

Racist Collectibles on EBay?

By Associated Press

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Activists on Friday asked the Internet auction site eBay to stop listing items they say are racially offensive and demeaning to blacks.

The Southern California groups said eBay is violating its own policy that discourages sellers from listing items that promote racial intolerance.

The groups displayed cast-iron banks they said were examples of items listed on eBay. One was a caricature of a black person, with large red lips, dark skin and rolling eyes, that had been described on eBay using the n-word.

"This is what they think of us," said Earl Ofari Hutchinson, president of the Inglewood, Calif.-based National Alliance for Positive Action, a public advocacy group for racial and social justice. "This shows the absolute utter contempt many in the society still have for African-Americans even today."

EBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove said he was unaware of the alliance's efforts to reach the company. The company removes listings using words in ways that are "abusive or offensive or degrading or in any way disparaging," Pursglove said.

But it doesn't strike listings that use such words to describe items. For example, some book or album titles use a racial slur in their titles, Pursglove said.

"What we've always tried to do is strike a balance between the sensitivities of eBay users with the desire of eBay users to buy and sell merchandise," he said.

But Hutchinson and others say it's especially painful to find listings for books, prints, card games, antique glass sets, tobacco tins and other items that use a racial slur and are sometimes described as "cute" or "adorable."

Dante Lee, president of A.S.J. Media in Long Beach, California, which owns BlackNews.com, said when the n-word is typed in, "you see items that portray blacks" with a "pitch dark skin tone (and) exaggerated nose flares, almost as if they look like animals. I felt offended."

In May 2001, eBay began banning the sale of artifacts from Nazi Germany, the Ku Klux Klan and notorious criminals, in hopes of avoiding legal problems in other countries. In France, Germany, Austria and Italy it is illegal to sell items relating to the Third Reich.

More recently, the auction site deleted listings for items billed as debris from the space shuttle *Columbia*.

eBay's offensive material policy states the company will "judiciously disallow listings or items that promote or glorify hatred, violence, or racial intolerance, or items that promote organizations (such as the KKK, Nazis, neo-Nazis, and Aryan Nation) with such views."

David Pilgrim estimates he has bought about 1,000 racist collectibles on eBay for the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia located on the Ferris State University campus in Big Rapids, Michigan. The museum displays about 4,000 items and has about 3,000 more in storage.

The market for memorabilia depicting black people has undergone a resurgence in the last few years due to eBay, Yahoo and other Internet auction houses, said Pilgrim, curator of the museum. Black memorabilia items range from black baseball league jerseys to postcards depicting lynchings that can sell for up to \$1,000, he said.

"I hate the fact that people buy" racist items, said Pilgrim, who is black. But "people have the right to sell."

Andrew Robinson-Gaither, pastor of the Faith United Methodist Church in Los Angeles, said Friday he wants eBay to stop listing such items immediately.

"How could eBay do this during black history month?" Robinson-Gaither said at the news conference.

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