

Why Charles M. Schulz Added a Black Character to the Peanuts Gang

On April 15, 1968, Harriet Glickman, a schoolteacher and mother of three, wrote a short letter to cartoonist Charles M. Schulz.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated less than two weeks before. Much of the momentum of the Civil Right Movement seemed lost. Glickman explained to Schulz that she felt a need to do *something*; so she was asking if the cartoonist would be willing to include a black character in his Peanuts comic strip.

To her surprise, she received a reply less than two weeks later (though Schulz misspelled Glickman's name). Schulz explained that he was sympathetic to the suggestion, but feared the inclusion of a black character could be construed as patronizing.

Mrs. Glickman was not so easily deterred. She contacted several black friends and acquaintances who implored Schulz to add a black character. One mother [wrote](#):

At this time in history, when Negro youths need a feeling of identity; the inclusion of a Negro character even occasionally in your comics would help these young people to feel it is a natural thing for Caucasian and Negro children to engage in dialogue.

Schulz was convinced. On July 1 he wrote a letter (again addressed to Mrs. Glukman) telling her that he'd be introducing a black character to the Peanuts gang that month.

The addition of Franklin did not come without controversy.

Schulz ran into trouble with a company president who balked at a strip that featured Franklin sitting in a classroom next to Peppermint Patty. The executive feared that the cartoon would anger readers in the South, but he relented when Schulz threatened to quit.

Many would agree that the Peanuts gang wouldn't feel complete today if Mrs. Glickman hadn't decided to write a letter to the famous cartoonist following the death of Dr. King.

The only problem is that our culture has turned inclusivity into a caricature. It's now basically expected that a television show or commercial feature a racially diverse assortment of characters; if it doesn't [judgment looms](#).

Decades after Schulz created Franklin, South Park creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker invented Token, a black child the writers use to poke at racial stereotypes and hypocrisy. It's no accident that Token is primarily used as a vehicle to expose our culture's often superficial notions of race.

Will we ever find that happy medium? Can we be an inclusive society without being judgmental or punitive when a lack of racial diversity is present?