

This Day in History... March 23, 1874

Birth of J.C. Leyendecker

Illustrator Joseph Christian Leyendecker was born on March 23, 1874, in Montabaur, Rhine Province, German Empire. He was one of the most popular and recognized illustrators of his day – popularizing the images of Baby New Year, Santa Claus, and more.

Leyendecker lived in Germany until 1882, when his family moved to Chicago, Illinois, where his uncle ran a brewing company. His parents saw his artistic talent but could not afford an art education for him. At fifteen years old, Leyendecker apprenticed to a Chicago engraving house and attended the Chicago Art Institute after work. His skill increased enough to earn a promotion to staff illustrator. He got his first commission when he was a teenage – a series of 60 Bible illustrations. Leyendecker worked and saved for years and then went to study art in Paris.



This stamp pictures Leyendecker's January 2, 1937 Saturday Evening Post cover depicting Baby New Year.

Upon Leyendecker's return to America in 1899, he opened a studio in Chicago. That May he received his first commission to illustrate a cover for *The Saturday Evening Post*. Over the next 44 years he produced a total of 322 covers for *Post*, which was the most popular magazine in the country. During that time, Leyendecker produced a number of images that shaped the way certain things would be depicted in the future. Among these, he created the image of Baby New Year and the jolly Santa Claus in a red suite. His illustrations also normalized flowers for Mother's Day and firecrackers on the Fourth of July.

In 1900, Leyendecker moved to New York City. There he developed long-standing professional relationships with several clothing manufacturers. Most notable of these was Cluett, Peabody & Co. Leyendecker illustrated a series of ads featuring the "Arrow Collar Man," created to advertise the company's detachable shirt collars. Women swooned over the fashion idol and sent him mountains of love letters during his twenty-five-year advertising history. Leyendecker also did a series of illustrations for Kuppenheimer Suits and Interwoven Socks, which helped popularize the style of the fashionable man of the early 1900s.



J.C. Leyendecker illustration from a 1935 Saturday Evening Post cover.

During World War I, Leyendecker continued to produce commercial commissions and magazine covers. He also painted recruitment and bond posters for the war effort. His wartime work portrayed American icons, like Liberty, posed to project the sense of strength, certain justice, and ultimate victory.

Leyendecker's career hit its peak during the 1920s. He was one of the most popular and recognized illustrators of the time. Some of his most notable clients over the years included Amoco, the Boy Scouts, Collier's Weekly, Cream of Wheat, Ivory Soap, Kellogg's, Palmolive Soap, Procter and Gamble, and more.

Demand for Leyendecker's work steadily decreased beginning in the 1930s. The collar industry began to decline and the editor who often hired him to illustrate for the *Post* retired. Leyendecker continued to work, though he became increasingly reclusive. He again provided poster art for the war effort during World War II, before dying on July 25, 1951. He was an early influence on Norman Rockwell, who served as a pall bearer at his funeral.



Part of the American Illustrators issue, this stamp picture's Leyendecker's "Arrow Collar Man."



J.C. Leyendecker popularized the image of Santa in a fur-trimmed red suit.



On a 1914 cover of The Saturday Evening Post, Leyendecker pictured a bellhop carrying flowers to commemorate the first official Mother's Day that year. This popularized the idea of giving flowers on Mother's Day.

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