

The Story Behind TIME's 'America Must Change' Cover



Painting by Charly Palmer for TIME (Photo: Travis Grissom)

IDEAS

BY **D.W. PINE** JUNE 25, 2020 7:30 AM EDT

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For the cover of TIME's July 6 double issue, we commissioned Atlanta artist Charly Palmer to capture a moment in which Americans will see whether their country is able to live up to its promise. The resulting 40-by-30-in. acrylic painting, of a little girl faced with both the injustice of today and America's historical role in it, is titled "In Her Eyes."

“In my 60 years on this earth, so much has changed; however all too much has remained the same,” says Palmer, who was born in Fayette, Ala., and went on to study at the American Academy of Art and School of Art Institute in Chicago. “As a Black child of the mid-’60s, my parents did all they could to shield me from the horrors of racism, especially through the unconditional love and vigilant protection of my mother, Irma Walker. They shielded me from the

worst of the hate the world had in store for people who look like me. Now, as a man, I am concerned for my own children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. I worry about the Black community as a whole.”

The flowers seen in the painting are a theme in Palmer’s work, especially since his mother’s death in 2008. “They represent life, death, love, beauty and joy,” he says.

His past notable work includes the painting *His Story*, which was part of Maya Angelou’s art collection; the cover art for *John Legend*’s latest album, *Bigger Love*; and a poster for the 1996 Olympics, as well as commissions marking the 150th anniversaries of both Fisk University and Howard University. As an instructor, he teaches design and illustration and painting at the post-secondary level, most recently at Spelman College, and he received the 2018 Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe New Talent Award.

“For the past 25 years, I have been on a mission through my art to sound the alarm,” Palmer says. “I hope that this cover reflects that concern. My message is not white hate. It is resounding Black love.”

To further that message, Palmer and his partner, the sociologist Karida Brown, are also currently working on a project to reintroduce a version of W.E.B. Du Bois’ children’s magazine, *The Brownies’ Book*. “With this anthology of original essays and visual art created by Black writers and artists of note,” he says, “our desire is to produce a creative treasure for all Black families so they may know how much they are truly loved.”

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