

# REIMAGINING & EXPANDING INTERPRETATION: **MOVING TOWARDS MUSEUM ACCREDITATION**

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**WILLIAM STARK, DIRECTOR**

LSU Rural Life  
Museum

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**ROUSE CONSULTING – PROJECT MANAGER**

Terrie S. Rouse-Rosario  
President

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**LSU GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT**

Antonia S. Ingram, Th.M.  
Ph.D. Student, Anthropology

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**LSU WORKSHOP LEADER**

Joyce M. Jackson, Ph.D.  
Professor, Department of Geography and Anthropology

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**COLLABORATING INSTITUTION**

Clark Atlanta University's School of Business  
Henry Whitlow, Visiting Professor



**MAY 2021**  
FINAL  
REPORT



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# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT AND INTRODUCTION

As the new director, I expected that 2020 would be a significant transition year for the LSU Rural Life Museum. The museum marked its 50th anniversary, and the retirement of its long-time director signaled a momentous year ahead. What was not anticipated, though, was the watershed year that 2020 turned out to be.

Rather than a time of celebration, 2020 was a year of reflection and reconsidering for us, as individuals and as institutions. The year was marked by a global pandemic, social reckoning, political turmoil, and business disruptions, and we just see the potential beginnings of recovery. Now, as we move ahead, we seek clarity amid traces of chaos and a deeper understanding of our core values.

As a 19th century agrarian site, the LSU Rural Life Museum is rooted in history, folklore legacies, and communities. It portrays customs, labor practices, household experiences, and religious practices of that time. Everywhere in the museum, we see reverence for particular moments of the past.

In and of itself, this deep respect is not incompatible with the museum being a vibrant, inclusive, and relevant place. However, museum professionals and educators find that reverence for the past and adherence to traditional narratives often speak loudly about what is not said. The tellers of a given story may neutrally depict daily plantation life while meticulously detailing the owner class, omitting the human element and the actual, tangible degradation of many people simply by the perspective used in sharing history.

It is that human element that we now seek to capture. **By rethinking how we present history, the LSU Rural Life Museum aims to provide a richer, more textured, and more authentic presentation of the many peoples of rural Louisiana.** Our underlying premise: When one understands the past, they can better contextualize the world they live in today. When one sees their own experience and background represented in history, there is a stronger connection to and a better understanding of our shared history.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT AND INTRODUCTION

At its core, the reimagining of how we share our history will help the museum reach a broader audience by making history relevant to our lives today. To that end, this endeavor to reimagine and expand interpretation at the LSU Rural Life Museum begins with the following set of goals designed to establish **our roadmap forward** in the areas of interpretation and engagement.

- Provide for greater diversity and inclusion of the many cultures and voices represented in the museum's collection.
- Seek to engage the public in new ways that are both consistent with the stated intent of the museum and relevant to the lives and experiences of contemporary visitors.
- Properly and inclusively contextualize the Schuler statue in a manner consistent with contemporary museum practices.
- Provide a roadmap for phased and prioritized growth and development in research, exhibitions, and programming.
- Place the museum on a path for accreditation by the American Alliance of Museums.

As we prepare for the next steps, I would like to thank the following for their integral role in the museum's reimagining journey thus far.

The Decision Sciences Department of Clark Atlanta University's School of Business Administration collaborated with us to conduct surveys of the six identified interest groups via a collective intelligence software tool called GroupMind. Visiting Professor Henry Whitlow headed the effort.

Dr. Joyce M. Jackson, a professor in the LSU Department of Geography and Anthropology, highlighted survey responses as part of a comprehensive virtual workshop. A guest speaker at the workshop, Elon Cook Lee, Director of Interpretation and Education at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, outlined plantation interpretation progression over 100 years.

Terrie S. Rouse-Rosario, President of Rouse Consulting, Inc. and a veteran and forerunner museum professional, has led the Reimagining & Expanding Interpretation initiative approach and projects.



## WHY ACCREDITATION?

Reimagining the LSU Rural Life Museum’s interpretive approach was the natural starting point for its new director’s tenure. Informed by his experience as an accreditation reviewer with the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), William Stark embraces the fundamental concept of the industry that excellence is not about the size of your budget but rather the professional drive to reach your institution’s best level of operation. His statement in the spring of 2019 captured that very sentiment:

“... we are just beginning. Reimagining what the LSU Rural Life Museum can be to our public while still remaining true to the museum’s mission and vision is an ongoing process. By being ready to recognize and take advantage of opportunities, the LSU Rural Life Museum can make a meaningful impact on the community, and our support, relevance, and mission will continue to thrive.”

AAM’s mission is to “champion museums and nurture excellence in partnership with our

members and allies.” This spirit of seeking excellence has become the goal of the LSU Rural Life Museum. It will serve both the academic and the greater Baton Rouge communities optimally in full partnership with the university.

In the museum field, AAM’s Accreditation Program is the gold standard of excellence. As the sector’s mark of distinction, accreditation offers peer-based validation of a museum’s operations and impact. Process-wise, it is a standards-based assessment that uses the following evaluation framework:

**Core Standards for Museums** (formerly called the Characteristics of Excellence) are the umbrella standards for all museums that are developed through inclusive field-wide dialogue. They are not prescriptive or how-to but broad, outcome-oriented statements that are adaptable and expected of museums of all types and sizes, with each museum fulfilling them in different ways based on its discipline, type, budget, governance

**“... we are just beginning. Reimagining what the LSU Rural Life Museum can be to our public while still remaining true to the museum’s mission and vision is an ongoing process. By being ready to recognize and take advantage of opportunities, the LSU Rural Life Museum can make a meaningful impact on the community, and our support, relevance, and mission will continue to thrive.”**

William Stark, Director, LSU Rural Life Museum

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## WHY ACCREDITATION?

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The Core Standards are grouped into the following categories: *Public Trust and Accountability, Mission & Planning, Leadership and Organizational Structure, Collections Stewardship, Education and Interpretation, Financial Stability, and Facilities and Risk Management.*

These standards of excellence fit well with the goals of the Rural Life Museum’s Reimagining & Expanding Interpretation initiative. And both the Core Standards and the museum’s goals dovetail nicely with one of the seven anticipated outcomes of the LSU Strategic Plan 2025. That outcome reads as follows:

Louisiana will be the premier destination for both living and leisure through the advancement, promotion, and celebration of Louisiana’s unique arts, culture, and humanities.

### Sources:

Stark, William. “Is RLM an “innie” or an “outie”?” *Whispers of the Past: A Publication of the LSU Rural Life Museum* 25 (Spring 2019).

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# SPRING 2021 WORKSHOP – GOALS

The Workshop Phase of the Reimagining & Expanding Interpretation initiative was designed to examine challenges, charges, and prospective successes of broadening the LSU Rural Life Museum’s approach to interpretation. To provide context for this exploration, presenters shared information and insights on the following topics:

- Historical background of Baton Rouge and the LSU Rural Life Museum.
- Best practices demonstrated by similar sites of consciousness in Louisiana and across America.
- The progression of plantation interpretation over 100 years.

The one-day workshop consisted of four sessions. The agenda is listed below.

## Sessions I and II

- Brief Historical Background of Burden Plantation and the LSU Rural Life Museum
- Challenges and Charges
- Best Practices of Properties of Consciousness
- Guest Speaker: Elon Cook Lee, Director of Interpretation and Education at the National Trust for Historic Preservation

## Sessions III and IV

- Solutions for Higher Standards and Accreditation, Terrie S. Rouse-Rosario, Rouse Consulting, Inc.
- GroupMind System, Henry Whitlow, Visiting Professor, Clark Atlanta University’s School of Business, Decision Sciences Department
- Focus Groups, Dr. Joyce M. Jackson
- Baton Rouge History and Culture Synthesized with the LSU Rural Life Museum



# PROJECT STRATEGY WITH GROUPMIND COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE SOFTWARE

The overall goal of the Reimagining & Expanding Interpretation initiative was to gather community-wide comments that would become an essential component of the Rural Life Museum's efforts to better serve LSU and residents and tourists across multiple age groups, backgrounds, and interests.

The project's objectives attracted the collaborative support of Clark Atlanta University's School of Business Administration, Decision Sciences Department, Visiting Professor Henry Whitlow. Professor Whitlow designed the survey format for six customized questionnaires, participated in workshops, and trained the project team members. The team deployed the six surveys via GroupMind, a software tool that leverages collective intelligence for better decision-making, planning, and action.

The following interest/focus groups were invited to respond to their applicable GroupMind survey questionnaire:

- Education Professionals (K-12 and College)
- Museum Stakeholders
- Academic Community
- Staff and Docent Coordinators
- Community and Tourism Industry
- LSU Leaders

LSU professor Joyce M. Jackson incorporated highlights of survey responses into her "Successes and Challenges" workshop, held April 10, 2021. The workshop also included a background overview by William Stark, the Rural Life Museum Director. An analysis of the responses from the interest groups and a special presentation on the evolution of plantation museum interpretation by Elon Cook Lee, Director of Education and Interpretation, National Trust for Historic Preservation, completed the session.

The Museum plans to host a public questionnaire on its website as an ongoing tool for community engagement.





28 OAKRIDGE JAIL – OAKRIDGE JAIL



# PROFESSOR JACKSON'S WORKSHOP – SUMMARY

In the April 2021 workshop, LSU professor Dr. Joyce M. Jackson meticulously laid the framework for how the Rural Life Museum is perceived based on which side of the region's economic practices and history is the focus.

The workshop began with a brief historical background of the Windrush Plantation and the museum. The Windrush Plantation was acquired in 1850 by the Burden Family. Over the next almost 120 years, the family held the property. Like other plantations in southern Louisiana, the land was used to cultivate cotton and corn and raise cattle. The Burden Family's 20th century descendants began donating land and buildings to Louisiana State University in 1966. The donations and the efforts of the family to preserve the buildings and gardens became the LSU Rural Life Museum and Windrush Gardens in 1970.

After 1970, the Rural Life Museum's administration took several critical actions that impacted its professional and civic life. The actions highlighted by Dr. Jackson were as follows:

- 1972: The Hans Schuler (1874–1951) sculpture the “Good Darkie,” later referred to as “Uncle Jack,” was loaned to the museum and moved to the museum's grounds.
- 1974: The sculpture was formally accepted by the Rural Life Museum and placed in the center of a roundabout, where it greets visitors as they arrive.

- 2003–2020: A three-phase capital campaign, “Whispers of Change,” focused on exterior renovations to the visitor center, the addition of six exhibits within the visitor center, and collection storage.
- 2020–2021: Reimagining and Expanding Interpretation: Moving Towards Museum Accreditation workshops, surveys, and recommendations were completed.

Throughout the presentation, metropolitan Baton Rouge's growth was demonstrated by maps referencing the period from 1953 to 2010, providing community context for the material shared. Best practices for similar sites of consciousness were also presented to help set the stage for the presentation of goals and recommendations stemming from the Reimagining & Expanding Interpretation initiative.

Agricultural and industrial structures and the lives of individuals in and around them are the cornerstones of the museum industry. Of the nation's 35,000 museums, well over one-third to one-half of them are history-based, including plantation museums. Accordingly, some institutions actively demonstrate best practices for interpretation and education. The examples emphasized during the workshop included the regional sites of the Magnolia and Oakland Plantations. Additionally, the legendary and well-endowed Mount Vernon (VA) and Colonial Williamsburg (VA) sites were also singled out in the context of when each had a “pivotal moment that led to an expansion in their interpretation strategies and content.”

## PROFESSOR JACKSON'S WORKSHOP – SUMMARY

The workshop's historical presentation continued with guest speaker Elon Cook Lee, Director, Interpretation and Education, National Trust for Historic Preservation. Ms. Lee's scholarship produced a 150-year overview of how plantation sites chose to ignore or misrepresent the labor and lives of the enslaved population. Her codification depicted the best interpretative practice of the 21st century as one of "Equitable Incorporation." Here, multiple storylines of the plantation's inhabitants are explored, and deliberate interpretive decisions are made that veer away from a focus on only the lives and possessions of the landowners.

Dr. Jackson's research and presentation also touched on Baton Rouge's historical moments and cultural nuances, and the infamous "Uncle Jack" sculpture is explored in an accompanying section of this report.

The workshop's dynamic review of select responses from the six surveys conducted via the GroupMind software tool indicated strong support for the effort underway at the LSU Rural Life Museum. More specifically, the range of insightful comments and suggestions primarily lean towards improving the educational strategies of the museum. The legacy of the 1927 "Good Darkie" sculpture on the grounds continues to be an issue that influences visitorship and community engagement.

### **A sampling of the responses follows:**

*{Note: only minimal editing was applied to keep the essence of the comments.}*

### **Staff and Docent Coordinators**

#### ***How can the RLM collaborate with The Institute for Dialogue, Diversity, and Culture?***

- RLM could become one of the "institutions for programming, resource sharing, and opportunity-building."
- We could offer to be a part of the internship network for students from underrepresented communities.

#### ***Are there other areas to consider?***

- The more RLM formalizes our interaction with LSU departments, faculty and students, the more we will be viewed as an asset to the university.

### **K-12 Teachers and College Education Professionals**

#### ***How can the RLM advance LSU's strategic "Transforming Education" goal?***

- RLM resources by forming a volunteer RLM educational consultant committee.

#### ***Can RLM broaden the topics introduced in its tours?***

- RLM could include an architectural emphasis tour, a botanical tour in Windrush Gardens, and various roles and skills of women.

## **PROFESSOR JACKSON'S WORKSHOP – SUMMARY**

### ***What Hurdles are there to RLM visitation?***

- Consider adding wheelchair accessibility to accommodate all visitors and seating or benches dispersed throughout the property to provide rest areas during the tour.

### ***How can RLM attract more local and regional schools and residents?***

- The museum could provide opportunities for student project work from the design school on landscape plans and installation, textile evaluation and preservation, and historical interior design.

### ***Can RLM attract visitors with an interest in environmental science and farming practices? If so, how? What are the opportunities?***

- Reach out to local high schools and colleges offering classes in environmental, sustainable farming practices with an offer of the museum for study of history and areas for practical projects of study.

### ***How can we improve the current K-12 grades tours and programs?***

- The current school programs can be improved by assisting teachers in completing the instructional circle from planning to instruction and evaluation. A designated staff person for education is needed.

### ***What are the opportunities for RLM to offer STEM/STEAM programming?***

Provide opportunities for STEM programs by expanding the focus of provided information on certain artifacts and their function in rural life farm operations.

### ***What could RLM offer in programs and/or amenities that would make a visit more attractive to K-12 classes?***

Provide a picnic area on the grounds.

## **LSU Administrators and Trustees**

### ***How can the RLM collaborate with The Institute for Dialogue, Diversity, and Culture?***

- More interaction with professionals who have experience in such dialogues. Both the Board of Trustees and the Friends Board and staff and volunteers should participate.
- There should be discussion and education about the role plantations played in the development of systemic racism.

### ***In order to achieve high standards of interpretation, how can the mission statement serve as the basis for change? Should its wording be revisited?***

- Yes, most feel that the wording of the mission statement should be revised.

### ***What do elected officials and community leaders think of RLM?***

- In the past, there has been great cooperation with civic leaders with full support - mayor, Lt. governor, and governor. Outreach and open dialogue with current administrators need to continue.

## PROFESSOR JACKSON'S WORKSHOP – SUMMARY

### *What do the descendants of enslaved or underrepresented communities think of RLM?*

- Descendants of enslaved communities have been a part of the interpretation process at the museum through donations. They feel like the story needs to be told.

### *What do college and university faculty & staff members think of RLM?*

- Many faculty members and students do not know about the educational resources that RLM possesses. We need to educate them about the resources and how they can utilize them (i.e., instructions, meetings, retreats).

### *What do donors think of RLM?*

- RLM donors love it but feel it is underutilized. General community not engaged.

### *What does the community and other stakeholders think of RLM?*

- It appears that not enough of the community knows about the RLM.
- Many in the minority community feel there is a racist undercurrent and will not set foot here.

### *What does the general community think of RLM?*

- Many residents of BR do not know about LSU RLM. It continues to be a hidden gem for Baton Rouge.

### *Who at LSU, Southern University and BRCC can push for the acceptance of high standards?*

- The President, Provost, Vice Provosts, Deans, professors, and students in relevant fields.

## Academic Community

### *How can the RLM advance LSU's Strategic Arts and Culture goals?*

- Tie into the goals by offering programming that focuses on art by offering shows highlighting student work, local artists, and even artists throughout the region that focus on themes.

### *What are the other organizational and academic units and community groups RLM should consider when building strategic partnerships?*

- Libraries, High School mentoring programs, provide professional development for K-12 teachers, cooking classes to the community, partner with other institutions like Southern Food & Beverage highlighting untapped resources in diverse communities, Back Street Culture Museum, Children's museums, McKenna Museum of African-American Art to highlight diverse artists, JAMNOLA to create touchable pieces with appropriate dialog

### *What are the cognitive or perception-based hurdles to museum visitation?*

- Many visitors are demanding more from a museum visit – they are looking for an authentic experience. The more immersive and engaging the better. Open-hearth

## PROFESSOR JACKSON'S WORKSHOP – SUMMARY

cooking classes, how to write with a quill, or how to create natural dyes. Allow visitors to interact and experience.

### *What are other issues and challenges for RLM to consider?*

- Not everyone will be receptive to change. However, by broadening the stories you're sharing, you can help explain how these stories help to show that the horrors experienced and overcoming countless atrocities has allowed us to move forward so that today you can add those "silenced" voices to the narrative of our history, making it truly a more complete chronicle of the past, and our hopes for the future.

### **Museum Stakeholders**

#### *If RLM achieves high standards and excellence, how will your community, the region and Louisiana respond?*

- We could become a perfect backdrop for intellectual and political debate on the problems of our community, state, and country. We could become a destination for people to explore the 18th and 19th century experiences of our diverse cultures and heritage.

#### *From your perspective, what does/should "getting it right" include for RLM?*

- Getting it Right also includes an increase in individuals who have artifacts, written info about Louisiana and its people. They will donate items, info, etc. of the time period to the museum.

#### *How can the RLM advance LSU's strategic "Transforming Education" goal?*

- LSU has an incredible opportunity to utilize RLM as a living laboratory for student learning that addresses changes in culture and society. RLM should be a significant part of the new departments and programming (LSU African and African American Studies).

#### *To enhance tours or interpretative material, how should RLM include more diversity of perspective and background?*

- Personalize the different cultures by using quotes that depict the ways they lived during this time period, their struggles, hopes, dreams.
- Perhaps we should diversify our tours by offering a tour on architectural features, who built the houses, and a tour that relates to the cultural histories of the areas, and a tour for grade levels.

#### *To enhance tours or interpretative material, would RLM need to attract broader diversity in staff and volunteers?*

- To attract staff and volunteers of broader diversity, developing a partnership of some sort with leaders of our local community who are culturally diverse would help to create interest for potential additions to staff and volunteers. Also, polling other museums on things they do to attract culturally diverse staff and volunteers would be helpful.

## PROFESSOR JACKSON'S WORKSHOP – SUMMARY

- We need accurate and tasteful depictions of the inhabitants, not only of the slave cabins, but also of the Acadian cabins and swamp settings. Internal exhibits need to be better categorized and spatially organized. We should expand the interpretation of slavery, but in combination with new interpretation of our many non-slavery cultures.

### Community and Tourism Industry

#### *How can the RLM advance LSU's strategic "Transforming Education" goal?*

- Provide a space for K-12 & university students to extend text learning into a hands-on/visual learning experience.
- Developing a course offering in museum studies that provides consistent visits targeting different aspects of the museum throughout the semester.

#### *What Motivational Hurdles are there to RLM visitation?*

- Location/traffic. While it is impossible to relocate and RLM is centered fairly centrally in BR, many may still not wish to fight I-10/12 or Essen traffic. This leads to the benefits of bringing programs outside of the RLM boundary through other locations or digital space.

#### *Based on YOUR areas of interest and background, what are the opportunities for RLM growth in interpretation and community engagement?*

- Offering group tour options for hands on activities that teach and give participants an experience of what life was like for people of the represented time period from

various walks of life. Group tours also appreciate take-aways as a souvenir of their experience.

- RLM can extend beyond the local BR area & connect with current rural communities and plantation/farm museums for partnerships on information, tours, and shared advertising.
- Create a partnership with local farmer's markets to create education program for shoppers.

#### *How can RLM tie its offerings more closely to your community's needs?*

- Offering a variety of programming or themed tours for groups (ex: quilting/textiles, African American history, farming tools and techniques, etc.)
- To enhance tours for communities, the Burden family collection likely needs additional sources to expand upon or create entirely new tours and/or programs.

#### *How can RLM expand its volunteer pool to include more social and background diversity?*

- Offer summer camps for school age children that are extremely hands on; offer scholarships for the camp to allow students from all backgrounds the ability to attend; older students can also learn how to give tours to groups and develop a basic knowledge of tourism standards.



## **THE ORIGIN STORY OF “UNCLE JACK” AND HIS JOURNEY TO THE LSU RURAL LIFE MUSEUM.**

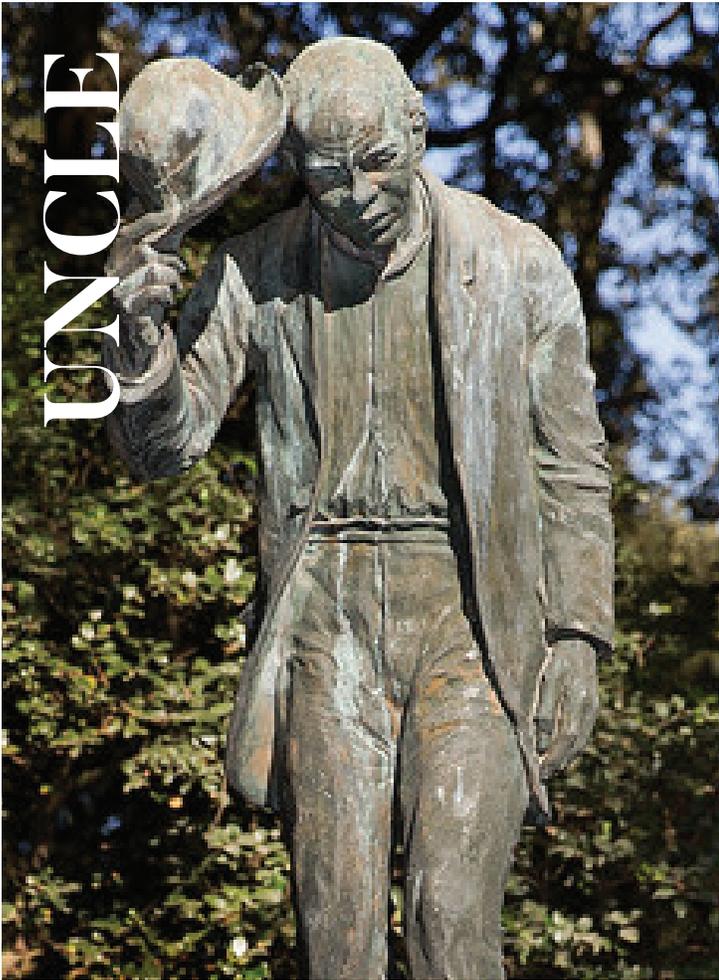
The origin story of “Uncle Jack” and his journey to the LSU Rural Life Museum. The late 1800s marked the end of postbellum reconstruction in the United States and the beginnings of Jim Crow laws and the “Lost Cause” ideology. A revisionist ideology, the Lost Cause recast the Confederacy’s defeat in the American Civil War as a valiant fight for the noble cause of state’s rights and falsely asserted that slavery was a positive good, even in the eyes of the enslaved. Lost Cause supporters gave their beliefs a symbolic material presence by erecting confederate monuments and statues in many southern states.

**“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.”**

Jackson Lee Bryan, Natchitoches, Louisiana, 1935



## PROFESSOR JACKSON'S ANALYSIS - THE STATUE KNOWN AS "UNCLE JACK"



Production of Confederate statues spread as disenfranchisement of the formerly enslaved and freedmen grew in the early 1900s. While most statues depicted Confederate soldiers, some presumably memorialized the African American contribution to the South. The bronze statue known as "Uncle Jack" or the "Good Darkie" is one of those born of the Lost Cause. Jackson Lee Bryan, a wealthy cotton planter from Natchitoches, Louisiana, commissioned the statue in 1926, and it is "defensible that he intended for Uncle Jack to be a "lesson" of sorts for both "races": a reminder to whites to be grateful and a reminder to blacks to be faithful."



In 1935 Bryan remarked when asked what inspired the idea:

"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."

With nostalgic memories of the Old South, Bryan believed that he was "doing the right thing" by commemorating those "old darkies." On the contrary, he was perpetuating a controversial racial stereotype – a nonthreatening caricature consistent with the negative representation of African American

## PROFESSOR JACKSON'S ANALYSIS - THE STATUE KNOWN AS "UNCLE JACK"

men and a collective dismissal of dignity as an inherent part of a role of service.

Bryan commissioned Hans K. Schuler, Sr. to sculpt and cast the statue in bronze for \$4,300. Mounted on a limestone base, the sculpture depicts a balding African American elder with his head bowed, shoulders slouched, and hat in hand in a submissive gesture of Black-white etiquette enforced during the Jim Crow era. Unveiled in 1927 on Front Street in Natchitoches, the statue had an inscription at the base that read: "Erected by the city of Natchitoches in grateful recognition of the arduous and faithful services of the good darkies of Louisiana."

*The Shreveport Times* covered the 1927 unveiling and reported:

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.

The statement is indicative of the popular opinion of the day, and there was a lack of recorded opposition for the next thirty years.

The "Good Darkie Statue" came to the attention of Clementine Hunter, the famous African American folk artist who lived near the area. In 1950 she painted a picture of "Uncle Jack," using oil paints on cardboard (in the collection of Jack and Ann Britton).

The statue became more popular after a National Geographic article publicized it as a tourist attraction. In 1969, as it became a target of protest during the Civil Rights Movement, African American residents in Natchitoches succeeded in having the statue removed. Despite many other requests for the statue, including one from the Smithsonian Institution, it was relocated to LSU Rural Life Museum in 1972 by Bryan's daughter, Jo Bryan Ducournau. It was here that the statue became known as "Uncle Jack."

In 1989, concerned citizens and legislators voiced their concerns about the inscription on the Schuler statue. In response, the museum covered the original placard that contained the offending language. This change became a pivot point. The Rural Life Museum's administration began the decades-long dialogue on how to interpret life on plantations, resulting in the "reimagining" project.

### ***What does "Uncle Jack" mean to the community?***

For those who uphold the privilege that came from the enforcement of Jim Crow laws and practices, the statue symbolizes the continuance of a bifurcated world based on skin color and class. Thus, the sculpted bending figure sentimentalizes the institution of slavery and its antecedent sharecropping while memorializing Black people's subservience. For the 21st century African American community, the statue is a painful reminder of oppression, submission, and denial of humanity.

## PROFESSOR JACKSON'S ANALYSIS - THE STATUE KNOWN AS "UNCLE JACK"

*How can we bring "Uncle Jack" to contemporary times in the context of today's racial climate – from the Civil War to Civil Rights and on to Black Lives Matter?*

The various meanings given to the statue over the last 90 years – from acceptable paternalism and the preservation of a myth to its politicization in the 1960s to the criticism currently leveled at its use – all make "Uncle Jack" a critical case study in public commemoration, truth, and reconciliation. The statue can be a rallying point of discussion focusing on racial relations and social justice matters. How do we harness the image in creating today's rituals in the urban and current landscape? "Uncle Jack" is here and still a powerful tool to facilitate our education.

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# INSTRUCTIVE TOUR TOPICS FOR THE “UNCLE JACK” SCULPTURE

## Age-Appropriate Student Engagement

### Primary Level (3rd-6th)

- What is your name?
- Tell me something about yourself.
- What do you think about Uncle Jack?
- Who do you think he is?
- Why do you think he is dressed like that?
- Who/what does he represent?
- What would you like to ask Uncle Jack if he could talk?

### Secondary Level (7th-12th)

- What is your name? And tell me something about yourself.
- Should racist monuments be preserved?
- What/who does Uncle Jack symbolize or represent to you?
- What can the Uncle Jack statue teach us about the history of the South? The United States?
- What can we learn about Black people’s experiences in the United States?
- Do you feel that Uncle Jack memorializes the African American community accurately?
- If Uncle Jack could talk, what would you be interested in asking him?

## Post-Secondary Level

- What is your name?
- What are your perceptions of Uncle Jack?
- What does Uncle Jack symbolize for you?
- Who/what does Uncle Jack represent to you?
- Why does Uncle Jack serve as a contentious space?
- How does your past, your collective history, affect your life in the present?
- How does the current political and racial climate inform Uncle Jack?

# ROUSE CONSULTING – RECOMMENDATIONS

The LSU Rural Life Museum’s Reimagining & Expanding Interpretation initiative raised awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the museum’s approaches to engage the public. The initiative highlighted the need to empower museum staff and volunteers with a fuller narrative of the lives of the plantation’s inhabitants as one area for enhancement. In addition, it revealed that there is a significant opportunity to solidly enhance the Rural Life Museum’s education and interpretation approach by using the scholarship of Louisiana State University’s faculty and the relationship to update and maintain a balanced interpretative perspective. A strong LSU academic relationship will allow the museum to reach and maintain the Standards of Excellence that underpin the museum industry, which the American Alliance of Museums oversees.

The recommendations are broken down into the four categories listed below.

- Governance
- LSU Engagement
- Plantation Museum Collaborative and Bi-Annual Symposium
- Community Engagement – The Pilgrimage

## **Governance**

- The Rural Life Museum’s Board of Trustees and Louisiana State University (via the Office of Vice President, Stacia Haynie, Ph.D., Executive Vice President and Provost) will affirm the American Alliance of Museum’s first steps towards excellence and accreditation by signing the “Pledge of Excellence.” The Rural Life Museum and LSU will announce the signing of the pledge and its significance for the entity moving forward. The pledge reads:

The museum pledges that, in fulfillment of its educational mission, it will strive to operate according to the core standards to the best of its abilities and in accordance with its resources.

The Core Standards are grouped into the following categories:

*Public Trust and Accountability, Mission & Planning, Leadership and Organizational Structure, Collections Stewardship, Education and Interpretation, Financial Stability, and Facilities and Risk Management.*

### **LSU Engagement**

- The Rural Life Museum will establish an Interpretation and Education Faculty Initiative. The five-year endeavor will be a grant program that supplements three faculty members per academic year. The faculty members' goals will be to work towards excellence in interpreting the historical, scientific, cultural, folklore, and geographic knowledge that will accurately depict a working plantation's environment, structure, and economy as portrayed through the architecture and grounds. The faculty members involved will be briefed on the Core Documents needed for accreditation. The program will support five graduate students to facilitate the work of the Initiative. The types of annual projects include the following:
  - Research on the architecture and contextualization of its use by various groups of people.
  - Recommendations on the current use of museum objects and suggestions.
  - Short (20-minute) video which updates the volunteers on specific topics and language.
  - Updated research and appropriate scripts for use by volunteers.
  - Submission of a report done over the academic year, including an abbreviated version for the museum's website.
  - A 20-minute presentation to the Board of Trustees, Provost, and appropriate members of LSU leadership.

### **Plantation Museum Collaborative and Bi-Annual Symposium**

- In conjunction with LSU, the Rural Life Museum will seek partners such as the Louisiana Office of Tourism, National Historic Landmarks, National Register of Historic Places, and American Alliance of Museums to convene a symposium on interpretation and excellence.
  - The Interpretation and Education Faculty Initiative will organize the event and secure a conference director to assure continuity.
  - The Rural Life Museum and LSU will seek funding for the conference and distribute the conference findings.
  - On-site training for staff and volunteers will be a feature of the conference to promulgate best practices.
  - The target year for the first conference would be 2023.

### **Community Engagement – The Pilgrimage**

- The Rural Life Museum will use its collection of buildings and objects to fashion a series of festival-type public programs to honor and celebrate Louisiana’s cross-section of cultural, economic, and religious practices. The engagement of regional residents and the tourism industry will be shaped by comments gathered through the Reimagining & Expanding Interpretation initiative surveys. The formation of a Community Engagement Committee with a paid facilitator will provide the professionalism and objectivity to develop reflective, contemporary, and viable programs. The types of gathering themes would include these:

## ROUSE CONSULTING – RECOMMENDATIONS

- Honoring the communities, general and specific, represented in the museum with special recognition of those with active and historic connections such as the College Grove Baptist Association.
- Resilience – Enslavement and Survival
- Environmental Change and Land Use
- Architecture
- Folklore
- Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) – The Plantation as a Model

The goal would be for the public to embrace the LSU Rural Life Museum as a site where various topics are remembered and celebrated annually.

### **Source:**

“Pledge of Excellence.” American Alliance of Museums. 2019. <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/accreditation-excellence-programs/pledge-of-excellence/>.



## **CLOSING STATEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **WILLIAM STARK, DIRECTOR**

The Reimagining & Expanding Interpretation: Moving Towards Museum Accreditation project has benefited from the continued support of organizations and individuals who cherish the museum's grounds. These groups share a common goal among their many interests: a deep-seated desire for an ever-increasing number of the region's population and visiting tourists to discover kernels of Louisiana's history, thereby advancing the vision of Ione and Steele Burden and fulfilling the museum's purpose.

By recognizing the "hardships, toils, vision, inspiration and determination" of previous generations of Louisianans, we can better appreciate and portray the often beautiful, sometimes tragic, and always unique experience that is the blended culture of our state. And thanks to the following groups and individuals who supported and participated in our initiative, we now have a set of goals and recommendations that will empower us to tell that story even better.

#### **Foundations, Individual Donors, and In-Kind Contributors**

The LSU Rural Life Museum would like to thank the Burden Foundation and the J.Y. Sanders Foundation for supporting the development of this plan and the initial stages of its

## **CLOSING STATEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **WILLIAM STARK, DIRECTOR**

implementation. A special thank you is due to Henry Whitlow, CEO of Hudson Strategic Group and a visiting professor at the Clark Atlanta University School of Business Administration, for the generous donation of his time and expertise, which greatly improved the efficiency and process of the entire project. And a note of appreciation goes to all the individuals who have contributed to the David Floyd Fund for Museum Excellence, which supports initiatives – such as this one – to advance the LSU Rural Life Museum.

#### **The Many Project Participants**

Many people gave their valuable time to see this project come to fruition as well. Dr. Stacy Haynie, Dr. Jane Cassidy, and Dr. Dereck Rovaris, along with their offices and staff, provided considerable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the process. In addition, the LSU Rural Life Museum Board of Trustees, the Friends of the LSU Rural Life Museum, the Burden Foundation Board of Directors, and the museum's docents and staff all came forward to support and participate in the discussions. Because of these groups of dedicated individuals, the LSU Rural Life Museum is and will remain a successful museum and tourist destination, a center for student learning and research, and a valued community partner.

We also want to express our deep appreciation for everyone who participated in the listening sessions, the workshop, and individual tours and discussions, which all informed the core of the recommendations in this report. The participants included community members,

faculty from Louisiana State University and Southern University, K-12 teachers, tourism and museum professionals, and many others. There are far too many to provide a complete list of participants here. But we do want to acknowledge Veneeth Iyengar from the office of Mayor-President of Baton Rouge, Sharon Westin Broome, along with Laurie Adams, Dwight Hudson, and Liz Alch of the Metropolitan Council for recognizing the importance of the project for the Baton Rouge community and contributing their valuable time to the process.

#### **The Project Team**

Finally, we must thank the team that worked on this initiative to support meaningful outcomes for the museum and our visitors. Terrie S. Rouse-Rosario of Rouse Consulting, Inc. led the team and project through many discussions, pivots, and challenges to keep us all moving toward the final goal. Dr. Joyce M. Jackson led the workshop and served as a key connection with LSU and the academic community. Henry Whitlow, whose contribution I mentioned earlier, went above and beyond to make sure that the project used GroupMind technology to its greatest advantage. Antonia S. Ingram provided considerable behind-the-scenes support coordinating the details and communicating with participants. Carrie Couvillon provided assistance to many of our participants, ensuring that we brought in a maximum number of responses. Malcolm Rouse - West and Brenda L. Marshall provided layout design and editing services, respectively, for the final product.

**HIGHER QUANTITY OF WELL-DEVELOPED PROGRAMS**

**VIRTUAL TOURS FOR CLASSES**

**CLASS**

**LSU ROADMAP**





MAY 2021 FINAL REPORT



REIMAGINING & EXPANDING INTERPRETATION:  
**MOVING TOWARDS  
MUSEUM ACCREDITATION**

