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The Big Apple' – NY Daily News T-shirts (1975) Helped Spread the Nickname Revived by Public Relations Man Charles Gillett

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‘THE BIG APPLE’ -- *NY DAILY NEWS* T-SHIRTS (1975) HELPED SPREAD THE NICKNAME REVIVED BY PUBLIC RELATIONS MAN CHARLES GILLETT

Barry Popik and Gerald Cohen

A Sept. 12 2019 email sent by Barry Popik to several people interested in word origins included a brief item titled “‘Big Apple’ *Daily News* T-Shirts (1975)’:

‘Another discovery in the digitized *New York Daily News* – “Big Apple” T-shirts in 1975. This was before adman Bill Phillips invented “Big Apple” in 1976, as the *Wall Street Journal* said...’

Popik then added the URL for the newspaper clip, where we see the *Daily News* ad for the new T-shirts:

https://www.newspapers.com/clip/35787213/new_york_daily_news_big_apple/

Afterwards I responded to Barry and the recipients of his email:

‘Barry, the news about the *Daily News* Big Apple T-shirts is significant. It’s the first written documentation of that development that I’m aware of. In December 1992 we attended the annual banquet of the American Name Society in which I spoke about NYC’s nickname “The Big Apple” and gave you credit for the extraordinary research you did in advancing our knowledge of what happened. Charles Gillett was invited to the banquet (he was duly honored there), and he mentioned to me that after he started publicizing NYC as “The Big Apple,” the sobriquet was picked up on T-shirts, which did a lot to help spread it.

‘Until now I only had his word for this (which I never doubted), and now we have contemporary newspaper evidence of the T-shirts. Moreover, since the T-shirts didn’t originate from just anywhere but from the *NY Daily News*, we can assume that the newspaper helped promote the sobriquet in its article/columns.’

The *New York Daily News* ad for the T-shirts is reproduced on the page below:

MAIL TO: BIG APPLE
THE NEWS, P.O. Box 2271
New York, N.Y. 10017

Please send me the Big Apple item(s) listed below which I have selected. Enclosed is my check or money order for total amount of order made payable to New York News. (Do not send cash.)

BIG APPLE T-SHIRTS 

(List quantity for each size)

Adult, white with red trim \$2.75 ea.
S, M, L, XL

Child, white \$1.75 ea.
4, 8, 12, 16.

BIG APPLE SWEAT SHIRTS 

(List quantity for each size)

Adult, white long sleeve \$5.25 ea.
S, M, L, XL

Child, white long sleeve \$3.75 ea.
4, 8.

Child, white long sleeve \$4.25 ea.
12, 16.

All prices include handling,
1st class postage and sales tax.

(Name) (Please print)

(Address)

(City) (State) (Zip)

The Big Apple shirts also are available at The News Reader's Service Bureau counter, 220 E. 42d St., open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. Prices at counter are: T-Shirts, Child's \$1.25, Adult's \$2.00. Sweat shirts, Child's junior \$2.50, senior \$3.00; Adult's \$3.50. Plus sales tax.

When I then asked Popik for the exact reference, he replied that his website contains an entry on 'Big Apple' T-shirts/sweat shirts/beach towels:

https://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/big_apple_t_shirt/

Here (next two pages) is that entry:

**‘Entry from September 09, 2019
“Big Apple” T-shirts from the Daily News (1975)**

‘The *Daily News* newspaper popularized “Big Apple” by selling T-shirts, sweat shirts and beach towels in 1975 and 1976. The first ad was printed on July 13, 1975, and the last ad on August 5, 1976.

Newspapers.com

13 July 1975, *Sunday News* (New York, NY), pg. 95, col. 1 ad:
NO. 1 IN THE BIG APPLE
BIG APPLE T-SHIRTS
BIG APPLE SWEAT SHIRTS

Newspapers.com

19 July 1975, *Daily News* (New York, NY), pg. 26, col. 3 ad:
NO. 1 IN THE BIG APPLE
BIG APPLE T-SHIRTS
BIG APPLE SWEAT SHIRTS
BIG APPLE BEACH TOWELS

Newspapers.com

16 November 1975, *Sunday News* (New York, NY), Living sec., pg. 58, col. 2 ad:
NO. 1 IN THE BIG APPLE
BIG APPLE T-SHIRTS
BIG APPLE SWEAT SHIRTS

Newspapers.com

11 July 1976, *Sunday News* (New York, NY), Leisure sec., p. 12, col. 5:
Feel at Home
In a Big Apple
NO. 1 IN THE BIG APPLE
BIG APPLE T-SHIRTS
BIG APPLE SWEAT SHIRTS
BIG APPLE BEACH TOWELS

Newspapers.com

5 August 1976, *Daily News* (New York, NY), pg. B12, col. 2 ad:

NO. 1 IN THE BIG APPLE

BIG APPLE T-SHIRTS

BIG APPLE SWEAT SHIRTS.’

That concludes the entry on Popik’s website. An interesting piece of the ‘Big Apple’ puzzle is now filled in. Also, when Charles Gillett (1992) told me of the unexpected role of T-shirts in promoting his ‘Big Apple’ campaign, he mentioned only the T-shirts; he either overlooked the sweat shirts and beach towels or regarded them as minimally significant.

REFERENCES

Barron, James 1995. Charles Gillett, 80 the creator of the ‘Big Apple’ Ad Campaign. *New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1995, p. B/17, cols. 5-6.

Barrypopik.com – Barry Popik’s extensive website on Americana (mainly its language). As of this writing, it contains over 10,000 entries.

Cohen, Gerald and Barry A. Popik 2017. *Origin of New York City’s Nickname ‘The Big Apple.’* 2nd, revised and expanded edition.

Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag. 2011. (Gerald Cohen was the sole author of the first edition, 1991; all the important discoveries since 1991 were made by Popik.)

Pombeiro, Beth Gillitt 1976. Crazy to the core...and proud of it. (The three dots appear in the article’s title.). *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), June 4, 1976, p. 30-D

https://www.newspapers.com/clip/35925145/im_crazy_about_the_big_apple_1976/

Pombeiro tells how ad exec Bill Phillips’ ‘Big Apple’ 1976 T-shirt campaign helped popularize NYC’s sobriquet, but she was evidently unaware of the *New York Daily News’s* ‘Big Apple’ T-shirt campaign that began already a year earlier. However, she *was* aware that Charles Gillett deserves credit for reviving ‘The Big Apple’ in the early 1970s as NYC’s sobriquet. Her article says:

‘...It is not a new phrase, having been used by jazz musicians in the late 1920s to describe playing the big time.

‘But it wasn’t familiar in later years until the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau resurrected it in 1972. Explained Bureau President Charles Gillett, “We wanted to come up with a better name for New York than the Asphalt Jungle, as people were wont to call us”.’

Also, Barry Popik drew Pombeiro’s article to my attention and commented in a private email:

‘Remember when adman Bill Phillips died last year, and the *Wall Street Journal* said that he, more than anyone, was responsible for New York’s nickname The Big Apple? Well, this is his ad campaign, from 1976. Could he have known that the *New York Daily News* beat him by a year to T-shirts (in 1975)?... These 1976 shirts helped, no doubt, but the 1976 campaign merely added to what came before’.

Popik, Barry 2019. ““Big Apple” T-shirts from the *Daily News* (1975).’

This entry appears on his extensive website (barrypopik.com).

Roman, Ken 2019. The man behind ‘the Big Apple.’ (subheading): ‘Ad exec Bill Phillips made New York City’s nickname immortal.’

Wall Street Journal, Jan. 28, 2019, p. A15, cols. 1-4. This article remarkably overlooks Charles Gillett (President of the New York Convention and Visitors Bureau), who in the 1970s (and later) received widespread recognition as the creator of the ‘Big Apple’ ad campaign; see, for example, Barron 1995 above.