



## Aunt Jemima



Few commercial icons deserve to be called "cultural touchstones" of significant political and social change. But the Aunt Jemima trademark is one of them.

The image of the smiling black woman first appeared on thousands of boxes of pancake mix in the early 1890s, but throughout the 20th century, Aunt Jemima's trademark mirrored America's changing perceptions of African-American women.

The idea of Aunt Jemima was first conceived by newspaperman and entrepreneur Chris Rutt, according to the Afro-American Almanac. Mr. Rutt and his partner, Charles Underwood, had developed and packaged a ready-mixed, self-rising pancake flour but they had not settled on a name or brand positioning.

One evening Mr. Rutt attended a vaudeville show and heard a tune called "Aunt Jemima" sung by a black-faced performer clad in an apron and bandana headband. The melody was such a hit, Rutt decided to use the song's title as the name for his pancake mix.

When Rutt and Underwood later sold the business to Davis Milling, the company hired Nancy Green, a 59-year-old former slave, to serve as the living trademark for the mix. The image of Aunt Jemima, however, is an artist's rendering and has appeared on Aunt Jemima products -- now marketed by successor Quaker Oats Co. -- ever since.



Beginning in the 1950s, the Aunt Jemima logo started coming under criticism that its image of a black "Mammy" in a kerchief was an outdated and negative portrayal of African-American women. During the 1950s and '60s the trademark was gradually modernized, with the most recent changes being made in 1989.

Today, Aunt Jemima's face beams from beneath a full head of dark hair -- sans kerchief -- but her sparkling eyes and warm smile remain the same. [<http://adage.com/century/icon07.html>]

I grew up with Aunt Jemima (sort of). As a kid, I would always see Aunt Jemima commercials on TV. They worked for me! I never got any negative connotations from the way she was pictured. All I saw was a friendly, motherly figure who was supposed to be a great cook...and, certainly, the Disneyland of the times wouldn't have sponsored anything that smacked of racism [*It kind of reminds me of those psychologists, years ago, who would convince people that they were molested by someone in their childhood...even though they had no memory of anything happening*]

Anyway you look at it, though, this is a great cover, isn't it?!

Go get 'em, Aunt Jemima!