GO
TH
AM

A FONT TO BELIEVE IN

HISTORY

Gotham is a typeface produced by type designer Tobias Frere-Jones, previously under the Hoefler & Frere-Jones type foundry before a falling out with Johnathan Hoefler over alleged inequity in their partnership under the firm (but this is another story altogether).

Tobias Frere-Jones was born on August 28th, 1970. His connection to typography is most literally genetic, born grandson of a chairman of William Heinemann Ltd, a British publishing house. He graduated BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1992, worked at Font Bureau, Inc. for over seven years, many of them as senior designer, worked as a critic on the Yale School of Art faculty. He began working with Hoefler at the Hoefler & Frere-Jones in 1999, after which only one year produced Gotham.

Gotham, widely regarded as one of the most influential typefaces in the past 20 years, is a typeface burn at the turn of the 21st century. It is a direct descendant of pre-World War II geometric sans-serifs like Futura and Universal, popularized with art movements like Bauhaus, early Modernism, and Deutscher Werkbund. These geometric sans fonts are contextualized in the aftermath of World War I as a collective preference for objective, structured, and universal design. In a sort of anti-nationalist rut, fonts of these avant-garde movements shared a geometric grid as the foundation.

This geometric sans serif was commissioned by GQ magazine for 'versatile' use across its publication, desiring a masculine, modern yet established feel. With visual directors Paul Martinez and Arem Duplessis giving a fusion of techno/rave posters and early-modernist, Bauhaus movement references to go by, Gotham: classification, geometric, category, sans serif, comes into fruition, remaining under GQ's private usage for a couple years until 2002.

Gotham shares some key traits with a font like Futura, for example: an almost perfect circle for the O and a right-heavy crossbar on the lowercase t, references, again, to the roots of geometric sans-serifs. Paradoxically, however, Frere-Jones and Hoefler did both described wanting to capture the

"The humanist and the geometric... had already been thoroughly staked out...I didn't think anything new could have been found there...I was mistaken."

hand-lettered sans-serifs of the 1920s-30s, in a seeming antithesis to their strict geometry. (As a note, although Tobias Frere-Jones is solely credited for the font, Hoefler seems also have some involvement. The real extent is unknown but cited are multiple instances in which the two discuss their shared inspirations for Gotham.)

These designers work in a modern landscape, with many departures since the aforementioned design movements. To begin, typography is more established, and designers such as Frere-Jones and the (previously) Hoefler & Frere-Jones type foundry as a whole were accustomed to completely digitally-integrated type design. However, the main inspiration for the font, as described both by Frere-Jones and Hoefler, is the architectural font on New York City buildings that stood and existed before typography was an established field of design. This hand lettering featured won cornerstones, storefronts, plaques, painted signs and bronze letters on buildings across New York City, was a touchstone for architectural lettering before the arrival of mechanical sign-making in the 1960s. In an outtake of Gary Hustwit's 2007 documentary "Helvetica", in which they were heavily featured, Frere-Jones and Hoefler described their upbringings in cities and their independent

notice of this niche architectural hand lettering. In order to channel this 'flavor', the typographers had to depart from their accustomed modes of design and resort to more mathematical, architectural instincts to support their design. Referring to a stockpile of New York architectural photos they had complied in the past (knowing that this could become the starter for a font), Frere-Jones draws up the sketches and Gotham Bold is born. Notably, the Port Authority Bus Terminal door signage is most clearly regarded as a precedent to Gotham; capital 'M' is uncanny to the character on the sign.

One interesting note about Gotham is that, since its release, it has been distinguished as particularly American. Due to its roots, this geometric sans has communicated an American "working class" type of vibe. It has since been used as the font for the graphics of Obama's 2008 campaign, which most definitely relates back to this American, no-nonsense, working class feel. USA Today has even named Gotham the font of the decade. I believe this reading of the font has established Gotham in a modern age, where even designer Frere-Jones admits "The humanist and the geometric… had already been thoroughly staked out and developed by past designers. I

GOV. DANIELS CRUISES TO 2ND TERM

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2008   ★   "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" II COR. 3:17   ★   75 CENTS   ★   CITY FINAL

HISTORY

OBAMA ELECTED NATION'S 1ST BLACK PRESIDENT

Democrat edges McCain in Indiana; state goes blue for 1st time since '64

JAE C. HONG / Associated Press

VICTORY: President-elect Barack Obama, his wife, Michelle, and daughters Malia (center right) and Sasha wave to a crowd of 100,000 at the election night rally in Chicago.
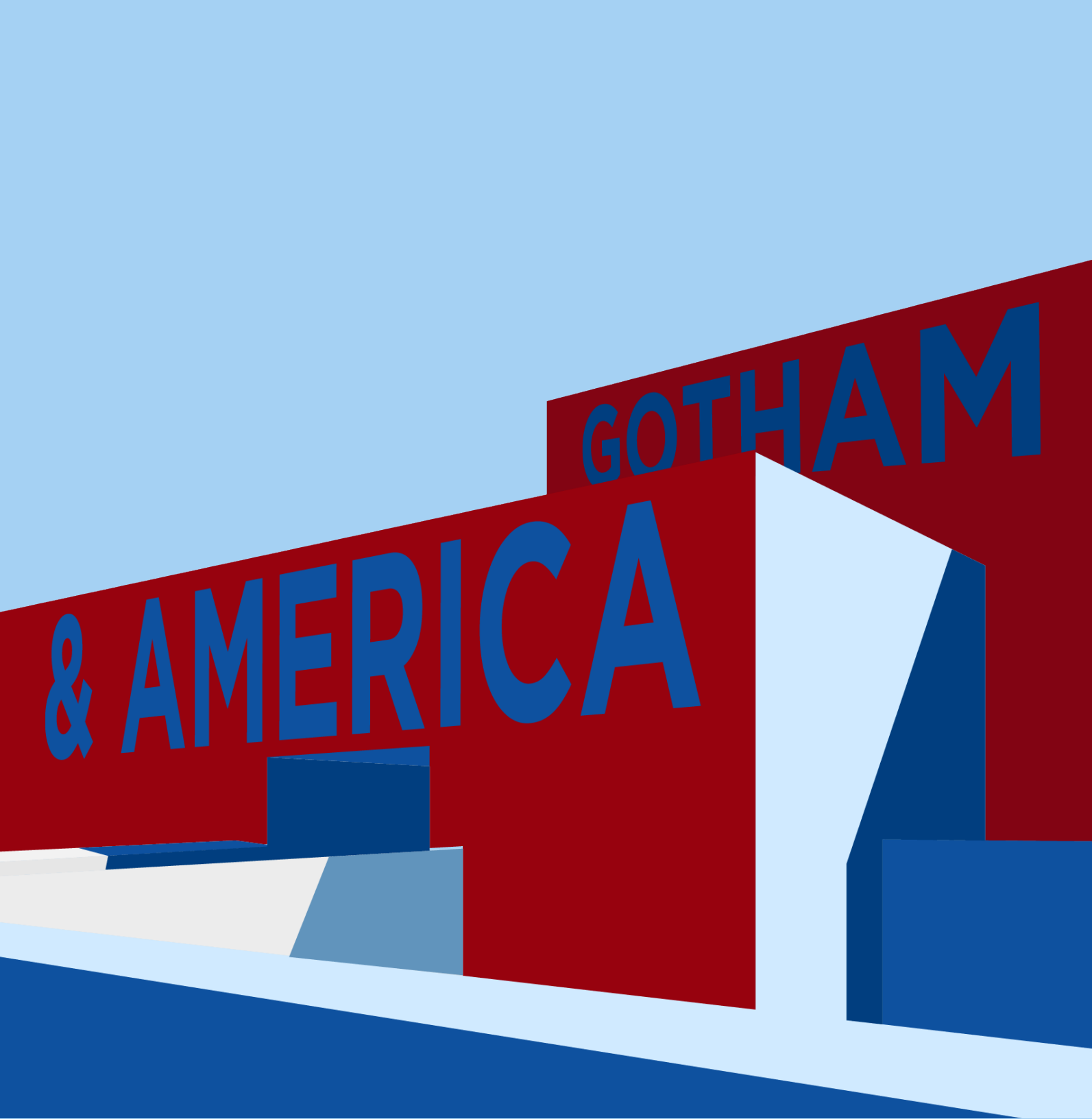
'This is a day for change,' Obama's victory proves

Under a bright sunny sky late Tuesday morning, Renee

ILLINOIS SENATOR REDRAWS NATION'S ELECTORAL MAP

By Mary Beth Schneider   is a place where all things are

didn't think anything new could have been found there, but luckily for me (and the client), I was mistaken."

Other notable fonts by Tobias Frere-Jones are Interstate, Whitney, and Archer, of which Interstate is the only one not produced with the Hoefler & Frere-Jones Foundry (It was licensed by Font Bureau before Tobias joined Hoefler & Frere-Jones).

My personal view of Gotham is that, compared to other geometric sans-serifs, which I think look utopian, sci-fi-y, and a little inhuman, Gotham has been said to invoke a strong feeling of belief and hope. I like the fat x-height, I think the volume gives it some personality, sort of straight-faced but still boisterous. This characteristic makes Gotham particularly good for what it was inspired by; architecture. It looks nicer larger, making great headers, but falters a little in being used as body text. Hoefler & Co., the official foundry and owner of the typeface does cite Gotham Narrow to be the designated version to be used for large bodies of text, but headers are still optimal.

The variation that Gotham offers is also really nice. The official foundry website offers 4 different widths, each including italics and a large range of weights. Gotham was so popular that there was enough demand to produce a rounded Gotham package. One option is a hooked or unhooked lower-case a. The unhooked, single-story a, I feel, flows better with the other letters. The hook addition creates odd interactions with the shoulder of some lowercase letters i.e.: r. Overall, a clean but flavorful sans-serif to use for headers, nice when used in contrast with serif body text.

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Picture: Gotham typeface used for Freedom Towers' cornerstone inscription

WHO LOST THEIR
A TRIBUTE TO THE
FREEDOM

anatomy

didot **dd** gotham

flat apex   straight crossbar   pointed vertex   pointed vertex/flat apex   o's are set below baseline

ABMWO

short descenders/ascenders   squre points   uniform weight, imperfect circle

large x-height   **aditjo**

varied weight in bowls   offset crossbar

The Crystal Goblet or Printing Should Be Invisible.

Beatrice Ward

Ionce was talking to a man who designed a very pleasing advertising type which undoubtedly all of you have used. I said something about what artists think about a certain problem, and he replied with a beautiful gesture: 'Ah, madam, we artists do not think---we feel!' That same day I quoted that remark to another designer of my acquaintance, and he, being less poetically inclined, murmured: 'I'm not feeling very well today, I think!' He was right, he did think; he was the thinking sort; and that is why he is not so good a painter, and to my mind ten times better as a typographer and type designer than the man who instinctively avoided anything as coherent as a reason. I always suspect the typographic enthusiast who takes a printed page from a book and frames it to hang on the wall, for I believe that in order to gratify a sensory delight he has mutilated something infinitely more important. I remember that T.M. Cleland, the famous American typographer, once showed me a very beautiful layout for a Cadillac booklet involving decorations in colour. He did not have the actual text to work with in drawing up his specimen pages, so he had set the lines in Latin. This was not only for the reason that you will all think of; if you have seen the old typefoundries' famous Quousque Tandem copy (i.e. that Latin has few descenders and thus gives a remarkably even line). No, he told me that originally he had set up the dullest 'wording' that he could find (I dare say it was from Hansard), and yet he discovered that the man to whom he submitted it would start reading and making comments on the text. I made some remark on the mentality of Boards of Directors, but Mr Cleland said, 'No: you're wrong; if the reader had not been practically forced to read---if he had not seen those words suddenly imbued with glamour and significance---then the layout would have been a failure. Setting it in Italian or Latin is only an easy way of saying "This is not the text as it will appear".'

Let me start my specific conclusions with book typography, because that contains all the fundamentals, and then go on to a few points about advertising. The book typographer has the job of erecting a window between the reader inside the room and that landscape which is the author's words.

> "I believe that in order to gratify a *sensory delight* he has mutilated something *infinitely more important.*"

He may put up a stained-glass window of marvellous beauty, but a failure as a window; that is, he may use some rich superb type like text gothic that is something to be looked at, not through. Or he may work in what I call transparent or invisible typography. I have a book at home, of which I have no visual recollection whatever as far as its typography goes; when I think of it, all I see is the Three Musketeers "The Crystal Goblet," Beatrice Warde 4 and their comrades swaggering up and down the streets of Paris. The third type of window is one in which the glass is broken into relatively small leaded panes; and this corresponds to what is called 'fine printing' today, in that you are at least conscious that there is a window there, and that someone has enjoyed building it. That is not

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ABCDEF
GHIJKLM
NOPQRSTU
VWXYZ

abcdef
ghijklm
nopqrstu
vwxyz

Character Set

Number Set

12 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

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**Special
Set**

"Orange man bad" 42pt

"Orange man bad" 36pt

"Orange man bad" 30pt

"Orange man bad" 24pt

"Orange man bad" 18pt

"Orange man bad" 14pt

"Orange man bad" 12pt

"Orange man bad" 10pt

SIZING

A Type Specimen Booklet