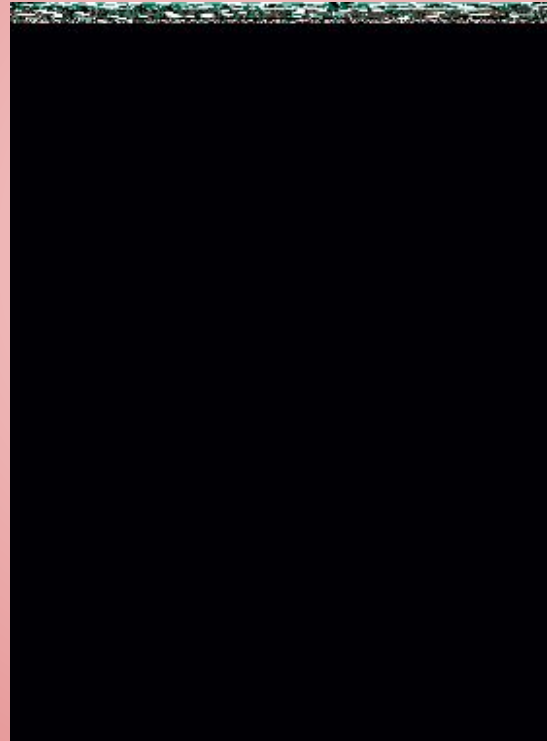


THE NEW YORKER AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE: REPRESENTATION, CONTROVERSY, AND CONTRIBUTIONS



AFRICAN-AMERICAN REPRESENTATION

A PROGRESSION



REPRESENTATION IN CARTOONS

IN THE BEGINNING THE NEW YORKER STRAYED AWAY FROM RACE AS A TOPIC. SCOURING THROUGH VINTAGE NEW YORKER MAGAZINES LED TO FEW LEADS, TEMPTING ME TO ALMOST ABANDON THE SUBJECT. HOWEVER, AN ARTICLE ABOUT CARTOON REPRESENTATION ALLOWED ME TO UNDERSTAND HOW OFTEN AFRICAN-AMERICANS WERE VISUALLY DEPICTED IN THE EARLY YEARS.

IT MUST BE SAID THAT THIS INFORMATION WAS HARD TO FIND. IT SEEMS AS IF THERE ISN'T A DEMAND FOR THIS RESEARCH.



"FROM RACISM TO TOKENISM: THE CHANGING FACE OF BLACKS IN NEW YORKER CARTOONS"

- THE NEW YORKER SEEMED TO STRAY AWAY FROM THE TOPIC OF RACE, BEING THAT IT WAS GEARED TOWARD UPPER TO UPPER MIDDLE CLASS, WHITE, AND LITERATE NEW YORKERS
- WHEN BLACKS DID APPEAR, IT WAS IN STEREOTYPICAL ROLES, OR BUT OF RACIST JOKES. ONLY ONE CARTOON IN 40 YEARS FEATURED A BLACK CHARACTER WHOSE RACE WAS NOT THE FOCUS
- AFTER THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, SURPRISINGLY THE NUMBER OF BLACK SUBJECTS IN CARTOONS DECREASED.

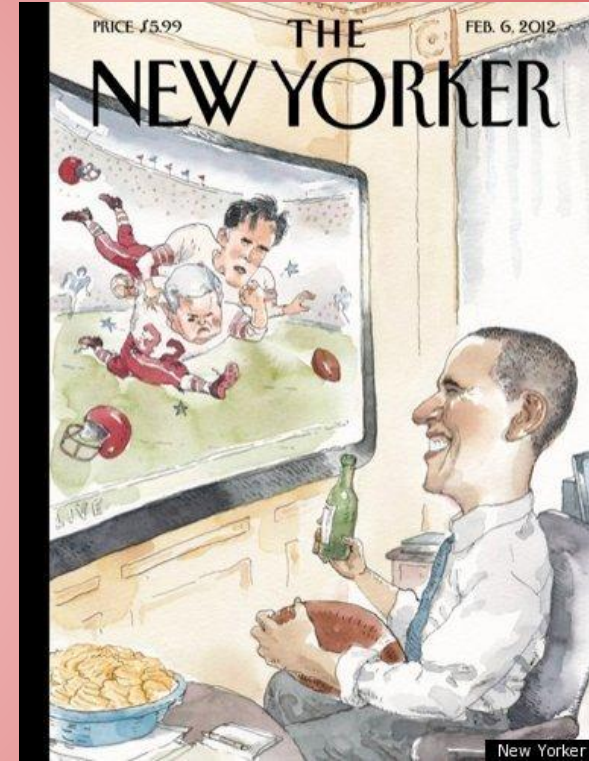


"Miranda, I thought you'd be interested in this... by your people, you know—such significant solidity... such a surface... how do you do it?"

KEEP IN MIND, HOWEVER THAT THE STUDY WAS FROM 1946-87. THE REPRESENTATION OF BLACK PEOPLE IN POSITIVE ROLES HAS SINCE, THEN (ESPECIALLY AFTER THE ELECTION OF BARACK OBAMA IN 2008, INCREASED, ALONG WITH THE NUMBER OF BLACK PEOPLE ON THE COVER.

I COULD FIND NO MAJOR RESEARCH ON REPRESENTATION OF BLACK PEOPLE IN THE NEW YORKER OVER RECENT YEARS, BUT WHILE IT WAS HARD TO FIND A BLACK PERSON DEPICTED AT ALL IN EARLIER ISSUES (PRE-2000S/2010S), TODAY THERE SEEMS TO BE NO SHORTAGE OF BLACK CHARACTERS, WITH OR WITHOUT RACE AS THE CENTERPIECE

THE NEW YORKER ORIGINALLY DIDN'T SEEM TO TAKE MUCH OF A STANCE ON RACE, HOWEVER THE STAFF IS LIBERAL LEANING AND HAS FEATURED PIECES POKING FUN AT RACISTS, SUCH AS THE FICTION PIECE "ARRANGEMENT IN BLACK AND WHITE."



EXAMPLES OF POKING FUN AT RACISTS:



"Miranda, I thought you'd be interested in this... by your people, you know—such significant solidity... such a surface... how do you do it?"

ARRANGEMENT IN BLACK AND WHITE

THE woman with the pink velvet pappas wreathed round the auburn gold of her hair traversed the crowded room at an interesting gait combining a skip with a side, and clutched the lean arm of her host.

"Now I got you!" she said. "Now you can't get away!"

"Why, hello," said her host. "Well. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm finely," she said. "Just simply finely. Listen. I want you to do me the most terrible favor. Will you? Will you please? Pretty please?"

"What is it?" said her host.

"Listen," she said. "I want to meet Walter Williams. Honestly, I'm just simply crazy about that man. Oh, when he sings! When he sings those spirituals! Well, I said to Burton, 'It's a good thing for you Walter Williams is colored,' I said, 'or you'd have lots of reason to be jealous.' I'd really love to meet him. I'd like to tell him I've heard him sing. Will you be an angel and introduce me to him?"

"Why, certainly," said her host. "I thought you'd met him. The party's for him. Where is he, anyway?"

"He's over there by the bookcase," she said. "Let's wait till those people get through talking to him. Well, I think you're simply marvellous, giving this perfectly marvellous party for him, and having him meet all these white people, and all. Isn't he terribly grateful?"

"I hope not," said her host.

"I think it's really terribly nice," she said. "I do. I don't see why on earth it isn't perfectly all right to meet colored people. I haven't any feeling at all about it—not one single bit. Burton—oh, he's just the other way. Well, you know, he comes from Virginia, and you know how they are."

"Did he come tonight?" said her host.

"No, he couldn't," she said. "I'm a regular grass widow tonight. I told



him when I left. 'There's no telling what I'll do,' I said. He was just so tired out, he couldn't move. Isn't it a shame?"

"Ah," said her host.

"Wait till I tell him I met Walter Williams!" she said. "He'll just about die. Oh, we have more arguments about colored people. I talk to him like I don't know what. I get so excited. 'Oh, don't be so silly,' I say. But I must say for Burton, he's leagues broader-minded than lots of these Southerners. He's really as fully fond of colored people. Well, he says himself, he wouldn't have white servants. And you know, he had this old colored nurse, this regular old nigger mammy, and he just simply loves her. Why, every time he goes home, he goes out in the kitchen to see her. He does, really, to this day. All he says is, he says he hasn't got a word to say against colored people as long as they keep their place. He's always doing things for them—giving them clothes and I don't know what all. The only thing he says, he says he wouldn't sit down at the table with one for a million dollars. 'Oh, I say to him, 'you make me sick, talking like that.' I'm just terrible to him. Aren't I terrible?"

"Oh, no, no, no," said her host.

"No, no."

"I am," she said. "I know I am. Poor Burton! Now, me, I don't feel that way at all. I haven't the slightest feeling about colored people. Why, I'm just crazy about some of them. They're just like children—just as easy-going, and always singing and laughing and everything. Aren't they the happiest things you ever saw in your life? Honestly, it makes me laugh just to hear them. Oh, I like them. I really do. Well, now, listen, I have this colored laundress, I've had her for years, and I'm devoted to her. She's a real character. And I want to tell you, I think of her as my friend. That's the way I think of her. As I say to Burton, 'Well, for Heaven's sakes, we're all human beings! Aren't we?'"

"Yes," said her host. "Yes, indeed."

"Now this Walter Williams," she said. "I think a man like that's a real artist. I do. I think he deserves an awful lot of credit. Goodness, I'm so crazy about music or anything. I don't care what color he is. I honestly think if a person's an artist, nobody ought to have any feeling at all about meeting them. That's absolutely what I say to Burton. Don't you think I'm right?"

"Yes," said her host. "Oh, yes."

"That's the way I feel," she said. "I just can't understand people being narrow-minded. Why, I absolutely think it's a privilege to meet a man like Walter Williams. Now, I do. I haven't any feeling at all. Well, my goodness, the good Lord made him, just the same as He did any of us. Didn't He?"

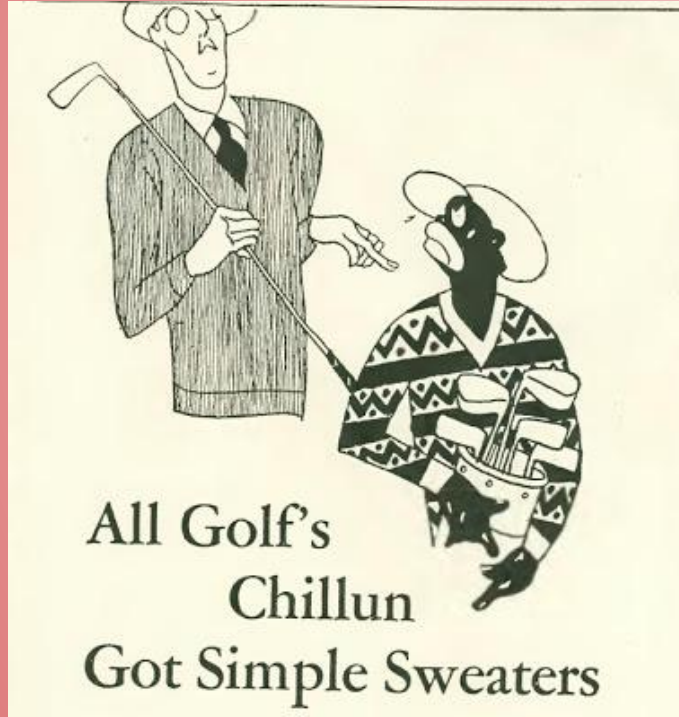
"Surely," said her host. "Yes, indeed."

"That's what I say," she said. "Oh, I get so furious when people are narrow-minded about colored people. It's just all I can do not to say something. Of course, I do admit when you get a bad colored man, they're simply terrible. But as I say to Burton, there are some bad white people, too, in this world. Aren't there?"

"I guess there are," said her host.

"Why, I'd really be glad to have a man like Walter Williams come to my house and sing for some one," she said. "Of course, I couldn't ask

HOWEVER, THE SAME MAGAZINE ALSO FEATURED THESE ADS AND DEPICTIONS



REPRESENTATION IN CONCLUSION:

THE NEW YORKER STRAYED AWAY FROM RACE, AT FIRST, AND IN THE PAST THIRTY YEARS HAVE INCREASED POSITIVE REPRESENTATION. THE PROGRESSION OF THE NEW YORKER SEEMS TO HAVE MIMICKED A SORT OF "WHITE LIBERAL" IDEOLOGY OVER THE YEARS, WHERE THEY NEITHER PROMOTED RACISM OR MADE ACTIVE CHANGES TO CHALLENGE IT. ALTHOUGH, THE MAGAZINE SEEMS TO POKE FUN AT SOME PREJUDICED INDIVIDUALS, IT ALSO LACKED SUBSTANTIAL REPRESENTATION FOR MANY YEARS, POSSIBLY TO AVOID ALIENATING AN AUDIENCE.





CONTROVERSY

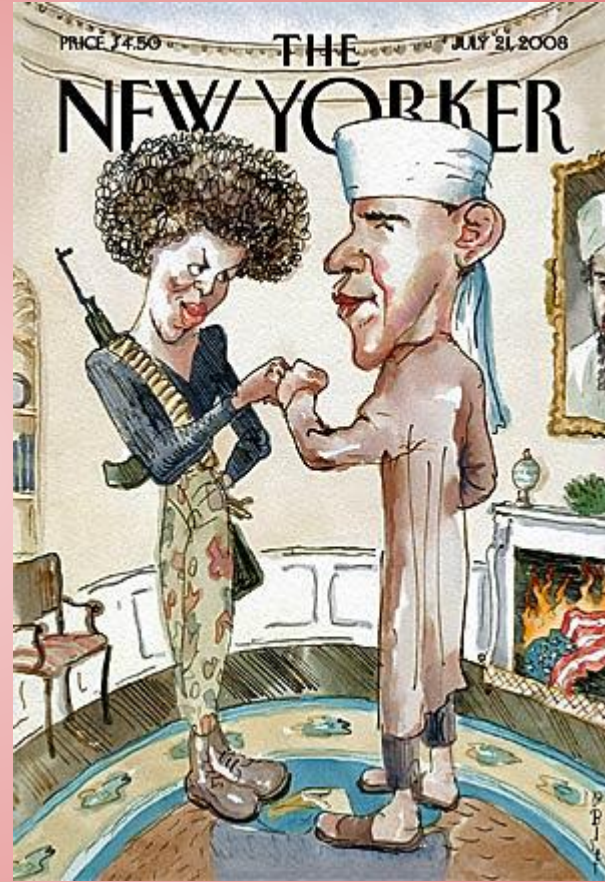
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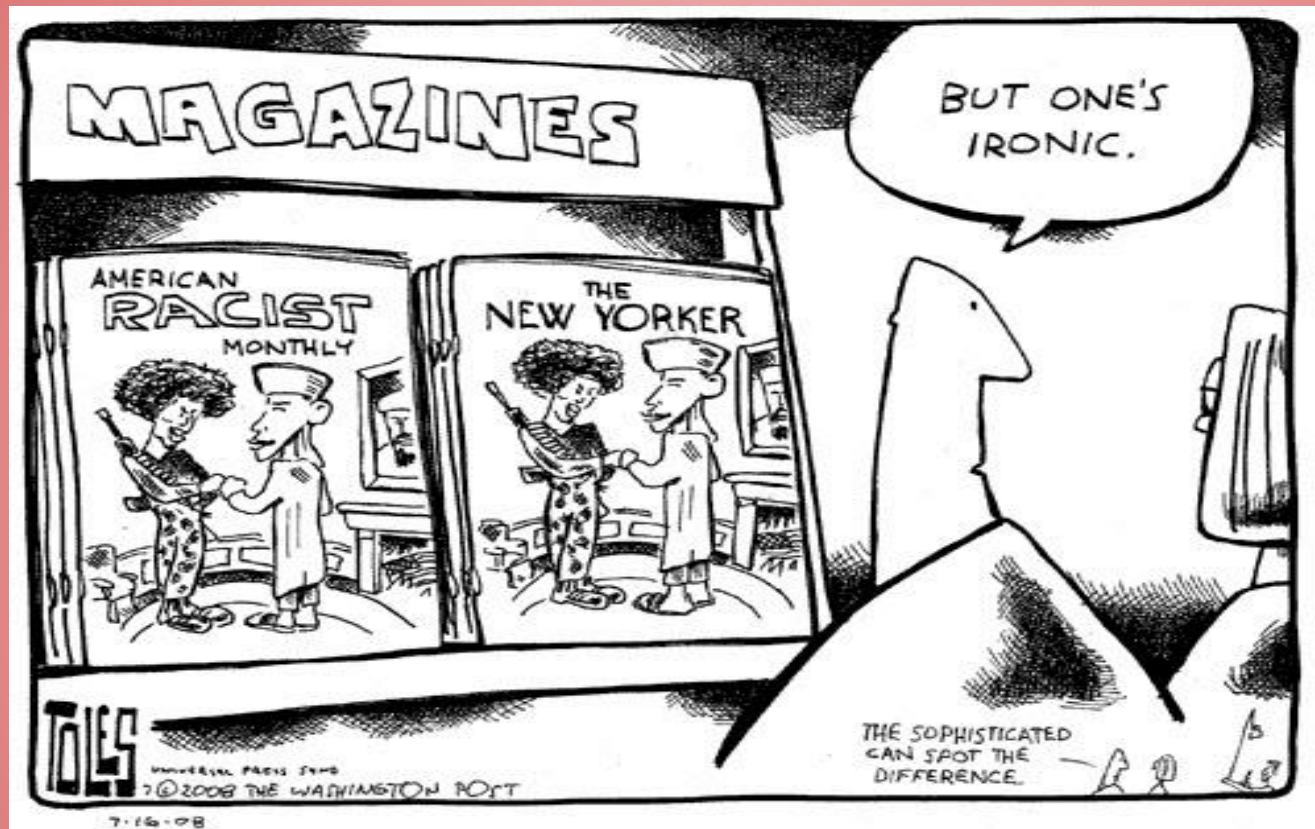
THE TEA IS HOT

THE OBAMA CONTROVERSY

THIS COVER RECEIVES BACKLASH FROM AUDIENCES, AFTER IT RELEASED THE JULY 21ST, 2008 COVER, WHICH WAS ALLEGEDLY A SATIRE OF FAR-RIGHT CONSPIRACIES CENTERING AROUND THE OBAMAS' WORKING WITH TERRORISTS.

ALTHOUGH, THE COVER MEANT WELL, IT WAS CRITICIZED AS BEING RACIALLY INSENSITIVE, AND POORLY THOUGHT-OUT, DUE TO THE RACIST DEPICTIONS OF PEOPLE OF COLOR IN THE PAST AND THE HISTORY OF RACISM IN AMERICA.



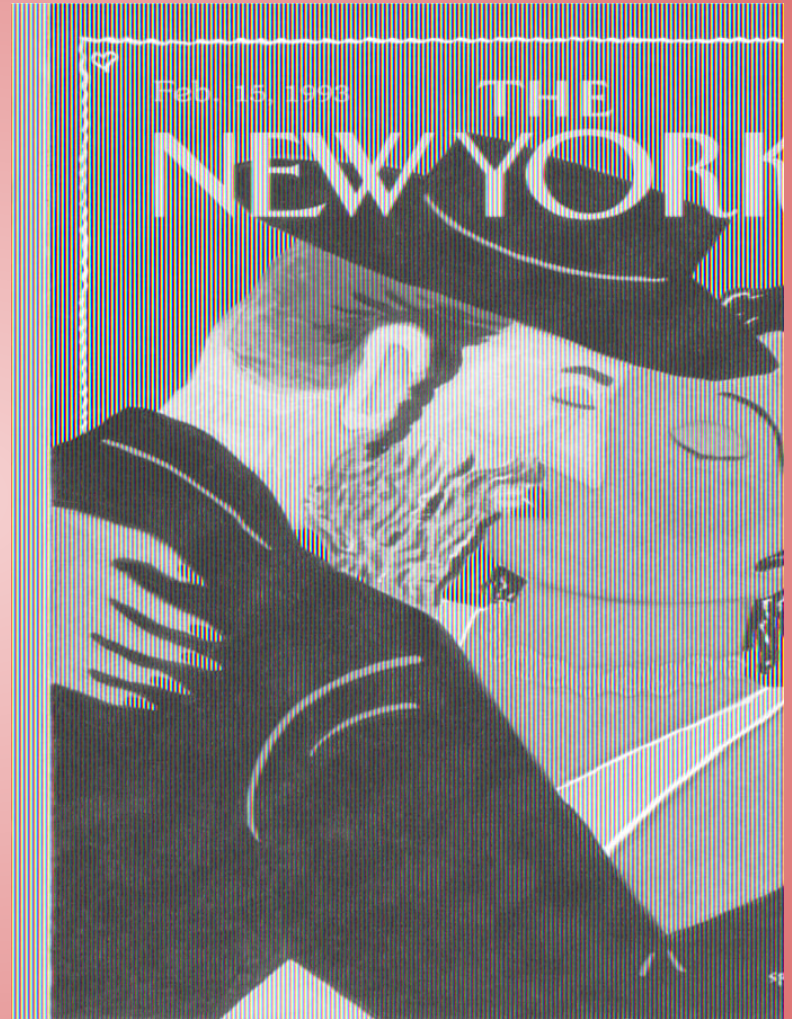


RESPONSE TO OBAMA COVER

HASIDIC KISS

THIS COVER REFERENCES THE TENSION BETWEEN THE HASIDIC JEWS AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, WHICH RESULTED IN TWO DEATHS. THIS COVER WAS MEANT TO INSPIRE, HOWEVER, IT CAME OFF AS INSENSITIVE. IT WAS CRITICIZED FOR SIMPLIFYING A COMPLEX RACIAL PROBLEM, BUT IT WAS MEANT TO IMAGINE "LOVE BEING REPLACED WITH HATE."

THE MAGAZINE WAS UNDER TINA BROWN'S DIRECTION AT THE TIME, AND THE COVER WAS MADE BY PULITZER PRIZE WINNER ART SPEIGELMAN.



CONTRIBUTORS



BLACK STAFF

BEFORE THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, THERE WERE NO BLACK STAFF WRITERS UNTIL THE NEW YORKER STAFF REALIZED THEY SHOULD PROBABLY GET SOME!

SINCE THEN, THERE HAS BEEN PLENTY OF BLACK STAFF ALTHOUGH CURRENTLY THERE ARE ONLY NINE OUT OF ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-NINE STAFF MEMBERS TODAY.



PROMINENT BLACK CONTRIBUTORS (NON-STAFF)

THE NEW YORKER HAS AN UNSURPRISINGLY LOW AMOUNT OF BLACK CONTRIBUTORS. MANY WRITERS WHO ARE CONSIDERED CANON IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE HAVE NEVER BEEN PUBLISHED IN THE NEW YORKER, ALTHOUGH THEY WERE ALIVE DURING THE TIME, SUCH AS: TONI MORRISON, NIKKI GIOVANNI, AMIRI BARAKA, MAYA ANGELOU, AUDRE LORDE ALICE WALKER, GWENDOLYN BROOKS, ZORA NEALE HURSTON, AND LANGSTON HUGHES AMONG COUNTLESS OTHERS...

HOWEVER, JAMES BALDWIN, JAMAICA KINCAID, AND TERRANCE HAYES ARE ONLY A HANDFUL MAJOR BLACK WRITERS WHO HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED IN THE NEW YORKER. UNFORTUNATELY, THERE IS NO WAY TO TELL THE TOTALITY OF BLACK CONTRIBUTORS, ALTHOUGH MANY WHITE AMERICAN WRITERS CONSIDERED IN THE ELITE LITERARY CANON HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED.



CONCLUSION

THE NEW YORKER HAS CERTAINLY INCREASED THE REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN, THOUGH THEIR BEHAVIOR TOWARDS RACISM SEEMS CRITICAL, THE NEW YORKER ALSO DOESN'T SEEM TO ATTRACT OR PUBLISH MANY BLACK CONTRIBUTORS. THE GOOD NEWS, IS THAT REPRESENTATION HAS INCREASED FOR BLACK AMERICANS IN THE NEW YORKER, BUT ONLY AFTER IT BECAME TABOO.

