who retains the appropriate posture and attitude of servility, of 'faithfulness'” (*Standing Soldiers* 158). Savage does not offer an in-depth analysis of Uncle Jack but observes that Uncle Jack was made in the fabricated image of the “faithful slave.” Fiona Handley echoes Savage, arguing, “The 'Good Darkie,' by being faithful and subservient, was most similar to an 'Uncle Tom,' and thus represented non-threatening behaviour and a simplistic, Christian understanding of the world” (106). She adds, “The statue demonstrates how racial thought has a material correlation, and that its very nature—visible and visit-able—literally casts social values in bronze” (112). Ned Sublette shares his personal memories of Uncle Jack (which he remembers as the Good Darkey), also noting the Uncle Tom parallel with a pithy sarcastic tone: “After all, you couldn't call them Mr. or Mrs. if they didn't have last names . . . that would mean they were people instead of property” (101). James Loewen forwards the most extreme position about the statue, describing the statue as the commemorative equivalent of an unwanted hand-me-down and advocating its destruction based on a presupposed “usefulness” that Uncle Jack has “outlived” (220). He argues, “The function of 'the Good Darcy' was to commemorate, symbolize, and help

maintain white supremacy, particularly that rigid form of racial subordination known as segregation” (221). Like the other authors who have discussed the statue, Loewen is concerned with Uncle Jack's place in public memory.

The statue's place in public memory is undeniably important. However, I believe its ethical complexity, as well as the baffling oddity of its supplemental wooden box which covers the original inscription, are deserving of additional critical reflection that may be accommodated best by a rhetorical analysis.² Studying public memory from a rhetorical perspective warrants “attention to rhetoric's materiality as well as symbolicity,” and therefore requires careful consideration of the material symbols present in the commemorative work (Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki 31). Questions of legitimacy—of what, by whose agency, and how a site “remembers”—guide the field of commemorative and material rhetoric (Balthrop, Blair, and Michel; Dickinson, Ott, and Aoki; Gallagher and LaWare; Biesecker; Sturken). However, Loewen's questions of legitimacy are guided by two deterministic criteria: is it historically accurate and is it politically correct? His prescription to destroy Uncle Jack is overly simplistic, reflective of an anachronistic desire to repress and/or outright destroy works “inherited” from the troubled parts of history. If nothing else, the strange phenomenon of the wooden box demands further consideration of the ethical complexity of the statue as a commemorative sculpture. Certainly the statue employs commemorative images that render “blackness” as servile, indeed “faithful” to the Old South and white supremacy. As ethically problematic as that may be for representing “blackness,” the impulse to correct the problem by either destroying the statue (Loewen's solution) or covering the original inscription with a wooden box (Jetson's/the museum's solution) is also troubling in an alternative ethical register. The ethical complexity is precisely why the recommendation to destroy the statue is

ill-considered. There are multiple facets to the statue that are not reducible to the materiality of sculpture, nor to the exclusive temporality of the statue's creation. A more robust account of the material and ethical complexity of the statue is crucial before we can begin to argue for or against the statue's “usefulness”—or even its continued existence.

I argue that rhetorically, the statue materializes the “uncle” stereotype of the faithful slave in bronze, the wooden box assigns racial problems to the past, and the interpretive placard defers the problems of racial anxieties indefinitely to the future. In this way, Uncle Jack is bronze testimony to the racial anxieties of the Jim Crow era up to contemporary times, reflective of the ethical investment in constructing “blackness” both in the statue's inception and in the museum's intervention of re-constructing the statue by erecting the wooden box and the interpretive placard. The ethical complexity of this statue is twofold. First, there is the “original” (“pre-wooden box”) statue which is predominantly read as a portrayal of an African-American elderly man as harmless, respectful, and faithful to white patriarchy (Savage; Handley; Loewen).³ Even in 1927 the statue represented a waning romanticized representation—indeed, a caricature—of African Americans' servile and proud devotion to white power. Second, the later addition of the “wooden box” censors the original inscription because of the words “good darkies,” allegedly the only “offensive” part of the statue (Copping qtd. in Ohlsen). This is further complicated by the museum's decision to provide the original text of the inscription on the interpretive placard adjacent to the statue (the reasons for the wooden box, however, are not provided; see Figure 5). Specifically, the museum's attempt to conceal what Copping refers to as the “offensive” parts of Uncle Jack remains always incomplete because of the presence of the statue's sculptured body—which is also arguably offensive—and the interpretive placard that reveals the text of the original

inscription beneath the wooden box. To consider these ethical complexities allows for a consideration of the racial anxiety from which the statue emerged and that it continues to activate, and leads to conclusions considerably at odds with Loewen's recommendation to destroy the statue.

My analysis begins with a rhetorical critique of the sculptured body of Uncle Jack framed not only by Jack Bryan, the commissioner of the statue, but also by the deeply problematic trope of “Uncle Tom” or the “faithful slave” and “Jim Crow era” depictions of African American masculinity. I then move to a critical account focusing on the ethical complexity of the wooden box that covers the original inscription, and the rhetorical work it is performing. I then consider the odd interpretive placard that bears the text of the original inscription despite, yet also because of, the presence of the wooden box. I conclude with an intervention that poses the questions of what should be done with Uncle Jack, how the statue might generate critical considerations of racial anxiety and commemoration, and how we might imagine an ethics of commemoration that does not assume that every case be treated the same way. We cannot make Uncle Jack stand up straight and place his hat back on his head, but there must be an answer that does not lead to the annihilation of the statue and the space for serious discussion it opens.

The Sculptured Body

Uncle Jack's sculptured body not only indicates a system of perceived racial difference, but also points to a historicized practice of representing race in disturbing ways.⁴ As Kirk Savage states, “Race was not always discussed, but it was always there, at the most basic level of visual representation, the human body” (*Standing Soldiers* 209). After the Civil

War, the racial terrain of the South experienced a drought of stability, leaving plenty of the racial regime groundwork to be flooded by those who still held the power (read: white men) to produce a new racial “consensus.” Commemorative work during this time was “designed not to celebrate slavery's demise but to muse nostalgically over its passing” (Savage 157). As Cedric J. Robinson argues:

The supporters of the slave regime had more continuity and more resources. And with their manufacture of the Lost Cause ideological movement [i]n that just order where the races had been deposed by nature to superior and subordinate statuses, certain lessons would be derived from the chaos concomitant with the unnatural and the tranquility ensuing the natural. (59)

Uncle Jack was born of this “Lost Cause” delusion that both whites and blacks remained nostalgic for the “old days and ways” of race relations. It is defensible that Jack Bryan, the commissioner of the statue, intended for Uncle Jack to be a “lesson” of sorts for *both* “races” (i.e., “white” and “black”): a reminder to whites to be grateful and a reminder to blacks to be faithful.

Jackson Lee “Jack” Bryan was a white man born in Mansfield, Louisiana in 1868, who grew up on Hope Plantation in Natchez, Louisiana. After moving to Natchitoches, Louisiana, he became a successful cotton planter, oil mill owner, and banker. Bryan decided to commission and erect a statue dedicated to the faithful service of African-Americans who played an instrumental role in the building of Louisiana. When asked what inspired the idea, Bryan remarked

When I was a boy, I used to play with the colored boys on my father's plantation in Bossier parish, and after I moved to Shreveport I was in the habit of coming back to the old plantation on frequent visits. I was always impressed with the kind attention which the old darkies gave me. I had long wanted to do something for them and I chose this way of showing my gratitude and the gratitude of many people of the South toward the negroes. (“Bronze Darkey on Front Street Greets All Natchitoches Visitors”)

In the summer of 1926, Bryan selected Hans Schuler, Sr., known as the “Monument Maker,” to sculpt and cast a statue in bronze for \$4,300.00. Schuler was the first American sculptor to win a Salon gold medal in Paris in 1901, and thus his work did not come cheap.⁵ The statue was finally put on display in downtown Natchitoches on Front Street in May 1927 (Louisiana State University).



Figure 1. Uncle Jack. Photograph by Gretchen Klobucar.

Bryan was initially praised for his donation. Published reactions to the statue echo the sentiments expressed in this excerpt from *The Shreveport Times*:

In this case the thing accomplished was more than a work of art. It was a work of preservation, the perpetuation of a type that is rapidly vanishing, that

ties into the very heart of the traditions of the Old South and into the deeper sentiment of the genuine Southern. It represents as well a sincere and lasting expression of one race's gratitude to another, a tribute as noble as it was deserved. ("Memorial to the 'Good Old Darkies'")

This letter and others like it reflect the general early sentiment about the statue in 1927—a bleached-white illusion of a somehow “shared” nostalgia for the lost relationship “between races”—and the lack of opposition, at least *recorded* opposition, for approximately thirty years. Even at the statue's point of creation it was already representing a “dying” ideal, a way of life that was quickly slipping away and arguably never existed under the terms that whites perceived (i.e., “faithfulness” because of loyalty, as opposed to “faithfulness” just to stay alive).



Figure 2. The Face of Uncle Jack. Photograph by Gretchen Klobucar.

That the statue became a rallying point for discussions and protests about racial

relations is hardly surprising, given that the original inscription addressed precisely that issue (i.e. “good darkies”). Especially with the growing success of the Civil Rights Movement, Uncle Jack became a target of protests with the shifting racial climate. By the beginning of the 1960s, the statue had already become a “relic of the past, perceived as an insult by the people it was to honor” (Floyd). In a 1968 protest, white supremacist groups, apparently appalled that an African-American would be immortalized by a white man, poured white paint on the statue in an attempt to white-wash—quite literally—Uncle Jack.⁶ That same year, responding to the whitewash attempts, Civil Rights activists attempted to saw off the tipping-hat arm of Uncle Jack, apparently because his bodily position connoted subservience to whites. Uncle Jack still bears the scars of both of these vandalistic protests (“The Good Darky is Gone”). Despite the threat of the statue's utter destruction, Jo Bryan Ducournau, daughter of the late Jack Bryan, adamantly opposed the removal of the statue and prevented the first attempt at “secretly” removing the statue.

On September 26, 1968, Natchitoches city officials removed the statue to avoid further troubles, promising by word-of-mouth that the statue would be restored to its original location sometime in the future. The front page article of *The Natchitoches Times* on the day of the statue's removal called Uncle Jack a “victim of progress” (“The Good Darky is Gone”). The article continued,

With the changing of racial patterns now going on in this country, and with people of good will from both races trying to accommodate to the change, it became patent that the statue had outlived its usefulness as a symbol of good will, and had become, indeed, a symbol of local negroes, of racialism.

In November 1968, the statue was found near the Cane River Lake, missing its base and having seemingly sustained other damage. Once retrieved, the statue remained in storage in the Natchitoches Airport for four years until it was returned to Ducournau. When LSU

Chancellor Cecil G. Taylor and then museum landowner Steele Burden learned of the statue's existence, they presented Ducournau with a plan to loan the statue to LSU for one year; meanwhile local Natchitoches organizations demanded that Uncle Jack be returned to its original location. Despite eight other requests for the statue, including one from the Smithsonian Institution, Ducournau selected the LSU Rural Life Museum in September 1972 (Louisiana State University). In 1989, the museum's staff constructed the wooden box to cover the original inscription in response to Jetson's request to have the words “good darkies” removed.

As recently as October 2009, the debates on the statue's “place” continued—even within the museum's own grounds. David Floyd, director of the museum, announced that Uncle Jack would be placed near the Church on the preservation grounds (Ohlsen). In late February 2010, Uncle Jack was moved across a low, hand-made wooden fence to his current place between the Museum's historic Baptist church and its cemetery.⁷ The statue is thus both the product of and the perpetual target of strongly held reactions and reservations about race relations of the past and present. Its place seems to always be “out of place.”

Bryan's investment in the statue's creation—both financially *and* personally—is evidenced *at least* by the large sum of money he spent. The statue was, according to Bryan, created to remind Natchitoches citizens—and perhaps also the tourists that the statue eventually attracted to the area—the debt that they owed to slaves and their descendants, and was thus allegedly directed at a white audience. Also implicated in the statue's creation are those “good darkies” Bryan aimed to thank; what he meant by “good” can only be surmised or argued.⁸ This is to say, it remains unclear as to whether Bryan meant to reify the faithful slave ideal for political reasons, or if his monument served as an expression of gratitude to

“the faithful negroes of the South who remained at home during the War-Between-the-States and faithfully guarded 'ole miss' and the children while 'Massa' was fighting in the Confederate ranks” (“Bronze Statue to Negro Slaves Now Completed”). However, it is reasonably clear from the excerpt above that Bryan believed that he was “doing the right thing” by commemorating those “old darkies.” He clearly differentiated himself from the “ignorant” and “prejudiced” whites who thought a statue *like this* should not even exist. Yet now his rationale seems perplexing, to say the least—how could he believe that former slaves were being “faithful” when they were given little choice but to continue to work and be loyal, or at least create the illusion of loyalty and its “place” in white southern supremacist imaginary? Certainly this indicates the ethical complexity of the statue, even in its “early years.” In Bryan's endeavor to create this statue, which was probably read as “progressive for its time,” he actually perpetuated a problematic image of nonthreatening, servile African American masculinity consistent with the “Uncle Tom” stereotype.

Uncle Jack acquired his nickname as “Uncle Jack” from friends of Jackson Lee “Jack” Bryan who teased that he commissioned a statue of himself (Byrd). Such rumors have been dispelled, as the statue does not resemble Bryan.⁹ While “Uncle Jack” is less troubling than “Good Darcy,” the name Uncle Jack presents its own issues. The statue has no name of its own. Like the practice of slaves taking their master's names upon emancipation, Uncle Jack has taken the name of his “master” who commissioned him. Furthermore, Uncle Jack's name indicates that “Uncle” was, for many whites, “the correct nomenclature for an African American who was too old to be a 'boy’” (Handley 107). The statue's status as “uncle” links it to the line of Uncle Tom stereotypes.¹⁰

In many problematic ways, Uncle Jack embodies the figure of the non-threatening,

hyper-polite, and loyal black male conjured from the white imaginary, reflective of a white anxiety about a rapidly changing racial regime that threatened to alter the power dynamic that favored whites. Loewen claims, “Whites needed to convince themselves not only that it was somehow equitable to keep blacks out of hospitals, hotels, and jury boxes, but also that African-Americans *liked* it that way and *deserved* the discrimination they received” (225, emphasis original). Uncle Jack's bronze-sculptured body signifies racial difference as a justification not only for slavery, but for the continued unequal treatment of African Americans under a re-claiming of the Old South, embellished with nostalgia and illusions of racial utopia. As Patricia A. Turner asserts:

The most popular icons are those that contain safe, nonthreatening servile depictions of blacks or those that imply the inherent ineptness and imbecility will prevent the race from earning social and political parity. This pattern can be seen by examining the clothes and facial expressions of the men, women, and children as they are rendered in the objects, as well as the objects and products with which they are consistently juxtaposed. (12)

Uncle Jack's facial features, clothing, bodily gestures, and name serve as material signifiers for his “blackness” within a tradition of stereotypical representations of African American masculinity, “the most intensively manufactured subject” (Robinson 4).

Uncle Jack's surrounding placards mark him as a “bronze sculpture of an elderly black man” (see Figure 5). Beginning at the top of Uncle Jack's head, he is bald from his forehead back, similar to a receding hairline. His forehead is wrinkled and slightly furrowed, though it remains unclear why (see Figure 2). His eyebrows are slightly raised, not furrowed, but do not indicate an inquisitive expression. His eyes are cornered by crow's feet, indicating both his age and his smile. His “down-cast eyes to avoid the gaze of a white person” are baggy, as though his life has been haunted by a lack of rest (Handley 106). The bridge of his nose widens as it meets its bulbous end with two wide nostrils. His cheeks seem to sag. His

ears are nearly as large as the distance from his eyes to the bottom of his nose. His full lips are closed but smiling. His eyes seem to smile more than his mouth as though he sees something he cannot say.¹¹

Clothing also plays an integral role in representations of “race.” Tim Edensor states, “Clothes implicate the body clothed in them, facilitating the comfort of identity. They bear the imprint of use, and similarly our bodies bear the imprint of wearing them” (109). We might extend this argument to the clothing inscribed upon a statue like Uncle Jack in order to reveal the manner in which his meaning is constituted, in part, by his clothing. As Turner suggests, “The clothing worn by blacks depicted in these artifacts establishes an insidious pattern—a pattern that reinforces a limited range of social and political possibilities for blacks” (7). Uncle Jack wears ill-fitting pants high on his waist and an over-sized blazer that falls to his mid-thigh. Underneath the blazer, he wears a loose shirt, tucked into his waistband, which has been sculpted to appear as though the bottom of the shirt has not been buttoned. All of his clothing appears over-sized. As Turner notes:

[T]he sloppy uncles wear ill-fitting garments As old age sets in, the dancing clothes are hung up in favor of tattered old hand-me-downs, not unlike those worn by the black child. The implicit message here is that the black man can look quite dapper when dressed to suit (pun intended) his employer, but when left to his own devices, he is completely inept. (20)

Thus, Uncle Jack's clothing and age mark him as nonthreatening to the fragile white institutions. Uncle Jack is presented as incapable of dressing himself neatly or without clothing from another individual (perhaps a master or overseer).

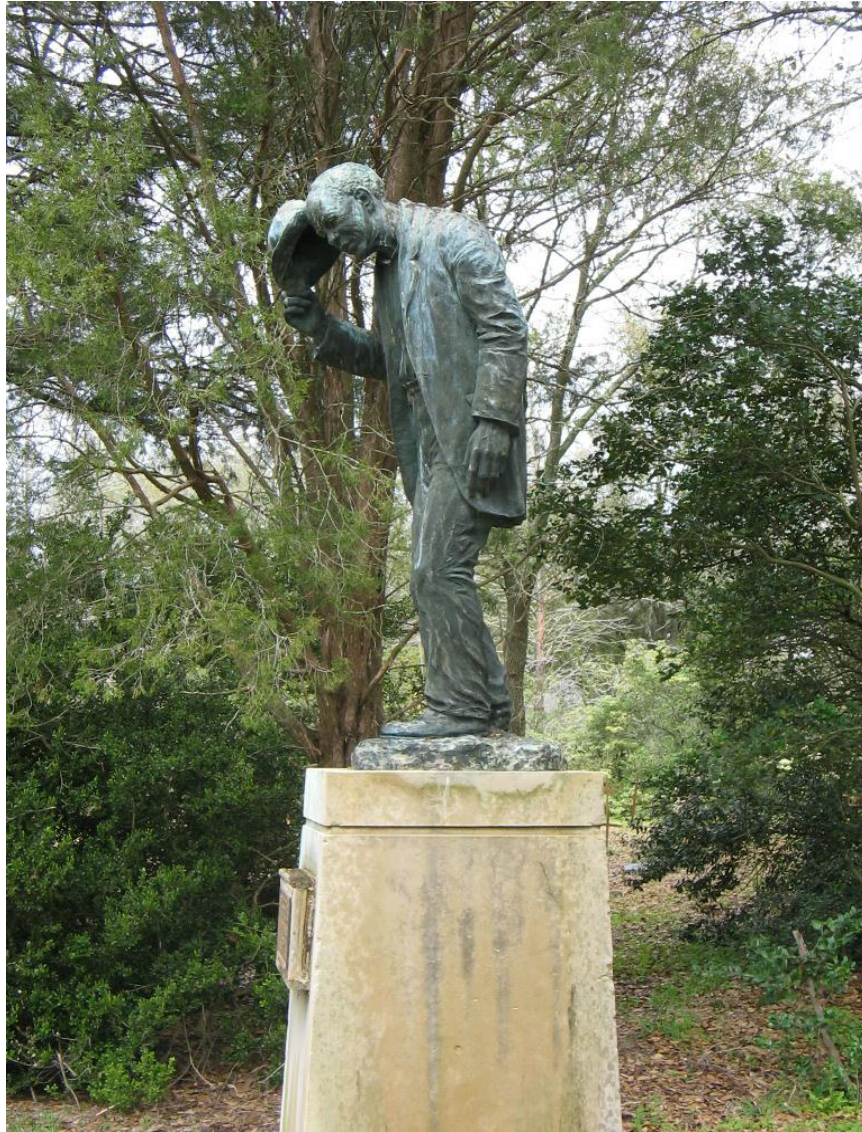


Figure 3. Side View of Uncle Jack. Photograph by Gretchen Klobucar.

Uncle Jack remains forever frozen in his bent position. This bent posture has thus far been interpreted as connoting subservience. Loewen argues

His smiling, obsequious pose, bent over but happy, presents no threat and implies he is content to be inferior Thus the servile pose of the statue was no myth but a rational response by African-Americans to an untenable situation. The response, like the statue, was nevertheless a white creation. (225)

Under this logic, Uncle Jack's bent body mirrors his bent will. Uncle Jack's posture reflects the incalculable, devoted efforts of post-Reconstruction era whites to keep blacks intimidated, submissive, and "in their place." As Savage comments, "Once abolished, slavery forced itself into the domain of memory, there to be reckoned with in one way or another—suppressed, integrated, romanticized" (*Standing Soldiers* 5). However, it is important to note that Uncle Jack's position is always already doubled. Constitutive of white power, his bent position—and even the gesture of tipping his hat—is consistent with the semblance of subservience as well as the potential for subversion. It was precisely the "sincerity" Bryan felt that allowed for the doubleness of figures like Uncle Jack to operate as tricksters in the doubled space of signification.¹² Such doubleness made possible the destabilizing of an economy of signifiers that produced and reproduced racial regimes.

Subscribers to the Loewen interpretation would argue that Uncle Jack is a prime example of the Uncle Tom stereotype. This is by no means an implausible conclusion; rather, it is an incomplete assessment because calling Uncle Jack an Uncle Tom is based primarily upon the statue's body, and therefore excludes the significance of the wooden box covering the original, problematic inscription. The body of the statue produces a problematic representation of African American masculinity, as I have already demonstrated by detailing the statue's gestures and expressions. This is part of the irony of Allen Copping's comment, "I am confident that the modifications made to the base of the statue have eliminated the possibility of anyone being offended" (Ohlsen). It implies that the *only* offensive part of the statue is the original inscription and not the problematic representation of African American masculinity.

The Wooden Box

The museum's answer to Jetson's demand to remove “good darkies” was arguably well-intentioned, a seemingly harmless attempt stemming from a perceived politeness—that the covering of the original inscription will be beneficial in the long run by removing the offensive language.¹³ In their attempt to cover the “offensive” part of the statue, the museum has simultaneously recognized, but refused to acknowledge or discuss the problematic racial language of the past. The wooden box “solution” not only reflects the racial anxieties of the past, but is also reflexive about that reflection—it acknowledges that we still cannot talk about the anxieties.¹⁴ The wooden box assigns the problem of racial difference and racial inequality to a problem of the past.



Figure 4. The Wooden Box Encasing the Original Plaque. Photograph by Gretchen Klobucar.

It is my position that the ethical dimensions of commemoration, much like the rhetorical dimensions of commemoration, are contingent upon the complex historical, social, and political context in which they are conceived (read “the past”) and through which they continue to exist (read “the present”). This issue becomes more complicated when the two are in conflict with one another, as indicated by Levinson's question of what we ought to do when we no longer remember the same way.¹⁵ Erika Doss claims:

As cultural bodies, memorials have particular life spans and biographies: few memorials possess constant or consistent meaning or create the same sort of public response they did when they were first dedicated. Likewise, because they depend on the fluctuating interests and feelings of their public patrons, memorials have no stable and timeless agenda. (46)

Echoing Loewen's sentiment of a statue that has “outlived” its purpose, Doss notes a kind of expiration date on memorials—their messages change over time as public interests shift.

Uncle Jack is a prime example of this phenomenon, and points us to the ethical repercussions of constructing and reconstructing memory through material examples. If the commemorative process cannot be stopped before a monumental mistake is made (pun quite intended), is alteration of the original artifact ethical? In the case of Uncle Jack, the question of an ethics of commemoration is inextricably, but not irretrievably, tethered to the problem of the wooden box covering the original inscription. The ethical problem embedded with the statue is not exclusively the falsely romanticized representation of slavery and what a “good darky” might do. I argue that the additional ethical problem created by the wooden box is the false assertion that we have somehow assuaged racial anxiety or reached racial equality: that the conversation has been and must be closed. Furthermore, it is reflective of a desire to evade the ethical imperative of “race.”

Much like the protesters who whitewashed Uncle Jack in 1968, the museum

attempted to whitewash the troubling past with the construction of the wooden box. Kirk Savage notes, “[A]s the historian Michael Kammen has famously remarked, ‘Societies in fact reconstruct their pasts rather than faithfully record them, and they do so with the needs of contemporary culture clearly in mind—manipulating the past in order to mold the present’” (qtd. By Savage, *Monument Wars* 36). Uncle Jack, particularly with the wooden box ensconcing the original inscription, exemplifies this reconstruction of the past. In addition, though, Uncle Jack *literalizes* this reconstruction with the materiality of the constructed wooden box: the present (specifically, 1989 to the present) has quite literally and physically imposed itself upon the “message” of the past.

Moreover, race itself is *just as much of a construction* as the wooden box. Cedric J. Robinson argues:

The production of race is chaotic. It is an alchemy of the intentional and the unintended, of known and unimagined fractures of cultural forms, of relations of power and the power of social and cultural relations While necessarily articulated with accruals of power, the covering conceit of a racial regime is a makeshift patchwork masquerading as memory and the immutable. (xiv)

By marking the constructed-ness of race, its status as rhetorical invention, I do not intend to elide the different effects race has on a person's life, but to ask a question similar to that of Kirk Savage: “What would freedom come to mean in a society still attached to the very concept of racial difference used to justify slavery? Would new barriers between the races have to be erected, or could race itself be re-thought, reimagined?” (*Standing Soldiers* 3) This is not to say that simply realizing race is constructed allows us to change; such a conception would assume a set of cultural dupes who proclaim the hackneyed “Knowledge will set you free.” It also risks, though does not automatically entail, reducing structural processes to individualistic psychological motivations. In addition to noting the complex construction of

race in general, Robinson's claim that racial regimes parade about as “memory and the immutable” recognizes the significance of how race and racial relations are constructed in public memory. Thus, not only the wooden box, but also the Uncle Jack statue as a whole, employs a literal “covering conceit of a racial regime” and also an emergent display of a racial regime. To clarify, the wooden box *covers* particular racial regimes (i.e., 1927 as represented by the original plaque) while it simultaneously *displays* others (i.e., 1989 as represented by the wooden box itself). The material structure of the wooden box—that literalization of the covering conceit of a racial regime—allows us to see that rendering racism invisible is arguably futile. Furthermore, it might be equally as dangerous, if not more so, than explicit displays of racial inequality. The wooden box functions like the ethically-disturbing myth of the colorblind society: if we cannot see racism, it doesn't exist.

Michael Brown and his co-authors explore the issue of proclaiming that we are living in a color-blind society:

Formal color-blindness fails to recognize or address the deeply rooted institutional practices and long-term disaccumulation that sustains racial inequality. Color-blind ideology is no longer a weapon that challenges racial inequality. Instead, it has become a powerful sword and a near-impenetrable shield, almost a civic religion, that actually promotes the unequal racial status quo. (58)

They continue, “To assume that a color-blind perspective is the remedy is *to be blind to color*. It is to lose sight of the reality that in contemporary America, color has consequences for a person's status and well-being” (64; emphasis added). In the case of Uncle Jack, it is literally *to lose sight*—to be unable to see the hidden original inscription beneath the box—of the racial inequalities which were once present and have never truly “gone away,” even with seemingly progressive legislation. In the attempt to *not* recognize the problematic racial language (i.e. “good darkies”), we are forced to recognize the racial anxieties surrounding the

language, as well as the ongoing anxieties about the past and how we choose to represent it.

Furthermore, the wooden box effect is not limited to Uncle Jack, but is reflective of the larger set of commemorative practices which seek historical closure.¹⁶ However, intervention into that closure should not be *yet another* closure (the wooden box), even if that closure is always necessarily incomplete because of the continued deferral of the message (the interpretive placard). The museum's attempt at intervention in 2000 was the erection of the “interpretive placard” which actually evades interpretation of Uncle Jack and prefers Jack Bryan's “sincerity” behind creating the statue. Instead, the placard defers the problem of both the ethics of commemoration and the problem of racial inequality to an unspecified future—in effect, postponing it indefinitely.

The Interpretive Placard

In addition to what the sculptured body and wooden box already indicate, the interpretive placard draws attention to the selectivity of memory and the strange struggle to edit the problematic history of Uncle Jack for seemingly ethical reasons. Certainly the statue deserves some interpretive work, and the museum has taken decisive steps toward that end. Uncle Jack has a complex history, and museum-goers would likely benefit from knowing more information about the problematic sculpture, especially if the wooden box remains. However, as the interpretive placard stands, it is insufficient—and perhaps even *counterproductive*—as an “interpretive” marker for the statue. If the wooden box acknowledges but refuses to talk about the racial anxieties of the past, then the interpretive placard ensures that the conversation will be deferred to the future. David Floyd suggests that the interpretive placard is “the museum's attempt to be faithful in its representation” (Floyd).

Though that may be a noble effort on the museum's part (an interpretive alteration, rather than or in addition to a physical box) much like Jack Bryan's arguably “good” intentions, the interpretive placard works in two particularly troubling ways. First, the interpretive placard prefers certain interpretations of Jack Bryan uncomfortably similar to 1927 over interpretations of the statue. Second, it defers the problems of the statue and of the wooden box as issues for the future.



Figure 5. The Interpretive Placard. Photograph by Gretchen Klobucar.

The placard's text opens with a description of Jack Bryan's intentions, focusing upon the “strong close association with African-Americans” that he and his twin brother Joe shared. The first paragraph of the interpretive placard places emphasis upon the interpretations and “sincere” intentions of the *maker*, ensuring that readers will “read” the statue as Bryan intended. Rather than contextualize the statue, the interpretive placard inadvertently reproduces the racial regime of 1927 by privileging Bryan's narrative of “sincerity” without questioning its effects or ethical implications. Thus, the interpretive placard not only reinforces the 1927 reading of the statue, but also circumvents the work of contextualizing the original inscription or considering its ethical complexity.

Even if we attempt to place the rhetorical and ethical implications aside (i.e., commemorative closure and alteration, racial anxiety), the interpretive placard still defeats the purpose of the wooden box—the covering of the problematic phrase “good darkies.” In addition to rendering the wooden box unnecessary, the interpretive placard fails in its attempt to re-contextualize the original message and “interpret” it. The final paragraph of the interpretive placard reads:

Local residents called it 'Uncle Jack' for Mr. Bryan. It has been known also as the 'Good Darcy.' The original plaque read 'Dedicated to the arduous and faithful services of the good darkies of Louisiana.' Newspapers and magazines, including the National Geographic, contained articles and pictures of the sculpture and stated 'A visit to Natchitoches was not complete without a visit to the statue.'¹⁷

The placard simply reports, rather than actively seeks to interpret the original inscription.

The original message follows a sentence that explains the statue's (whisper it) *other* nickname, failing to acknowledge that the name “Good Darcy” was adopted from the original inscription and the indexical link that locals made between the figure and the inscription.¹⁸ A random fact about the statue's popularity for Natchitoches tourism follows

the report of the original message. Though I find the strange sentences around the original message intriguing, the way that the museum reports the original message warrants further analysis.

The interpretive placard reports only part of the original message. The full text of the original inscription read “Erected by the City of Natchitoches in Grateful Recognition of the Arduous and Faithful Services of the Good Darkies of Louisiana,” not simply “Dedicated to the arduous and faithful services of the good darkies of Louisiana.” Because “good darkies” was the problematic phrase that arguably caused the most controversy, it is still included in the museum's report on the interpretive placard. This seems counterintuitive; why include the problematic words if they caused the controversy and the “need” for the wooden box in the first place, especially if Jetson's demand to remove the words was specifically centered upon *that* phrase?

While the impetus behind creating the interpretive placard was an aim of “faithfulness” in the museum's interpretation, something arguably necessary in this complex case of Uncle Jack, the placard falls short where it would have been reasonably simple to follow through: with the original message. Though the museum includes perhaps the most significant and interesting part of the original inscription (i.e., “good darkies”), the city of Natchitoches and their “grateful recognition” are redacted. Though it is reasonable to argue that this does not affect the meaning of the original inscription as much as “good darkies,” it is still worth noting that these portions of the original message are edited out of the interpretive placard, since the museum presumably could have included the entirety of the plaque's inscription quite easily.

In addition to the missing pieces of the full inscription, the phenomenon of the

wooden box and the reasons for its erection are excluded from the placard. If the museum's goal was faithful representation of the statue, then perhaps they ought to at least explain what State Representative Jetson demanded they do. It is at least arguable that the museum's resistant counterpoint to Jetson's wooden box was the interpretive placard, and given the alternative of altering or destroying the original inscription, the museum succeeded in “protecting the original historic plaque” (Floyd). However, the interpretive placard does more than simply provide the original message; it defers both the content and the ethical implications of the statue's message away from its deeply problematic past, postponing the problem to the indefinite future.

Beyond just the words imprinted on the placard itself, the interpretive placard rhetorically defers the discussion of the ethical complexity of shifting racial regimes and the important role Uncle Jack might potentially play as a material example of those shifts. The interpretive placard *reflects* racial anxieties about the troubled past (i.e., “good darkies”) and the ongoing representation of racial anxieties (i.e., the wooden box and the sculptured body of Uncle Jack), but *deflects* those anxieties and the problems of resolving them to the future. The placard speaks to an anxiety about two problems that it constructs as impossibly resolvable: the problem of interpreting the statue and its original inscription, and the problem of racial regimes across the history of the statue. Instead of acknowledging the problems, the interpretive placard dodges them by refusing to address them. It defers the confrontation, both in the sense of acknowledgment and also in the sense of conflict, that it ought to enable. Instead we ought to recognize the statue and its associated problematic history as an opportunity to discuss these issues openly, rather than defer them away for a future time. The question that remains is, might racial difference be re-located to the register of positive

heterogeneity? Might race be constructed and construed differently from the way it has been historically treated? Furthermore, might the whole assemblage of signifiers marking white supremacist memories and racial alignments “proper” to them be deconstructed or constructed differently? What role will commemorative work have in meeting this goal?

Toward a Commemorative Ethics: How Can the “Good Darky” be Good?

If the rhetoric of commemoration points to the inevitable presence of the present in representations of the past, then an ethics of commemoration points to the way in which that temporal present is made present, the way in which the present “intervenes” into representations of the past.¹⁹ An ethics of commemoration evaluates the legitimacy not only of contemporary appropriations/rhetorical constructions of events of the past, but also of “inherited” artifacts that represent a troubled part of our history or reflect a representation of the past we no longer find appropriate (or, perhaps, never did). For Uncle Jack, the ethical ambiguity is present not only in the *what/who/how* of commemoration, but also in *when/why/how* that commemoration—and any subsequent changes to that commemoration—occurs.²⁰ The ethical ambiguity of the statue is evident not only in its creation (i.e., Bryan's intentions, the sculpture itself, and the original inscription), but also in the alterations of the statue (i.e., the museum's intentions, the wooden box, and the interpretive placard).

By looking at Uncle Jack as an example of ethically-complicated commemorative practices, particularly with the move to cover the original inscription, I seek to *interpret* and *describe* rather than *prescribe* a particular ethics of commemoration. I address the question of an ethics by examining Uncle Jack through the following inquiries: Is there a clear “how” to how we ought to remember?²¹ Is the alteration of an artifact unethical, and under what

circumstances? Can—and should—monuments “evolve as audiences and social practices change,” along with our broader practices of how we remember (*Savage Monument Wars* 21)? What is the nature of that evolution? Perhaps as Robinson suggests, “Change is the nature of historical occurrences, and we must constantly remind ourselves that the Negro is an historical conceit” (7). I argue here for an ethics of commemoration not only for the sake of “theory,” but also for the sake of “practice,” specifically statues like Uncle Jack and other controversial monuments, memorials, and/or museums.²² One need not assent to the essentialist maxim that if an historical representation is a problematic one, it must be destroyed or put in a sterile museum.

Is this statue an ethical representation of African American masculinity? We can safely answer “No.” We might even add, “No, not even in 1927, or even before that.” The only way to undo this action is to destroy the statue. However, destroying this statue will not destroy the memories of the past or the fact that they happened. Covering the original inscription will not change the fact that African Americans were referred to as “darkies,” or that Jack Bryan (and presumably, others) believed that *this* was what a “good darky” looked like. This question of the ethics of commemoration is about more than just the original intent of the work, or just the meaning created in the bronze mold. Rather, the ethics of commemoration stretches into the present and the future, into the intractable moment of reception for the viewer and how future visitors might “read” the statue. This is not about re-romanticizing the statue and the image it projects; this is a problematic statue and should be represented as such. Nonetheless, it is an artifact, not imbued with that mystical power of history and therefore fetishized, but it is a symbol of a past that must not be repeated.

What, then, do we do with Uncle Jack (and other statues like him)? If Uncle Jack will

serve a pedagogical purpose, which I argue it can, then we must consider the possible options for re-framing—rhetorically or with a wooden box, as it were—the statue. In this way, the importance of the statue extends not only from its *meaning*, but also how it comes to be *meaningful*. Blair, Dickinson, and Ott claim

[M]eaningful-ness invites us to consider how discourses, events, objects, and practices inflect, deploy, and circulate affective investments. 'Meaningful' enables a second set of associations if we understand it as filled with meaning . . . discourses, events, objects and practices are composed of signs that may take on a range of signification. (3)

To echo the sentiment of their language, it is not simply about how the statue comes to *signify* certain meanings, but how the statue comes to be *significant*. Thus, even if we “read” the statue as a racist example of another Uncle Tom figure as its meaning, Uncle Jack can still be “filled with meaning” in a different way: by serving as an example of the racist past with the recognition that this was an ethically disturbing stereotype meant to ensure a non-threatening “black” population. Thus, the *meaningful-ness* of the statue—its ethical complexity, I argue, as well as its affective modalities—would shift from the intent of the nostalgic Jack Bryan of “preserving” certain relations, to preserving the statue as a reminder that we have only come so far in the struggle toward racial equality, that racial difference remains just as much of a construction as the bronze, limestone, and concrete making up the statue. We can then locate a discursive space for negotiating new meaning not only for the statue, but also for a new understanding of positive difference, a new reading of how differences make a difference—how they become *meaningful*.

Part of the construction of meaningful-ness, or the process of filling with meaning, happens through the way in which the present invests meaning into the past and whether or not that investment is ethically sound. In their pointed critique of the World War II Memorial,

Balthrop, Blair, and Michael conclude: “What we seek here are evaluative criteria based in a wise and careful consideration of relations of past and present, of ethical and political stakes invested in the past, and of how precisely analogues of a past can be *legitimately* connected to a present” (196). Though they do not prescribe a set of ethical standards, nor shall I attempt a generic list here, the ethics of commemoration begs for further theorization. As all commemoration is historically and spatially situated, it is virtually impossible to prescribe standards that could be applied in every case. However, by using Uncle Jack as an example, I offer a few interventions.

Postcard from the Future

One way for the museum to resolve these issues of deferral to the past and the future would be to create an exhibit that provided stronger contexts for the ethical complexity of the statue. In terms of improving the interpretive work on the statue, the preference would be to remove the wooden box and the unnecessary deferral and/or repetition of the message on the interpretive placard, and replace it with an interpretive placard that actually does some helpful interpretation about the work itself—including an explanation of the history of the wooden box and generally providing a more robust and detailed historical context. The wooden box should be removed to allow the original inscription to be read in its original entirety. This will not eradicate the problems; in fact, it might cause some unforeseen new problems. However, hiding the problem—literally by hiding the problematic discourse by constructing the wooden box—is not a productive alternative. Removing the wooden box might allow for a more open consideration and discussion of the race issues raised by the statue. If the nearby placard will profess the original inscription anyway, the inscription

should be clearly visible, uninhibited by any structure “hiding” it. Instead, the museum's contemporary ethical stance on this statue should provide some interpretive assistance by providing text something like the following: “The LSU Rural Life Museum takes no position on the views expressed *on* this monument or *by* this monument. Though in the past the museum has covered the controversial original inscription, it is the museum's hope that this statue will evoke discussions about the incomplete nature of the commemorative process, as well as the incomplete nature of the struggle for racial equality.”²³ The wooden box should be removed but kept as part of the interpretive display, as it, too, is part of the history and ethical complexity of the statue. The wooden box's history would contextualize the statue and provide further evidence that the statue is ethically complex.

If we followed James Loewen's advice and “toppled” the statue, we might actually be evading the problem. Destruction of the statue would imply that we have somehow destroyed the problems Uncle Jack embodies: racial inequality and the problem of commemorative representation. As an alternative to destruction, putting Uncle Jack in a museum indoors with other “artifacts” of the past presents its own issues. As Sanford Levinson states,

In some museums the new status would be that of 'aesthetic object,' in which form is substantially separated from content And the message, presumably, is that the object in question is now safely displaced to the past, at some distance—both emotional and intellectual—from the exigencies of the present. (68)

However, Levinson's split of form and content is inaccurate in assuming that the form and content of commemorative sculpture can be considered separately. Though the tenacious relationship between form and content is misrepresented by Levinson, he reasonably asserts that some historically problematic objects can be out of place in a stereotypical museum setting. In this case, putting Uncle Jack in a museum evades the discussion about racial issues

of both the past and the present that the statue might enable. Uncle Jack and the problems the statue addresses—in covered ways, nonetheless—would be relegated to the past as “archaic” and reflective of a past from which we have gained some potentially crippling distance. As David Floyd notes, “It would have been out of place indoors.” This is to say, placing Uncle Jack in a museum would be another kind of deferral. Such a move might re-inscribe the problem by implying that the racial problems of the past are irrelevant problems, not exigencies begging urgent attention now.

I agree with Gallagher and LaWare that “certainly no single monument can fill in the gaps of the memory and history of African Americans and racial relations in the United States” (87). Though this single statue can resolve neither the complexity of an ethics of commemoration nor the complexity of race relations in contemporary culture, Uncle Jack can open up discussions rather than defer or close them, if the wooden box is removed. The statue's contemporary purpose, or at least its potential purpose for contemporary times, is to provoke discussions about the issues of race we have yet to resolve. Communication, particularly open expression and discussion, *is exactly what this statue should enable*. As Brown, et. al. argue:

[T]he only way to achieve a society in which the color of people's skin *really* matters less than the content of their character is by forthrightly acknowledging the role that race still plays in American life, by facing up to the consequences, and by moving forward with a new seriousness to address the historical and contemporary sources of racial inequalities. (247)

Perhaps only then will Uncle Jack be tipping his hat “Goodbye” to deeply embedded patterns of political discrepancies based on race, and “Hello” to a society which embraces a positive notion of difference and heterogeneity.

It is clear that the ethical complexity of Uncle Jack warrants a more careful

consideration of what ought to be done with the statue, steering us carefully away from Loewen's easy answer to simply destroy it. If nothing else, I have demonstrated the need to consider each controversial case on an individual level with considerable attention to the material and symbolic dimensions of the artifact itself. When it comes to the ethics of commemoration, particularly as it meets racial representation, the issue is never simply black or white.

Notes

1. I visited the LSU Rural Life Museum most recently on March 9, 2010 and on November 27, 2010. The statue was moved sixty feet from its original cul-de-sac spot to where he now stands. For a detailed performance genealogy of the LSU Rural Life Museum, see Ruth Bowman's chapter "Diverging Paths in Performance Genealogies" in Judith Hamera's *Opening Acts: Performance in/as Communication and Cultural Studies*.
2. Kirk Savage's article was published in 1997, but his comments about the statue are structured more like side notes than the in-depth analyses he performs about the other works in his *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves*. Fiona Handley's article was published in 2007, but it is plausible that she never actually visited the statue in person, and thus would not have known about the wooden box. Loewen's book was published in 1999 (in which he ranks the statue as number 46 in his list of "100 Most Notorious Monuments") and the wooden box went up in 1989. Though it is possible that this gave him time to write about this aspect of the statue, his book analyzes a large number of monuments. It would be virtually impossible to keep up with all of the updates.
3. I use the term "original" here as the "pre-wooden box" state of the statue from 1927-1989, or what the statue might look like if the wooden box were removed. Therefore, I use the term "original" with a cautious caveat because I am not speaking about a sense of authenticity; rather, there is a need to talk about the state of the statue before the wooden box.
4. I use the word "sculptured" here instead of "sculpted" because the phrase "sculpted

- body” implies a muscular physique. “Sculptured” draws attention to the fact that this is not a real body, but instead has been shaped and sculpted with specific intentions and is therefore rhetorical.
5. Handley argues, “The statue therefore embodied a set of cultural values common to the white former slave-owning classes. Ironically, although viewers identified a 'type' in the features of the sculpture, Schuler had had such difficulty completing the face that he had to work from photographs of local elderly African American men, eventually, the 'type' became an amalgamation of one or two individuals, which also raises the possibility that several of the viewers unwittingly recognized the man depicted” (106).
 6. See Marback's articles about the *Monument to Joe Louis* for more on the rhetorical and material affects/effects of whitewashing. See also Gallagher and LaWare.
 7. I have argued in previous explorations of this statue about the implications of the statue's placement between the Church and the Cemetery. Indeed, this move presents an intriguing new hermeneutic for understanding Uncle Jack's “proper place,” as well as creates a noteworthy intertextuality between the three sites. However, my stakes in this essay focus primarily upon the statue itself. Thus, I have chosen to put the fully detailed spatial analysis on the shelf.
 8. It is quite possible that neither Bryan nor Schuler knew how to commemorate using appropriate images, and thus turned to the stereotyped images of African Americans. Of course, this does not excuse them, but perhaps reflects the perplexing task Savage notes: the commemorative problem of representing the black body. Savage specifically states, “These stereotypical black bodies [“darky” and “coon”]—whether

- they represented black Americans or whites masquerading as such—were still conceived and pictured as the grotesque inversion of what Bakhtin called the 'classical' or 'canonical' body” (12). See *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves* for more.
9. Just because the statue does not resemble Bryan does not mean that this statue could not have been construed as a white man. It is not my goal to whitewash the statue, but the fact that people believed the statue could be of Bryan also draws attention to the constructed nature of race in general. Furthermore, one could make the argument that Bryan was performing a kind of blackface with the statue or that Uncle Jack is a trickster figure, dressing like the “safe” uncle to stay safe, but advancing black politics in the background.
 10. In discussing her experience teaching an introductory course in African-American Studies, Turner states, “I asked the class to compose a picture of a classic Uncle Tom. In describing his physical appearance, the students emphasized his advanced years, his white hair, and his stooped posture” (70). Given this brief assessment of the Uncle Tom stereotype, Uncle Jack fits this description. It is important to note that Uncle Tom's character is not limited to his appearance. Uncle Tom is a pejorative term for an African American male who is perceived by others as behaving in a subservient manner to white authority figures, or as seeking to appease whites by unnecessary accommodation, often to the point of self-sacrifice. The term originates in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Turner goes into further detail about the term's origin and the way it has changed over time with adaptations of Stowe's original text.
 11. Uncle Jack's open eyes and closed mouth mirror the eye-sore of the wooden box.

The wooden box, and the inscription it hides, is what Uncle Jack “sees” but cannot “say.” This is explored in the next section.

12. In his discussion of the figure of the trickster in “The Signifying Monkey,” Henry Louis Gates argues that signifying can mean a number of things, as it “certainly refers to the trickster's ability to talk with great innuendo, to carp, cajole, needle, and lie. It can mean in other instances the propensity to talk around a subject, never quite coming to the point. It can mean making fun of a person or situation. Also it can denote speaking with the hands and eyes, and in this respect encompasses a whole complex of expressions and gestures” (989).
13. One could argue, similar to Erika Doss' chapter in *Memorial Mania*, that the reasons for putting up the wooden box are centered upon shame and its negative affects. However, shame can be complicated on a broader level than the individual.
14. For Michael Hyde, recognition and acknowledgment have distinctly different ethical significance. Recognition is the identification of something as existing. Acknowledgment is a fundamentally ethical way of being for others and recognizing the subjectivity of others. It works to clear a dwelling place “in space and time where other people and things can be carefully observed and listened to for the purpose of allowing them a say about the truth of their existence” (60).
15. Sanford Levinson's *Written in Stone* proposes the question, “Do we, as a society, have a duty to the past to continue to give pride of sacred place to monuments to our—and what one means by 'our' is perhaps the central question of this essay—own 'Lost Cause' of the Confederate States of America in spite of altogether persuasive arguments not only that this cause was racist at its core, but also that some of the

specific monuments . . . leave nothing to the imagination in terms of their racism?”
(68)

16. In this rhetorical vein, Kirk Savage argues, “The traditional expectation of closure that comes with the monument's promise of permanence now coexists with a conflicting awareness that monuments must evolve as audiences and social practices change” (*Monument Wars* 21).
17. For the purpose of brevity, I only include the end of the placard's text. See figure 5 for more.
18. It is quite reasonable to believe that people who read the interpretive placard will make the connection between the nickname and the original inscription's text, just as locals did when the statue was in Natchitoches. However, if the museum put in the labor to construct an interpretive placard, it ought to include that connection explicitly. One possible conclusion a visitor might make is something like the following: “Oh, that's what the original inscription read. Something must have happened to it, but they knew what it said when it was still there.”
19. Balthrop, Blair, and Michel consider the ethical repercussions of the World War II Memorial in “The Presence of the Present: Hijacking the 'Good War'?”: “We argue, furthermore, that this interpretation forwards important issues for memory studies, about assessing the ethical and political legitimacy of particular renditions of the past in the present. It is not enough to claim that the past is mustered rhetorically to serve present needs and interests; it clearly is. The challenge is for memory studies to articulate a principled and nuanced set of positions that would enable scholars to differentiate a legitimate versus an illegitimate rhetorical use of the past” (172).

20. Here “changes” refers not only to material changes (i.e., painting clothing onto a nude body, the wooden box), but also to ideological changes (i.e., the sentiment expressed by “We no longer remember this in *this* way”).
21. Margalit suggests, “So what should humanity remember? The short answer is: striking examples of radical evil and crimes against humanity, such as enslavement, deportations of civilian populations, and mass exterminations” (78). Though his book *Ethics of Memory* focuses primarily upon interpersonal memories, he has short answers to the problems of collective memory, though not necessarily commemoration.
22. I realize that on some level, *any* commemorative work is controversial in the sense that public memory is, by nature, extremely contested. When I say “other controversial monuments/memorials/museums,” I specifically mean those that have controversial histories from the moment of their inception and continue to be heavily contested in contemporary discussions
23. I owe this text in part to Sanford Levinson's *Written in Stone* which provides some answers to the question “What do we do with Confederate symbols that no longer represent what we believe?”

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