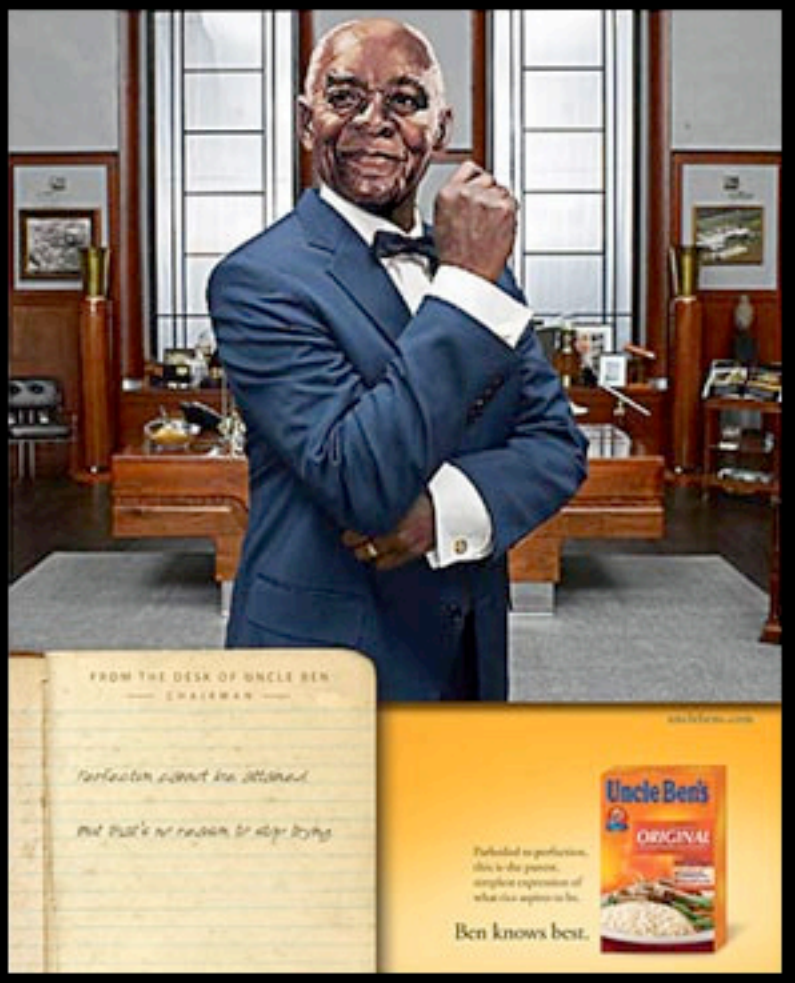
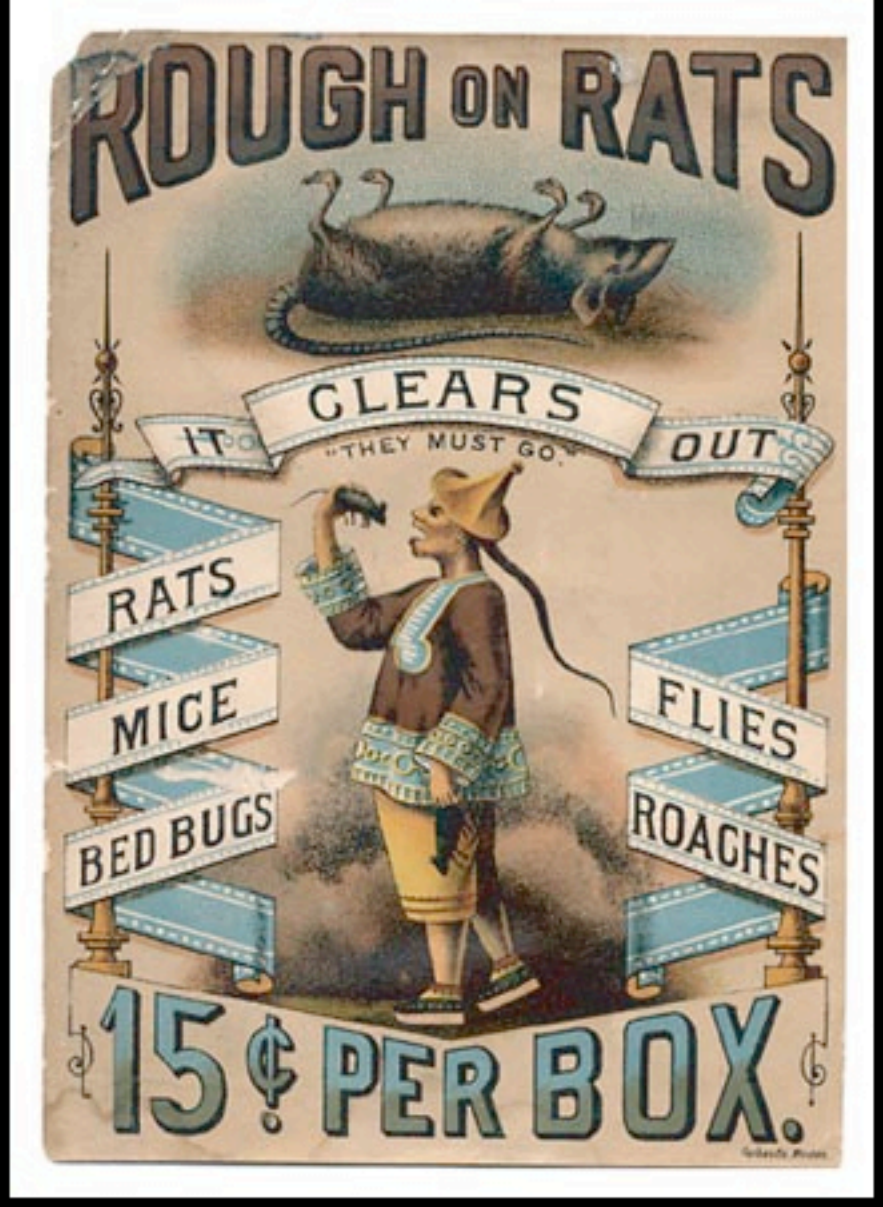
Well, look who's boss. After some 60 years of loyal service, Uncle Ben is being elevated from fictional cook to fictional CEO of the fictional Uncle Ben's Inc. Mars, which owns the brand, is about to spend $20 million on a campaign to spread the news. Visitors to "Ben's office" can take a tour of his virtual premises, a wood-paneled suite with a Mac and a leather chair. But what's amazing about this guy isn't his fake promotion—it's that he still has a job at all. Uncle Ben is a rare survivor in the once-crowded world of racist spokescharacters. Most of his contemporaries were fired a long time ago.



Newspaper ad and image of Uncle Ben in his office, Masterfoods USA.

Nasty stereotypes have helped move the merchandise for more than a century, and the history of their use and abuse offers a weird and telling glimpse of race relations in this country. Not surprisingly, the earliest instances were the most egregious. This circa-1900 ad for a rodent-control product called Rough on Rats doesn't just exploit the then-popular urban legend that Chinese people eat rats. It also underscores the intensity of American xenophobia of the day. There were anti-Chinese riots at the time, as well as legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act, a federal ban on immigration passed in 1882. (It was on the books until 1943.) In the ad, "They must go" refers both to the rodents and the Chinese.



Courtesy the Chinese Historical Society of America.

Such virulence didn't last for long in the realm of commerce, but the image of the servile African-American soon became a popular motif in American marketing, one that's proved remarkably enduring. You're looking at the most successful example of them all. Aunt Jemima was dreamed up in 1889 by a white businessman who was inspired by a character at a minstrel show. Looking for a way to sell a self-rising pancake mix, Chris L. Rutt conceived a jolly ex-slave who lived on a Louisiana plantation and made

legendary flapjacks in the days "befo' de wah." Eventually, she'd be boycotted by the NAACP, attacked by Langston Hughes, and belittled by Public Enemy. But this quintessential "mammy"—a black woman who lives to nurture, clean, and cook for whites—was a marketing phenomenon from the start, mythologized in ads painted by N.C. Wyeth and impersonated by actors who toured around the country. One had a permanent residency at "Aunt Jemima's Pancake House" in Disneyland.

Aunt Jemima's male counterpart was the Tom, a simple, cheerful, and ambition-free butler and cook. In the South, the mammy and the Tom reflected a nostalgia for the days of slavery and served as an implicit argument for segregation: *If it's so bad, why are these people so happy, huh*? In the North, these characters were presented as the epitome of hospitality and were designed to make potential buyers feel pampered and privileged. It was a sales pitch that advertisers apparently couldn't resist. One study of national magazines in the '20s—the beginning of the Tom's heyday—found that fully half of all ads that featured a black man depicted him as a servant. Like Ben, many were given the honorific "Uncle," a word favored by Southerners who wanted to express respect in a society where calling a black man "Mister" was out of the question.

1947 ad courtesy Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia.

The Tom was uniquely American, but the culture of segregation in the United States made its way into English advertising in the grotesque form of the Golliwog. Like Aunt Jemima, this red-lipped gnome and superstar spokescharacter has roots in the minstrelsy. Created by Florence Kate Upton, the Golliwog got its start as the star of a series of books for children—based on a minstrel doll given to Upton as a child—and then gained fame as a sort of black-face answer to the teddy bear. Gollies were hugely popular with kids in Europe at the turn of the century; Nabokov rhapsodizes about his in *Speak, Memory*.

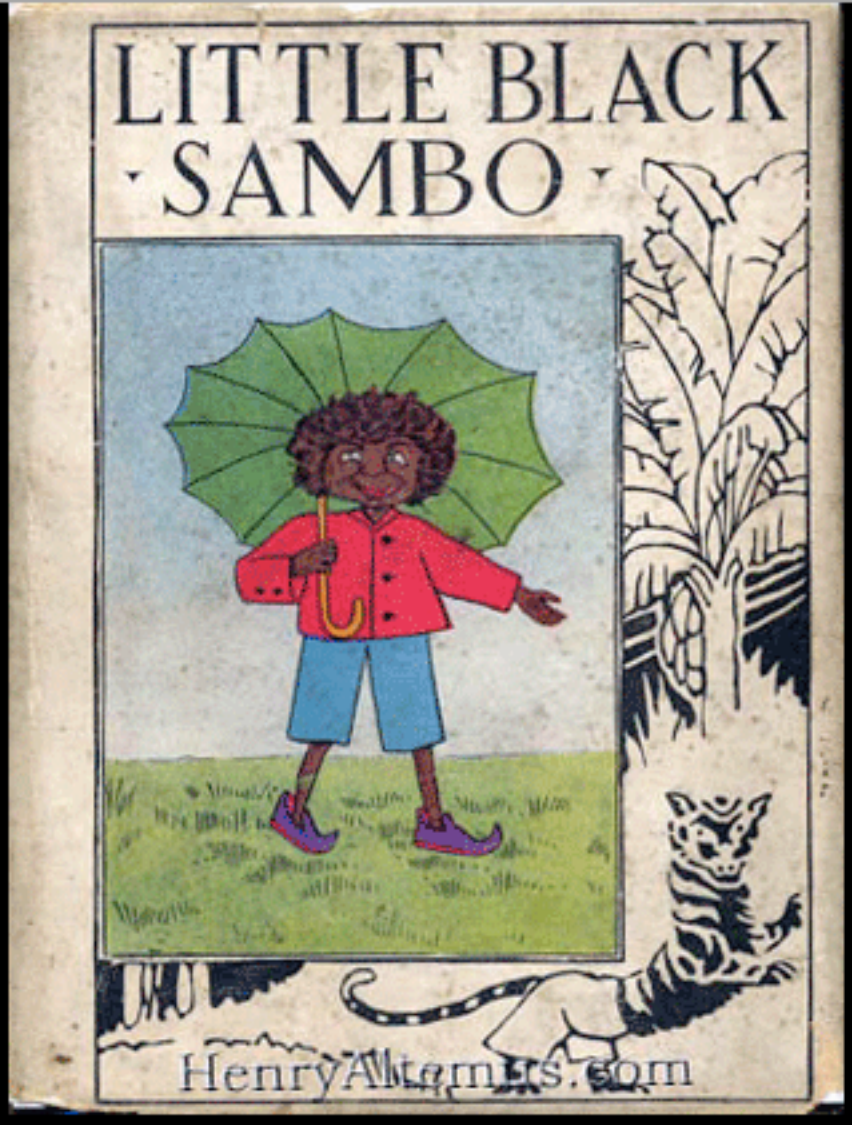
Courtesy Printcess Art Prints.

In 1910, a British jam maker named Robertson's began to feature the Golliwog on its jars and in its ads, a campaign that would last for decades. When the company offered brooches and pins to consumers who sent in proof-of-purchase tokens, Golliwog collecting became a British craze. According to Robertson's, more than 20 million Golly pieces were eventually mailed out.

By midcentury, racial caricatures were so common that Sam Battistone and Newell Bohnett did something that now seems unthinkable: They launched a restaurant chain called "Sambo's." Apparently, neither man had Helen Bannerman's children's book *The Story of Little Black Sambo* in mind when they opened up shop in 1957—the term was just a mashup of their names. But the restaurants' walls were soon decorated with images based on the book, which tells the story of a child who outwits a tiger that has stolen his clothing. The setting for the tale is India, which explains the look of the lad on the Sambo's menu.

Courtesy Dan Goodsell.

Racial attitudes changed dramatically in the following years, though, and marketing concepts that were viable in the '50s soon became toxic. Bannerman clearly created something Golliwoggish when she illustrated the story, published in 1899, and well after the book lost its place in the kiddie canon, *Sambo* endured as a racial slur. So, as Sambo's Restaurant expanded and moved East in the '70s, the chain came under attack by state chapters of the NAACP, which had been protesting racism in popular culture since D.W Griffith's Klan-sympathetic film *Birth of a Nation*. In some states, Sambo's became No Place Like Sam's, but the controversy, plus serious fiscal mismanagement, doomed the company, which peaked in size with 1,200 restaurants. Today, there's is just one Sambo's left, the original in Santa Barbara, Calif.

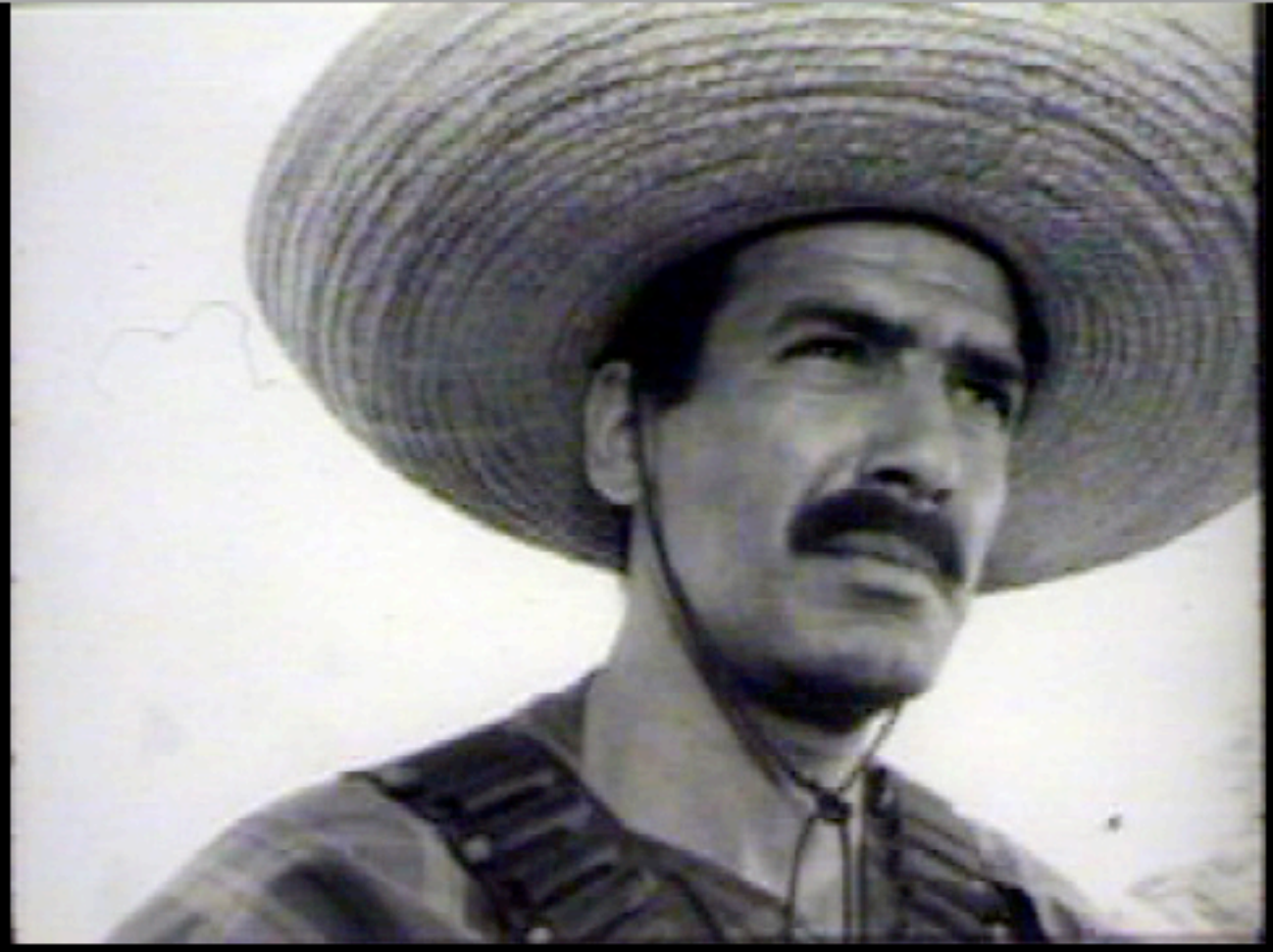


Courtesy Henry Altemus Company.

It was in the '60s that the fortunes of the racist spokestoon began to decline, in large measure because of changes brought on by the civil rights movement. The beginning of the end can be marked by the debut of Funny Face, Pillsbury's answer to the Kool-Aid craze. The brand was launched in 1964 and originally included these ill-advised goofballs. There is no record of a public outcry, but a year later, the two were quietly swapped for Choo Choo Cherry and Jolly Olly Orange.

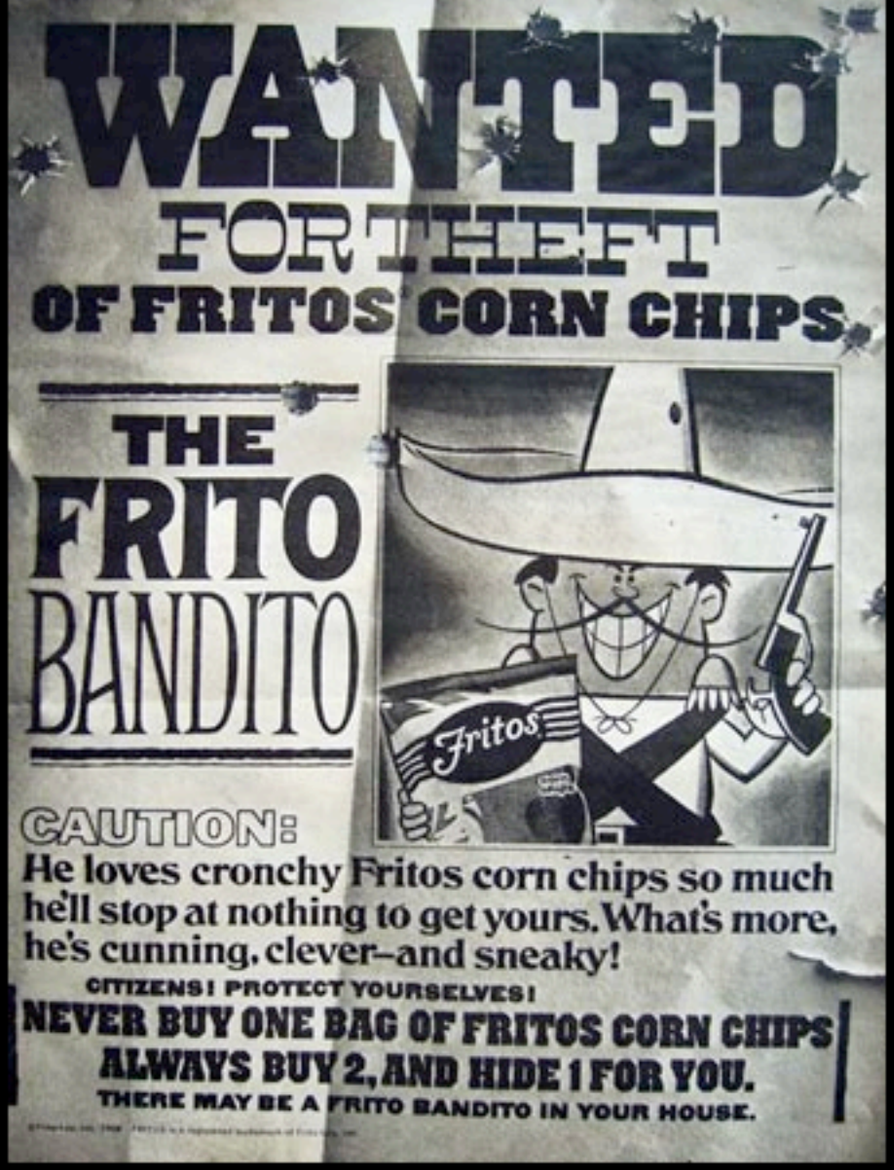
Courtesy Dan Goodsell.

Madison Avenue didn't give up on ethnic humor right away, however, and one comedic stereotype actually took off in the '60s: the lazy, larcenous Mexican. Liggett & Myers ran cigarette ads with a character named Paco, a man too sedentary to "feenish" anything, even the revolution he was supposed to be fighting. Napping or ransacking Mexicans showed up in ads for Frigidaire, Philco TVs, and Camel cigarettes. And those who weren't asleep or committing crimes apparently stank. This Mum deodorant ad featured the sweaty hombre you see on the right, who pauses a moment in midpillage to spray down his arm pits. "If it works for him," the narrator deadpans, "it will work for you."



Courtesy MacDonald & Associates.

This brigade of ruffians culminated with one of advertising's more memorable cash machines, the Frito Bandito. Armed, oily, and ravenous for your *cronchy* corn chips, the Bandito was a stickup man-slash-con artist with a ferocious appetite for his favorite salty snack. Introduced in 1967, he was a massive hit with kids. Quickly, though, he became a target for the Mexican American Anti-Defamation Committee, which wanted to end the ad world's love affair with south-of-the-border criminals. The group threatened litigation and filed a complaint with the FCC.



So, Frito Lay ordered a makeover. An ad firm was told to tidy up the Bandito, fix his teeth, and change his expression from sinister sneer to rascally grin. His guns were holstered, too, a response to the assassination of Robert Kennedy. Cartoon legend Mel Blanc (Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, etc.) provided the voice of the teeny outlaw, who had his own theme song about the joys of Frito thieving. But the MAADC was unmoved and prompted several television affiliates to ban the Bandito. In 1971, a House subcommittee made him the star of hearings about ethnic defamation on the airwaves. It wasn't long before Frito Lay pulled the campaign.

Courtesy Dan Goodsell.

Madison Avenue lost interest in playing ethnicity for laughs in the '70s, but spokescharacters of the deadpan variety popped up now and then. Case in point: Crazy Horse malt liquor, which was introduced in 1992. The estate of Crazy Horse and the Rosebud Sioux tribe were appalled; Crazy Horse was a teetotaler who'd preached abstinence, and the brand seemed to reinforce the idea that Native Americans are prone to alcoholism. Once again the company stuck with the product only for as long as the upside of cash flow outweighed the downside of adverse publicity. Stroh Brewery sold the brand and in 2001 apologized at a ceremony at the Rosebud Reservation, handing over "culturally appropriate" damages, which included seven racehorses and 32 braids of sweet grass. With less fanfare, the brand's second owners

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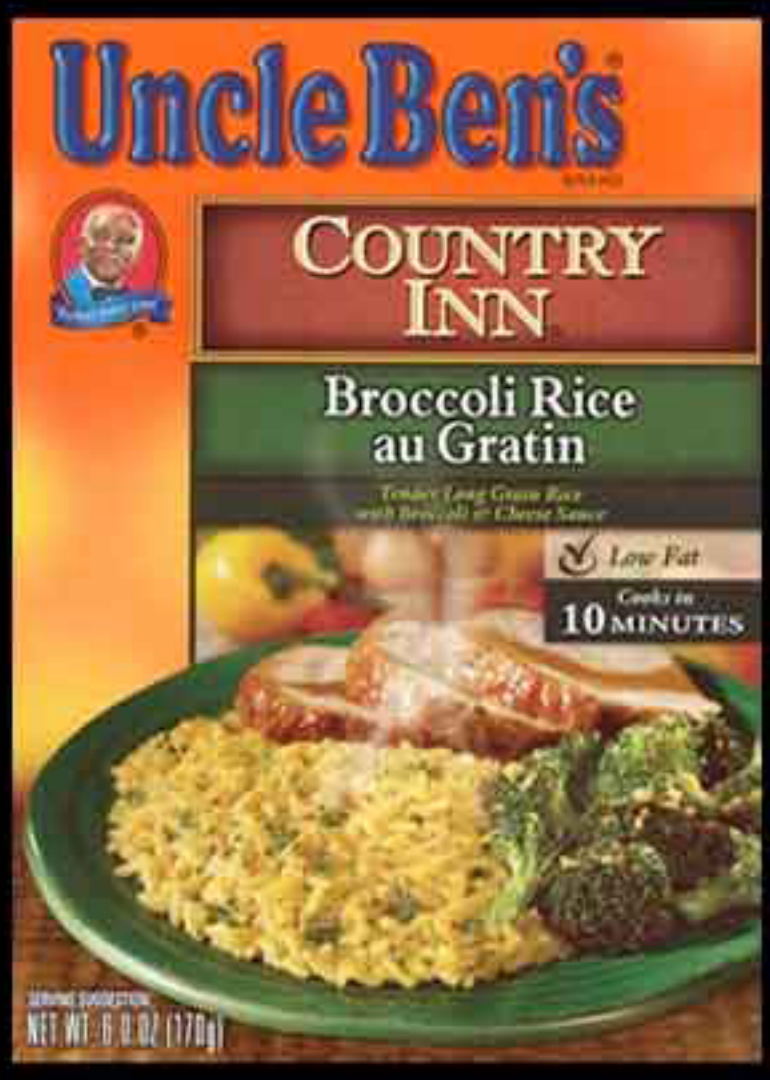
dropped Crazy Horse's face from the bottle and rechristened the beverage "Crazy Stallion" in 2004.

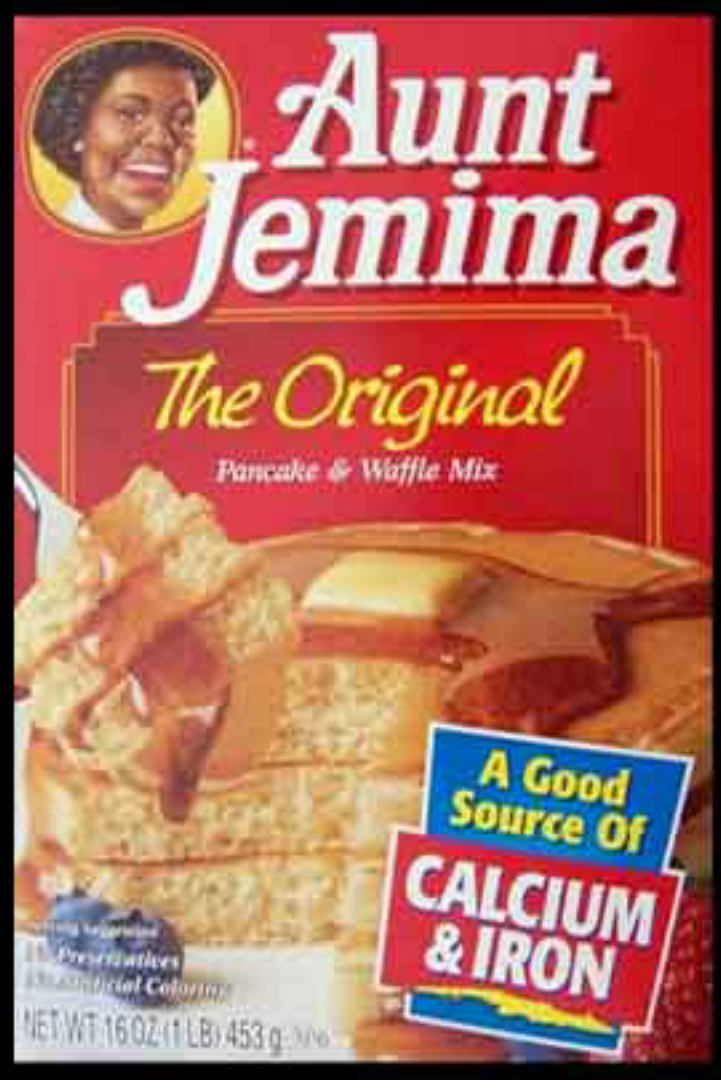
Whatever unwritten rules govern this realm clearly don't apply to caricatures that have been around for years—and that's doubly true of sports mascots. Behold Chief Wahoo, longtime mascot of the Cleveland Indians and still leering from team hats today. Shifty-eyed, devil-red, and grinning like a frat boy at an orgy, Wahoo was called "racist, degrading and demeaning" by the American Indian Education Center in Cleveland during one of many protests over the years. To no avail. Fans are dedicated to teams and their symbols in ways they rarely are to commercial products. Even here, though, the ground is shifting. The NCAA banned "hostile and abusive" mascots in 2005, prompting an outcry at places like the University of Illinois, which agonized about the fate of its Chief Illiniwek, who for halftime war dance at home games. Illinois relented, though, and in February, Illiniwek's headdress and buckskins were packed away for good.

The Golliwog survived until 2001, when Robertson's announced it would replace him with a few Roald Dahl characters. The company claimed that allegations of racism had nothing to do it—children simply no longer knew who the Golly was. Actually, by then the little cretin was a PR fiasco, the subject of several high-profile boycotts in the '90s. His most lasting legacy is a kazillion Golly-branded collectibles—check out what's for sale on Britain's eBay—and *wog*, the last syllable of his name and a racist term in England, usually referring to Pakistanis.

Courtesy Britannia Collectibles eBay Store.

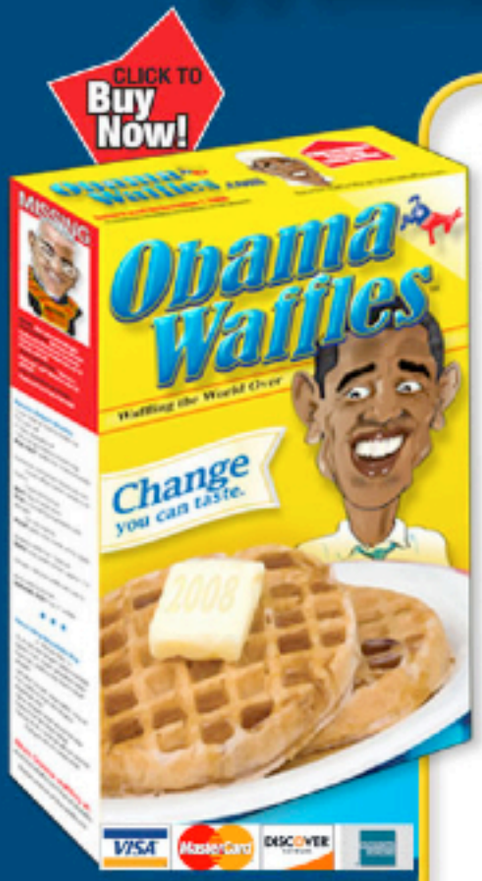
And yet this man just got an imaginary raise, and Aunt Jemima still smiles on boxes from sea to shining sea. What gives? Uncle Ben's owners have managed him carefully over the years, raising and lowering his profile depending on mores of the day, and removing his image from the box entirely during the civil rights era. Aunt Jemima survived courtesy of a series of timely makeovers, including the one in 1989 that turned her into this pearl-wearing, Betty Crockerish grandma. Such tinkering has kept the outrage surrounding this ur-Tom and ur-mammy limited to African-American activists, and in the absence of a groundswell of black anger, the general public never felt guilted into buying a different brand. Today, no company would be dumb enough to build a brand around a black servant, but the ones now in supermarkets have been grandfathered in, rendered innocuous by the passage of time, image overhauls, and judicious wardrobe adjustments. But it's worth remembering what these spokescharacters truly are: a final, living vestige of Jim Crow America.





Obama Waffles℠

Waffling the World Over℠



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- The souvenir conservatives crave . . . and liberals dread
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Whether you're clinging to God and your guns in Pennsylvania or just hungry for a change in one of the other 57 states, Obama Waffles are what the world is craving. Don't delay. Order today! **Only $9.99 each!** Or take advantage of our **Sarah Palin** special: **Buy 2 get 1 free.**

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Bon Appétit!