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.
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 solidarity... such a surface... how do you do it?”

Till we come with the pink velvet frock and corset of the oldest gold of our hands, to see the crowds rush in and out of the closed doors of the city. Till we see the smile of the moon upon the faces of the night. Till we see the stars upon the faces of the night. Till we see the stars upon the faces of the night.
However, the same magazine also featured these ads and depictions.

All Golf’s Chillun
Got Simple Sweaters
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

The Tea is Hot
The Obama Controversy

This covered 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

MAGAZINES

BUT ONE'S IRONIC.

AMERICAN RACIST MONTHLY

THE NEW YORKER

THE SOPHISTICATED CAN SPOT THE DIFFERENCE.
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 Speigelmen.
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.