

# Aunt Jemima Will Change Name, Image As Brands Confront Racial Stereotypes



“We recognize Aunt Jemima’s origins are based on a racial stereotype,” parent company Quaker Foods says, announcing plans to change the brand’s logo and name. Donald King/AP

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Aunt Jemima will change its name and logo, acknowledging the brand’s origins rooted in a racial stereotype, which harkens back to nostalgia for the South in the times of slavery.

Toward the end of 2020, the 130-year-old pancake and syrup brand will remove the image of “Aunt Jemima” from packaging, parent companies Quaker Foods, and PepsiCo said on Wednesday. The name change will follow.

“We recognize Aunt Jemima’s origins are based on a racial stereotype,” Kristin Kroepfl, chief marketing officer at Quaker Foods North America, said in a statement. “While work has been done over the years to update the brand in a manner intended to be appropriate and respectful, we realize those changes are not enough.”

Following the news, food giant Mars also said it’s “evaluating all possibilities” for changing its Uncle Ben’s brand, which has long been criticized as a stereotype.

“As a global brand, we know we have a responsibility to take a stand in helping to put an end to racial bias and injustices,” Mars said in a statement on Wednesday. “We recognize that now is the right time to evolve the Uncle Ben’s brand, including its visual brand identity, which we will do.”

Conagra also said on Wednesday that it has “begun a complete brand and packaging review” of Mrs. Butterworth’s syrup, adding: “We stand in solidarity with our Black and Brown communities and we can see that our packaging may be interpreted in a way that is wholly inconsistent with our values.”

These are the latest in a string of reactions from large corporations and marketers to the wave of protests against racial injustice and disparities, which began after the killing of George Floyd.

In recent days, several companies including Target and Nike have recognized Juneteenth as a holiday. NASCAR has banned the Confederate battle flag. HBO Max has temporarily shelved the film *Gone with the Wind* over its glorification of the antebellum South. Scores of brands have rushed to express solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, in some cases facing criticism of hypocrisy and lack of diversity among their leadership.

Calls for the Aunt Jemima brand to change its branding date back years, cited on NPR for example in 1980. *Old Aunt Jemima* originated as a song of field slaves that was later performed at minstrel shows. “Aunt Jemima” was originally portrayed by Nancy Green, who was born into slavery.

“Aunt Jemima has her roots really in the minstrel era of the 19th century when dancing happy slaves were depicted on the stage, usually by whites in blackface,” Patricia Turner, then vice provost of undergraduate studies at U.C. Davis and a professor of African-American studies, told NPR’s Tell Me More in 2008.

In recent years, Quaker Foods has changed the image, for example removing the “mammy” headscarf from the depiction.

“Aunt Jemima advertising played on a certain type of nostalgia and a certain type of racial nostalgia, particularly in the first half of the 20th century about how great plantation life was and how great it was to literally have someone like Aunt Jemima who would make the pancakes or whatever for you,” Maurice Manring, author of *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*, told NPR in 2007.

PepsiCo and Quaker Foods say they “acknowledge the brand has not progressed enough to appropriately reflect the confidence, warmth, and dignity that we would like it to stand for today.” The brand now also plans to donate at least \$5 million over five years “to create meaningful, ongoing support and engagement in the Black community.”

Both Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben’s have also been criticized for relying on titles “aunt” and “uncle,” which historically were used by people who resisted applying the honorific “Mr.” or “Ms.” to an African American person.

The Uncle Ben’s logo since the 1940s has featured an elderly black man, who originally wore a bow tie evocative of a servant. In 2007, Mars staged a rebranding ad campaign that “promoted” the character of Ben to chairman of a rice company, to mixed response.

Mars on Wednesday said it does not yet know when or how exactly it will change its Uncle Ben’s brand, but added that “to make the systemic change needed, it’s going to take a collective effort from all of us – individuals, communities and organizations of all sizes around the world.”

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Source:

<https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/06/17/879104818/acknowledging-racial-stereotype-aunt-jemima-will-change-brand-name-and-image>

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