

Director Statement

I grew up with the “cheerful designs” of the zip coon, mammy, buck, sambo, pickaninny, and blackface characters portrayed in subservient roles and mocking caricatures. From Uncle Remus and Aunt Jemima on cereal boxes and syrup bottles for breakfast, the Little Rascals, Shirley Temple and Bugs Bunny in blackface on Saturday morning TV, to Uncle Bens staring at me from the cupboards for dinner – these exaggerated and demeaning representations of African Americans were alien to the hard working and dignified people I knew.

I once thought it possible to eradicate these images from the stream of commerce and curb peoples’ insatiable appetite for black memorabilia. I had underestimated the enormity of the problem. This was not simply a matter of rummaging through boxes of buried treasures at antique shops in hopes of unearthing one or two “jolly nigger banks.” The marketplace for black memorabilia was and remains in high demand. Flea markets, antique stores and online auctioneers are all in the lucrative trade of buying and selling black memorabilia; often sparking fierce bidding wars that place most original artifacts out of reach for the average consumer. Manufacturers in China and elsewhere in the world reproduce these objects to satisfy America’s long-standing intrigue and demand for black memorabilia. The ever presence of these artifacts has also led some to literally assume the identities of these caricatures in an attempt to combat the harmful messages they can perpetuate.