

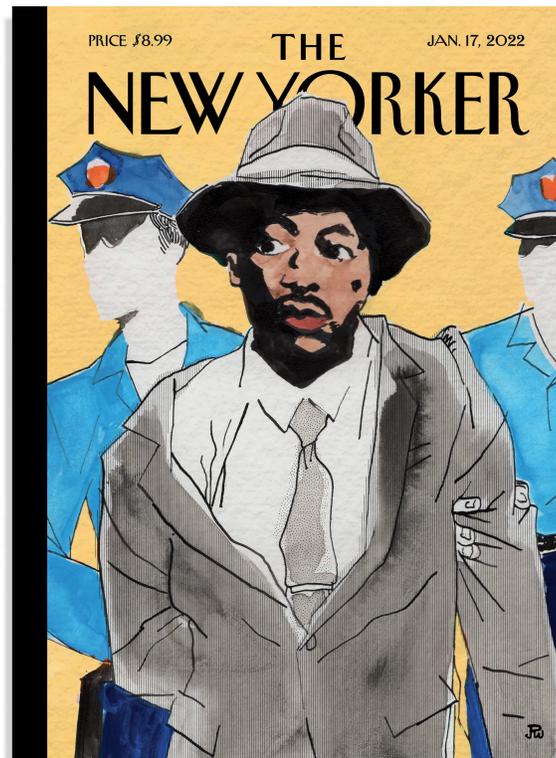
RONALD WIMBERLY'S "KING ARRESTED FOR LOITERING, 1958"

*The artist draws inspiration from the photojournalism of
Charles Moore.*

By **Françoise Mouly**

Art by **Ronald Wimberly**

January 10, 2022



Source photograph by Charles Moore / Getty

On September 3, 1958, Martin Luther King, Jr., arrived at the courthouse in Montgomery, Alabama, to attend the arraignment of a man accused of assaulting King's friend and mentor, the civil-rights leader Reverend Ralph David Abernathy. King was barred from entering the courtroom by two policemen.

When he told the officers that he would wait outside, they arrested him, twisting his arms behind his back and pushing him down the street to the police booking station. The charge was "loitering."



A photo taken by Charles Moore of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, 1958 arrest in Montgomery, Alabama.

Photograph by Charles Moore / Getty

This was not the first, or the last, occasion on which King would be taken into custody. He was arrested dozens of times throughout his life: in 1956, with Rosa Parks and many others, while organizing the Montgomery bus boycotts; in 1960, during a sit-in at a restaurant in Atlanta, Georgia; in 1963, with Abernathy, for demonstrating without a permit (from his cell, he would pen “Letter from Birmingham Jail”).

In this particular case, King’s arrest was captured by the photojournalist Charles Moore, an admirer who would go on to become an influential chronicler of the civil-rights movement. Years later, Moore said, “I did not know at the time that my pictures might make a difference, but I knew this man would make a difference.” His photos from that day, which ran in *Life* magazine and in newspapers around the world, provided the inspiration for Ronald Wimberly’s cover for the January 17, 2022, issue of the magazine. We recently talked to the artist about artistic collaboration and how he translates the tools he uses in cartooning to other fields.

You’ve mentioned that you draw inspiration from sources including Emory Douglas, who, in 1967, joined the Black Panther Party as minister of culture; the Pop artist Andy Warhol; and the Abstract Expressionist Robert Motherwell. How do you reconcile the divide between artists that seem, at least at first glance, to be so different?

Warhol and Douglas’s drawings and their practices weren’t that far from each other; both were newspaper men. Douglas is a phenomenal illustrator—a framed copy of his portrait of LeRoi Jones [Amiri Baraka] looks down on me as I type this. Warhol was also a great illustrator. Both artists use solid blocks of color and patterns, which connect them with Motherwell, especially with his collages.

You’re known for LAAB, a broadsheet magazine of comics and essays. Does curating pieces from a variety of artists and writers help or hinder your own work?

LAAB is my work—and it feels good to tease that boundary of self by collaborating. *LAAB* has kept me in comics for the past few years. I would’ve quit altogether without it. It’s the fuel and the fabric and, also, a social endeavor, which I appreciate.

You started out as a writer, a cartoonist, and an illustrator before expanding into animation. Do you find that your roots in comics and graphic novels help you tackle more collaborative projects?

Luis Camnitzer, who was at the vanguard of nineteen-sixties Conceptualism, said something about how different disciplines are conduits for him to express how he thinks as an artist. My roots are in thinking. Writing, drawing, and seeing—tools that are useful in cartooning—are also useful in filmmaking, and in any kind of art practice.