

Fear & Loathing Newsweek

01.04-01.11.2019

**MAKING
AMERICA
GREAT
AGAIN
BY...**

BARACK
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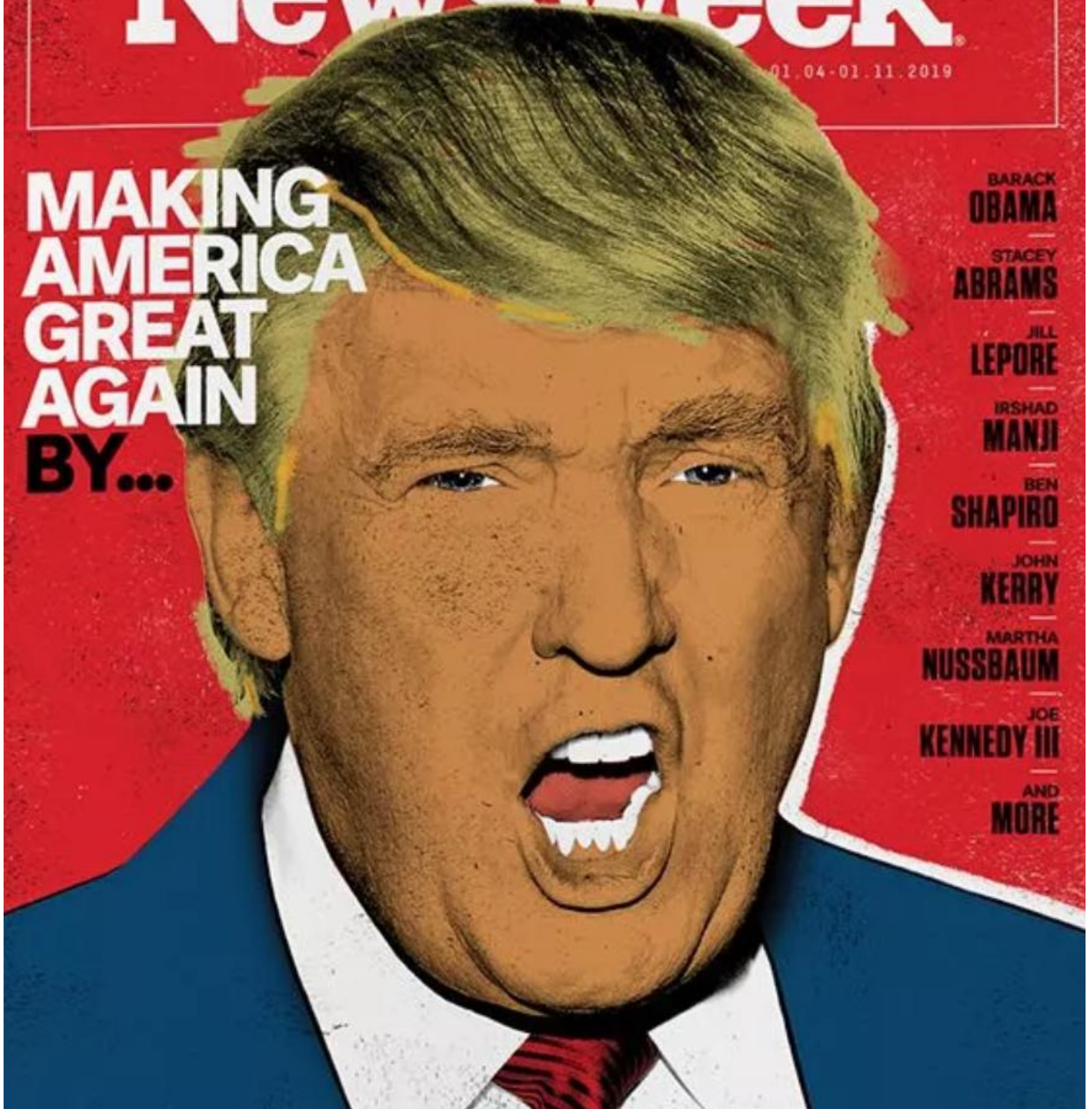
BEN
SHAPIRO

JOHN
KERRY

MARTHA
NUSSBAUM

JOE
KENNEDY III

AND
MORE



BY

Irshad Manji

T RUE STORY: A YOUNG HIP-hop artist from Biloxi, Mississippi wants the bars and stars in her state flag replaced by an inclusive and unifying design. She invites a supporter of the Confederate battle flag to her home, where they discuss his perspective. Soon after, he realizes that he cares more about defending her dignity than about preserving a symbol. He then stops flying his own Confederate battle flag. What sparked the transformation? Respect. The activist respected the flag-waver enough to engage rather than label him.

The word respect comes from the Latin to turn around and look again—to re-spectate. If I see people only as the labels that I affix to them, then I'm not taking the time to look again. By looking again, I'm saying, "You have a back story that I don't yet know. Will you share it?" And by going first in the listening department, I set the tone, the culture, of the conversation. That puts me in the driver's seat rather than in the victim's position.

Over the past two years, more and more of us have found ourselves saying, "Don't label me." Don't assume you know me just because you think I fit this or that category. Let's be honest: Labeling is game, a way of scoring points by putting people in "their place." It's manipulative, demeaning and ultimately enraging.

On social media, humiliation happens at warp speed. Each tribe be-

FROM LEFT: ERLC; RENÉ CLEMENT



POLITICS

believes it's being labeled, but the side that feels victimized is doing the exact same thing to the other side! Clearly, nothing will change—not cultures, not systems, not institutions—until we the people change. And since labels aren't going away, we ought to treat them as starting points rather than finish lines.

Starting points for what? For asking each other questions in the name of respect.

Here's a courageous exercise that more of us could turn into a concrete habit: When you're being disagreed with, ask not how you can change the other person's mind; ask what you're missing about the other person. Young people are not being taught this lesson: That if you want to be heard, you first have to be willing to hear the other person. And appreciating that is key to a lifetime of success. Sincere relationships make for social progress that endures.

The future's more uncertain than ever—politically, technologically, economically. But, thanks to human psychology, you can predict what moves your opponents to cooperate with you. Step one: Replace labeling with listening.●

MANJI is an Oprah "Chutzpah" award winner, founder of the Moral Courage Academy and the bestselling author of the upcoming *Don't Label Me: An Incredible Conversation for Divided Times* (St. Martin's Press, February 26).

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