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New York Post cartoon remains racist after 'immature' retraction

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03/04/09 - To the Cigar,

The New York Post recently published a cartoon that directly referenced two current news stories, the stimulus package proposed by President Barack Obama and the shooting of a chimpanzee that attacked and seriously wounded a woman.

Although the New York Post has apologized, the apology was of the type given by children sometimes as in, I am sorry that you interpreted what I said as offensive. The immaturity rests in the shift of blame.

It is an apology that places the blame on the interpreter, not the person who made the offensive statement and thereby denies any admission to or responsibility for the offense. We believe the New York Post should offer an adult apology for an overtly racist, extremely offensive cartoon that would never have been published if the implicit message was presented as text rather than as sketch.

The cartoon shows the shooting of a chimpanzee; the caption suggests that the chimpanzee was potentially responsible for the stimulus bill.

We believe the cartoon plays readily upon the historic use of primates to negatively portray people of African descent. President Obama is of African descent.

President Obama is the one who is responsible for making the stimulus package official with his signature; therefore the cartoon is portraying President Obama as a primate and it is by default depicting the assassination of a president.

The notion or suggestion of assassination implied or explicit, even in the form of satire, is abhorrent.

It is difficult to see how offended readers might be over-interpreting the cartoon. It is racially offensive; it evokes images of violence against people of African descent in the United States.

The cartoon is an affront to the dignity of people of color and undermines the values of racial justice, equity and respect for humanity that we as a nation embrace and defend. No, we have not arrived at the era of post-discrimination or post-racism, but surely we have progressed further than the cartoon suggests.

And surely we can expect more from a newspaper with the circulation and longevity of existence as the New York Post.

Political cartoonists capture a wide audience and their pictures notably often speak louder than words.

For this and other reasons, they have a huge responsibility to know the difference between stinging satire and dangerous insinuation.

In this climate of racial acclimation, where serious-minded persons are attempting a serious-minded coalition across racial and cultural lines, even satirists, political and otherwise, must be held accountable for careless words, pictures and everything in between.

We believe people of African descent have "been there and done that," (been the subject of racially offensive material) and they are not going there again, not ever, not for any reason and certainly not for the sake of a racist cartoon.

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