BARNIES SNOBLE'S BLACK HISTORY MONTH BLUNDER

By Meghann Greenhill



In 2020, Barnes & Noble decided to launch a series of classic literature with new covers to celebrate Black History Month. The covers of 12 classic books would depict the main characters as black. For example, Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz would be a Black girl with red sneakers over her shoulder. The release of these rebranded covers was canceled after instant (and well-justified) outrage.

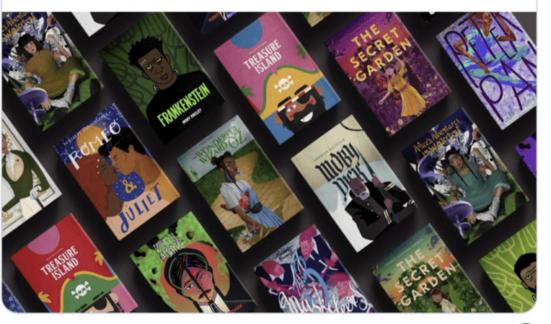


Nicholas Hunt-Walker @nhuntwalker

How diverse it is to have a bunch of white authors with what is effectively blackface on the covers of their books, while not really featuring black characters or black authors that may have actually intended to have black stories play out

🚳 Publishers Weekly 🤣 @PublishersWkly

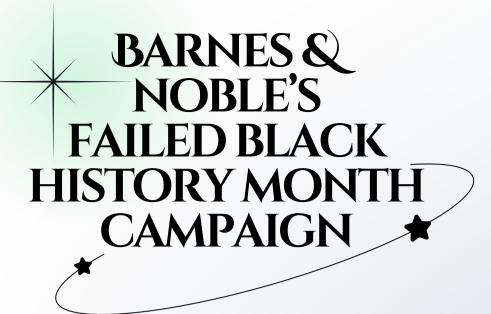
Barnes & Noble Fifth Avenue to launch sales of classic novels with new covers promoting diversity @amNewYork pwne.ws/2GU1jN2



2:44 AM · Feb 5, 2020

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♡ 10 See Nicholas Hunt-Walker's other Tweets



WHY DID TT FAIL?



• Superficial representation - The campaign was seen as a performance because it didn't amplify Black voices or stories but instead simply altered the cover art of existing White stories. The stories were still White stories with the recreated covers.

- - due to controversy.



 Major missed opportunity – Barnes & Noble could have used this opportunity to promote books by Black authors and Black stories instead of repackaging White classics. • Public backlash - The campaign was called out for being tone-deaf and lacking inclusion and meaning. • **Cancellation**- The campaign was pulled before launch

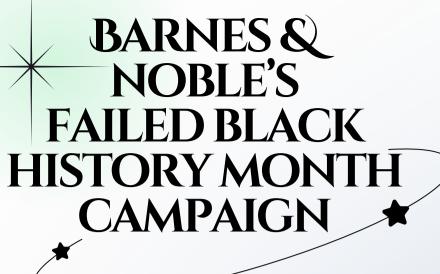


Here are some strategies Barnes & Noble would need to follow to succeed in a future campaign targeting Black History Month.

- Feature Black authors, voices, and stories Instead of altering the class book covers, B&N could easily highlight works by Black authors and historical books on Black History. This would show real support for Black creators and Black history and celebrate Black History Month by celebrating Black stories. Since they are a major book retailer, they should have no difficulty doing this.
- Collaborate with Black creatives Partnering with Black authors and artists to design new special edition book covers for Black stories that already exist such as Angie Thomas' "The Hate U Give" and Alice Walker's "The Color Purple." This would promote Black stories and focus on the appropriote representation for Black History Month.

BARNES FAILED BLACK **ISTORY MONTH** CAMPAIGN LET'S MAKE ITT BETTER

- Curate thoughtful collections Create reading lists and sections inside the stores showcasing collections of Black stories and works.
- Engage with the community B&N could host events, a BHM book club, or discussions focused on Black literature where readers can engage in meaningful conversations about Black history and culture. This would show B&N has a commitment to being inclusive, not just selling their books, which is what the original failed campaign came across as.
- Authentic Marketing B&N's campaign for BHM should go beyond just visual changes and truly show that they are committed to supporting Black communities by engaging with these communities and demonstrating a thoughtful, authentic approach to being inclusive.





In this clip, talk show hosts converse on the controversy of the failed campaign. They even mention their recent trips to B&N, where one of the women noted the lack of creativity and variety on their Black History Month tables. This tells me B&N had their work cut out for them in 2020, and let's hope they answered the call.