



...the e-newsletter of the Ethnic Arts Council

june/july 2009

Selling Black in Color

Stereotyping the "other" in early 20th century German advertising

By Wolfgang Schlink

American consumers love Aunt Jemima, human synonym for pancake mix. Modeled in 1890 after the clichéd image of the loyal black maid, Jemima stands for racial nostalgia from the times of slavery. In fact, former slave Nancy Green was the first pancake spokesperson for the R.T. Davis Milling Company. In her role as Jemima she operated - a precursor to today's TV food entertainers - cooking displays at trade shows fanfared by the Aunt Jemima slogan, "I'se in Town, Honey!". Jemima represents dependable, ready-made foods, i.e. labor-saving products that make the lives of suburban white housewives easy. In the olden days kitchen chores were the job of black servants. Now the subliminal message would be, "You can't have me anymore, but you can have my recipes".



For her 100th birthday, Aunt Jemima's (trademark-)owners gave her a semi-radical makeover. Employing political correctness, she would now lose her head rag, show off a perm, sport pearl earrings and a lace collar. Think Hattie McDaniel's *Gone with the Wind* "mammy" character morphed into a Clair Huxtable-type role of *The Cosby Show*. If you like the Aunt Jemima portrayal or not, she has been a success story for Madison Avenue and for Quaker Oats (now part of PepsiCo). She ranks among the top ten American advertising icons in terms of brand awareness, part of the elite group that includes the Marlboro man and the Energizer bunny.

On the other side of the Atlantic, early 20th century Germany could not indulge in slavery nostalgia, nor was there a need for niche-marketing to a significant black ethnic minority. It did not exist. Yet, time and again images of blacks were used in the advertising for a broad variety of products. The most popular ad medium at the time was the advertising stamp, the a-bit-larger-than-a-postage-stamp poster, initially used as a seal on the back of envelopes. Soon these advertising stamps (*Reklamemarken*) became popular collectors' items. The years 1900-1914 were the heydays of advertising stamps in Germany. Most everyone - small store, special event organizer, or large company - pressed the mini-poster into service as an effective, inexpensive marketing tool. The imagery shown on these stamps is a captivating reflection - embellished by the dream world of advertising - of that time, its people, and its worldview. Quite a few men must have been bald-headed and overweight (slim dogs, though) reminiscent of characters in the oeuvre of George Grosz. Or they appear trim and





attractive, dressed in evening attire and the de rigueur monocle, ready to go to the opera. So look the stylish, slender women at their side. Affluent ladies of the house had maids to serve their morning coffee, or to shine their daughters' shoes. Wealthy men employed drivers who cleaned up with "chauffeur soap". And kids(!) were suitable enough to promote smoking.

The Moor allure

How did German advertisers so frequently employ the image of the black? In contrast to the Americas, Europe had not been a destination for the slave trade, although it had been harboring its biggest profiteers. Yet the black servant, the Moorish page (*Mohrenpage*), had become a standard feature at European courts and in the households of noble families soon after the discovery of Africa's west coast by the Portuguese in the mid-1400s. As such he was portrayed as an offspring of the Moors. They were the (pre-dominantly) dark skinned Arab-Muslim people of northern Africa whose advance into central Europe had been stopped by the troops of Karl Martell at Tours and Poitiers in 732. Still, Moorish culture and continuing presence in southern Spain remained a significant influence until the completion of the Catholic *reconquista* in 1492.



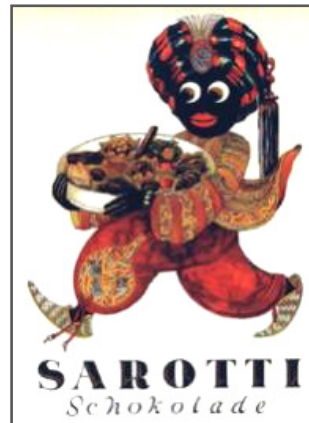
The Moorish page, often dressed in Turkish fantasy garb and thus transformed into an afro-oriental amalgamation, stood for the cute exotic child attendant. Always at service, he appeared in his many roles as a poster child for a culinary fair, a presenter of shoe polish, or as an advertiser for margarine.

In a 1922 shaving cream advertisement a black servant held the mirror for his "Indiana Jones". And, adding insult to injury, a black servant was showing off - what were they thinking? - Sauermann's Bavarian pork delicacies.





Germany's best known advertising icon, the Sarotti Mohr, was trademarked in 1922. The googly-eyed child presenter of chocolate and pralines personified a winning combination for his target consumers. The employed small child pattern (*Kindchenschema*) - wide eyes, large head, and short limbs – would appeal to the protective instincts of women and the cuddly love of children for decades to come.



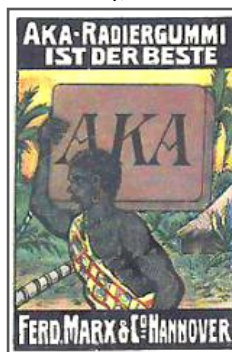
Europe had another, often overlooked source for the visual employment of the Moor. He was a Catholic saint, St. Maurice. Mauritius (his Latin name), the saga goes, was the dark skinned commander of the Theban Legion ordered around 280 AD from its base in Egypt to quash an insurgency against Roman rule in Gaul, today's France. Per one version of the legend, there are others, Mauritius suffered a martyr's death in southern Switzerland around 300 AD. He and his predominantly Christian soldiers had refused to pay homage to the Roman pagan gods. Mauritius became the first black saint of medieval Europe, the patron of many cities (see coat of arms of the city of Coburg in Bavaria, far left), churches, and monasteries. He also served as the venerated protector of soldiers, sword smiths, and tanners. His image, sculpted in stone in circa 1250 AD, to this day adorns the cathedral of Germany's Magdeburg.



Selling colonial pride

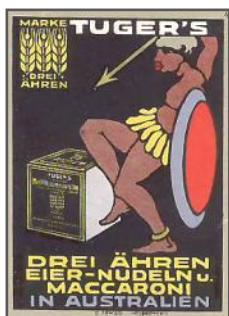
By the late 19th century, the image of black Africans was significantly influenced by Germany's acquisition of overseas colonies, a movement that began in 1884/1885 at the Berlin Congo Conference and came to an abrupt halt in 1918 at the end of WWI. Overseas possessions were euphemistically called "protectorates". For Africa, the "official" objective was the defense of the indigenous population against the threats of Muslim slave traders, the protection of the natives from themselves, or the safeguard of German trading companies against hostilities. Soon military force, though, was employed to quell local uprisings or to defend newly claimed territory against rivaling European nations. Colonialism made the turn into imperialism. It had enthusiastic support from large parts of the population. By 1890, the proud *Jeopardy!* answer to the "Germany's highest mountain"- question was, "What is Mount Kilimanjaro".

German colonies delivered welcome exotic produce (*Kolonialwaren*), like coffee from Tanzania (then *Deutsch-Ostafrika*), cocoa and rubber from Cameroon, palm oil for margarine production from Togo and Samoa, and tobacco from New Guinea. Germany, a latecomer to colonialism, had finally established its proverbial "Place in the sun" among other European powers.





Colonialism was not just about easy access to unusual wares or raw materials. The creation of export markets in far-away locales was equally important. German macaroni for Australian consumers and canned cheese for Papua New Guinea are examples for the export hype of the day. The freewheeling ethnographic imagination of the ad artists ran rampant by depicting an Aborigine in a Josephine Baker-style banana skirt and Zulu-type shield and a Papua tribesman wielding a boomerang. Or, go figure why a sugar pretzel would be called a “Kameruner, Marke: Alpenrausch” (Camerooner, Brand: Alpine Intoxication).



Marketing ethnocentrism

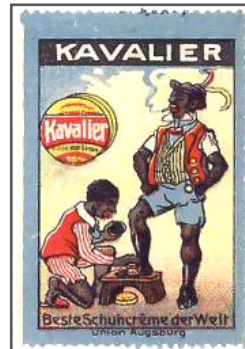
Some one-hundred years earlier (1790) German philosopher Immanuel Kant had introduced – virtually unchallenged - his ranking of races into the philosophical vocabulary of the late “Age of Enlightenment”. Race number one: White, followed by “yellow” Indian, then black, and in last place “red” American Indian. Consequently, the prevalent ethnocentric, pan-European view of the time assessed Africa’s native population as being lazy, dumb, and in need of re-education. Now, white colonial culture would make a difference, personified by the clichéd safari uniform-, pith helmet-clad, and riding crop-toting boss of the cocoa and coffee plantations.



Shoe polish ads represented the pinnacle of the disparaging depiction of native Africans. In a series of advertising stamps, Immalin showed a somewhat clueless African coming across an unknown yellow object in the desert. A precursor to the Coke bottle in “The Gods Must Be Crazy”? Finally, and under white supervision, he figures out that shoe polish lends an “ebony” luster to black bare feet. Competitor Kavalier (“Best Shoe Polish in the World”) went a tasteless step further by dressing a



black bare-footed shoeshine customer in a fantasy uniform sporting a touch of Bavarian Lederhosen. By 1885, German children learned to count by singing the popular nursery rhyme “Zehn kleine Negerlein” (Ten little niggers), an import from the U.S. that belittled blacks as careless and foolish.



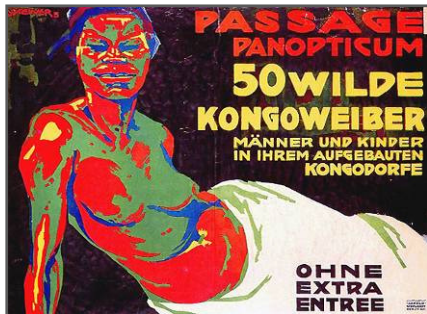


Yet there was the occasional voice of moderation. The wildly popular - and wildly violent - German children's book "Der Struwwelpeter" (*Slovenly Peter*) included the story of the "kohlpechrabenschwarzer Mohr" (*coal-pitch-raven-black young Moor*) in which three white lads keep mocking a black boy because of the color of his skin. As punishment, a larger than life St. Nicholas, the one who hates "rude ways and slang and sass", dunks the three urchins into a giant inkwell. Result and moral are captured in the final verse. Mark Twain - while living in Berlin in 1891 - translated into English what he called "the best known book in Germany":

*"You see them here as black as sin -
Much blacker than the Niggerkin -
The Moor a-marchin in the light,
The Ink-Blot following dark as night.
Now if they had but hid their glee,
They'd still be white and fair to see."*



A direct glimpse at the natives of Germany's colonies was provided by the ubiquitous ethnographic show (*Völkerschau*) often presented in a zoo or as part of a carnival or circus. Ethnographic shows had been en vogue in Europe since medieval times. Around 1880, organizers infused "authenticity" by presenting large African groups within their native cultural environment, including village life, dances, fights, food preparation, and so forth. The stir of these shows was thinly disguised by a



pseudo anthropological-ethnological appearance. The exotic participants were often measured and x-rayed, their language, songs, and dances recorded. In reality, though, these spectacles were demonstrations of ethnocentric supremacy. Hundreds of thousands of viewers attended these staged exhibitions, attracted, no doubt, to a large degree by black nudity on display, a sensation in prudish Wilhelminian Germany. The cliché of the black exotic-erotic proved to be a successful seller (see poster for a 1913 show in Berlin, left).

The colonies provided a treasure trove of tribal art. Scientific interest quickly melded with commercial presence. The Berlin Ethnological Museum used overseas trade agents to acquire Africa's material culture. The early critical assessment of Africa's aesthetics and craftsmanship ran the gamut from artistic brilliance (Benin bronzes) to utter ugliness and clumsy workmanship (West African sculpture). An effort by maverick art historian Carl Einstein in his 1915 publication "Negerplastik" to qualify the sculpture of the darkest continent without prejudice as "art" received mixed reviews. Interestingly, Carl Einstein presented the photographic images of African sculpture without any captions, ethnological context or provenance at all, revolutionary for his time and even today. The "upgrade" of African art in the eyes of Eurocentric art historians had to wait.

Post-colonialism

The loss of its colonies in the 1918 Treaty of Versailles took some steam off Germany's "selling black". In the Roaring Twenties the image of the "other" shifted to black entertainers, like jazz musicians and dancers. Ultimately, the 1933 Nazi Party's rise to power was a profound game changer for the advertising industry. It would now be controlled by the Ministry of Propaganda. Advertising had to be "German". Seductive images of exotic locales or people were not tolerated.



In 1934, the Catholic Moor in the coat of arms of the city of Coburg (see p.3) was replaced. The new design, the image of a sword brandishing the swastika on its pommel, was conceived by the Führer's personal draftsmanship. Thankfully, post-WWII Coburg has gotten its St. Mauritius back.

By 1938, the poster of the "Entartete Musik" (*Degenerate Music*) exhibition condensed the "banning of black" in a striking, single poster image. The exhibition, a successor to the earlier "Entartete Kunst" (*Degenerate Art*) show, condemned music written by Jews, Bolsheviks, and black jazz performers. To make the intended message visually clear, the latter's signature lapel carnation was replaced by the Star of David.



The chocolate-serving Sarotti Mohr (see top of p.3), enjoying brand awareness in excess of 90%, was popular enough to survive the onslaught of Goebbels & Co. Yet finally by 2004, sharing the sentiments of the Aunt Jemima make-over, this Moorish page underwent a profound change. Germany's "Mad Men" transformed him into a politically correct "Magician of the Senses" (*Magier der Sinne*). He became a juggler of stars and no longer a servant. His skin was lightened to a golden hue.

At the same time language was cleaned up. The names of popular cream filled, chocolate coated pastries - formerly known as "Mohrenkopf" (*Moor's Head*) or "Negerkuss" (*Negro's Kiss*) - were altered to Schokokuss (*Chocolate Kiss*). The use of the M- and N-words - just as in the U.S. - is by now a political taboo. The result: Moor no more.

The portrayal of blacks in the U.S. and in Germany has been shaped by seemingly different origins: Slavery here, colonialism over there. Yet both phenomena thrived on racial polarization and the degrading stereotyping of the "other". The commonalities are obvious. Advertising presented a visual mirror image of that worldview. Fortunately, times have changed and are still changing.



At the Auctions

- **The affair of the rat and the rabbit (see EAC e-news april 2009)** from the YSL collection has not come to a final conclusion. Supposedly, a consortium of French companies active in China (led by supermarket chain Carrefour) was going to match the bid of the non-paying auction winner and donate the bronzes to the Chinese in a goodwill gesture. So far that remains a rumor.

In a subsequent Paris auction at Beaussant Lefèvre, a small jade seal looted in 1860 from Beijing's Old Summer Palace, was sold in excess of \$1.9 million to a Chinese agent. The protests of the Chinese curators were less pronounced. The auction price was paid.

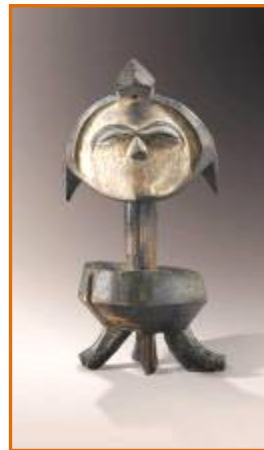
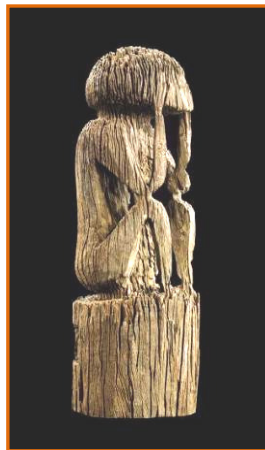
French courts have ruled that there is no legal base for restitution for looted art from the Opium Wars.



At the Auctions, cont'd

- The May and June tribal auctions in New York and Paris showed mixed results. A few highlights:

At the **Sotheby's Paris** June 17 morning auction, renowned provenance (Philippe Guimiot/Domitilla de Grunne) was not necessarily a guarantee for a successful sale. A few top lots were bought in, among them a stern female **Urhobo** figure from Nigeria (image detail far left, high estimate abt. \$700,000). A sentimental favorite, a **Jarai** funerary sculpture from Vietnam's Central Highlands, doubled its mid-estimate to abt. \$250,000 (image center left). Good to see that collectors are not shying away from "aesthetic erosion". The afternoon sale (various owners) actually outperformed the morning session led by a superb **Kwele** (Gabon) altar figure (image center right, abt. \$1.35 million) and a charming **Luba** (D.R.C.) figurine (image far right, abt. \$320,000).
[Images ©Sotheby's]



Museums - Exhibitions

- **De Young Museum**, San Francisco, more info at www.famsf.org
 - **Art and Power in the Central African Savanna**, June 20 - October 11, 2009. Catalog.
- **The Metropolitan Museum of Art**, NYC, more info at www.metmuseum.org
 - **African and Oceanic Art from the Barbier-Mueller Museum, Geneva**, thru September 27, 2009. Catalog.
 - **Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul**, thru September 20, 2009
- **The "New" Acropolis Museum**, Athens, Greece, has opened on June 20, 2009 in its Bernard Tschumi-designed location. The **Parthenon Marbles** (aka known as the Elgin Marbles) are not back in Athens, yet the issue of restitution is getting a new life. Image right: Sun baked original head (Athens) and plaster cast body (original in the British Museum). See www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2009/06/19/arts/20090620-acropolis-slideshow_index.html for more Acropolis Museum photos.





The Artistic Lens - Meet EAC Member Audrey Stein

The name of **Audrey Stein's** website reveals just part of her interests and talents. She is indeed a passionate traveler, yet she is even more so a passionate photographer. Her love for indigenous people in far-away locales shines through in the many portraits she has taken over the past twenty years. She has exhibited her photographs at several Los Angeles galleries.

The Artistic Lens image - In Audrey's own words:
"Kathakali is the colorful theatrical dance form of Kerala in Southern India. Only men can become Kathakali dancers and training for this profession begins at an early age and is extremely rigorous. It includes gymnastics, physical exercises and extreme yoga positions. The application of the performers' elaborate make-up can take up to several hours and I found this process to be as fascinating as the performance itself."

[Image ©Audrey Stein]



A visit to Audrey Stein's gallery at www.passionate-traveler.com will whet anybody's appetite for ethnic travel. Some of her Indian images are being shown at CAFAM from July 1 and are part of an auction at **CAFAM's Dreaming of India** bash on July 16, 2009. See www.cafam.org/global.html

Recent EAC Programs



Photos: W. Schlink

For aficionados of photography superstar **Sebastião Salgado** the exclusive EAC tour of the **Peter Fetterman Gallery** (Bergamot Station, S.M.; exhibition ends October 30) was a special treat. "Thank you", Peter, for hosting us on your birthday! And, "thank you" to **Armin and Barbara Sadoff** who opened their impressive collection to some 50+ EAC members. Pictured here is the "Huichol Room".



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