

The Complete Brief History of Club Negro
1999-2003



“Me, we.” – Muhammed Ali

Club Negro was inspired by an object of the same name – an old, persimmon-head golf club to which a mane of my dreadlocks was glued. From there, it became a concept into which I have put countless hours of thought and study.



Club Negro, 2000

Club Negro is where Black Americans find themselves politically listless and ineffective. It is where luxury and comfort are the goals we seek to obtain. It is here where black people congregate with blinded eyes and zipped lips. They see no, hear no, or speak no points of view on racial politics, economics, or the educational disparities between the black and white communities. They speak not a word on the outright violent injustices perpetrated at the hands of armed public

servants. It is an illusory state of leisure shielded by denial, wealth, and celebrity. At Club Negro one is not subject to the stop-and-frisk realities on the streets of this great country of ours (I was going to write, “the streets of the inner city, but experience tells me it’s any street, anywhere).

It is a place of complacency where the lack of collective outrage towards conditions that persistently burden black men and women is the norm and not the exception. The leaders, people of principle with the courage to speak without concern of retaliation from sponsors or political contingencies, have perished. Whether assassinated, bought and compromised, or marginalized by their political fatigue, those people of courage and conviction are gone, and no one has filled their shoes or taken the baton. No one of integrity has come to the fore to inspire the activism that defined the 1960s.



Athletes and entertainers, who assume role models and hero statuses, cannot break any barriers to benefit others. None will speak out on issues that directly affect black people and their future. They are too busy being arrested, jailed, and put on trial for fighting in clubs, brandishing guns, driving under the influence, and raping or harassment of women. In other words, they are too busy engaged in self-indulgent wealth, fame, and celebrity. Where are the Harry Belafontes, the Muhammed Alis, the Eartha Kitts, the Jackie Robinsons, and the Paul Robesons? Where are the celebrities who join their political points of view with their power to influence? Where are the Malcolms and the Martins?



1968 Olympics Black Power Salute

We are a generation that has abandoned principles and values for property, notoriety, and wealth. We flaunt these things as if material possessions signified an arrival to the promised land. Material gain and individual progress have become the virtues of this generation. We have under-appreciated philosophy, intellectualism, and art while over-appreciating gold chains, expensive sneakers, and new cars. All the while, an unsettling level of acceptance for the devaluation of human life has become epidemic. We have made martyrs of slain rappers who have cultivated the lifestyles of violence that claimed their

lives. That is not to say the death was deserved, but in some cases, the inevitable consequence.



The Slain Late Biggy Smalls, A.K.A. The Notorious B.I.G.

Our society continually absolves and rewards poor, anti-social behavior amongst our black celebrities. So why do we not hold them accountable? Why are athletes like Ray Lewis, Allen Iverson, and Mike Tyson idolized? Are there no other people in the public eye to emulate? And why is the problem always attributed to the media “blowing things out of proportion.” Without fail, these individuals claim they are the victims of over-scrutiny by the press. The defense? “I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, with the wrong people (but I wasn’t doing the wrong thing)”. Can’t the responsibility for their behavior rest in the choices these individuals make? Can’t they be held accountable for their actions? Even more disturbing is that no matter how reckless their social conduct is, they are

constantly returned to us as product pitchmen. We see them plastered to the sides of office buildings along 125th street, promoting HBO boxing or Reebok basketball shoes.

Today, we are interested only in being seen with the right people in the right places, wearing the right clothes from the hot designers. We are interested only in that which benefits the individual. The “I got mine” attitude is the working attitude of an aimless generation. If we continue down this shortsighted, narcissistic path, we are setting ourselves up for a blindside hit that will serve less as a wake-up call and more as a knockout punch. We will be thrust further into political sedation and social ineffectiveness. To be thrown further into this state of social narrow-mindedness is a signature on our own death certificate.

We contribute little and have left even less for the future generation of young black men and women to model. Where are the soldiers for change by any means necessary?



Fred Hampton

Which athlete today will board a plane to fly to South America to feed hungry people only to die in the course of that duty? Who today, among our black celebrities, would put their career and potential on hold to protest government policies and attitudes that directly affect the African-American population and society? Who among them would join the protest against police brutality (Rodney King, Abner Louima, Amadou Diallo, Patrick Dorismond)? Unfortunately, not a single celebrity would be on the front line demanding changes in the use of force practices by police personnel.

Is Al Sharpton, political opportunist or not, the only man willing to be at the front line as a force for silenced voices and against the abhorrent treatment of young black men by New York's finest? So take Mr. Sharpton out of the mix, and who's left?

No, these figures of today are anesthetized by fame and wealth. They are buffered by the conditions from which they grew (not all came from poverty, obviously), and they have become the establishment. They cannot be bothered with conviction on political issues, racial politics, or collective advancement because their own personal and economic progress

is far too important to risk losing. Their opinions are kept secret or spoken amongst each other, not to be construed by their employers or benefactors as ungrateful. They appear on late-night television to plug movies, concerts, or sporting events. Still, their silent rage at the dragging death of James Byrd or the outright murder of a defenseless Amadou Diallo stays hidden. They have no opinion *in public* on matters such as these, but that is exactly where they can be most effective. From there, they can sway the attitudes and actions of public officials or younger people who listen to them and sometimes look to them for guidance and leadership. Unfortunately, the young cannot find leadership in their neighborhood or the music they listen to. They go un-nurtured at home and in public schools to be responsible, intelligent young men and women of purpose and vision. This is not to say that none are, but many are being left by the wayside, which is the unfortunate and indisputable truth.

And what's more, these so-called role models and celebrities are unwilling to accept that they influence young people while simultaneously impressing each other. Instead, they rationalize their music by saying the vulgar lyrics express their first amendment right to free speech. "We just keepin' it real," they reply. But would any of these so-called hardcore gangsta rappers, some of whom are parents, let their children listen to the violent bitches and ho's "free speech" hip-hop songs of the last ten years?

If one of these popular figures in music stepped to the head of the pack by distinguishing themselves as politically conscious, racially sensitive, and compassionate individuals, others would

follow suit and join them. What kind of ripple effect would a contingent of our most revered actors, athletes, and musicians, joined as one voice and lending their celebrity to “grassroots” struggles, have on the people who admire them? Are not atrocities like police brutality more susceptible to change when people with power are joined in opposition to such matters? But no one is willing to risk anything they’ve worked so hard to achieve, forgetting that the generations before them suffered great injustices for the opportunities they now enjoy!

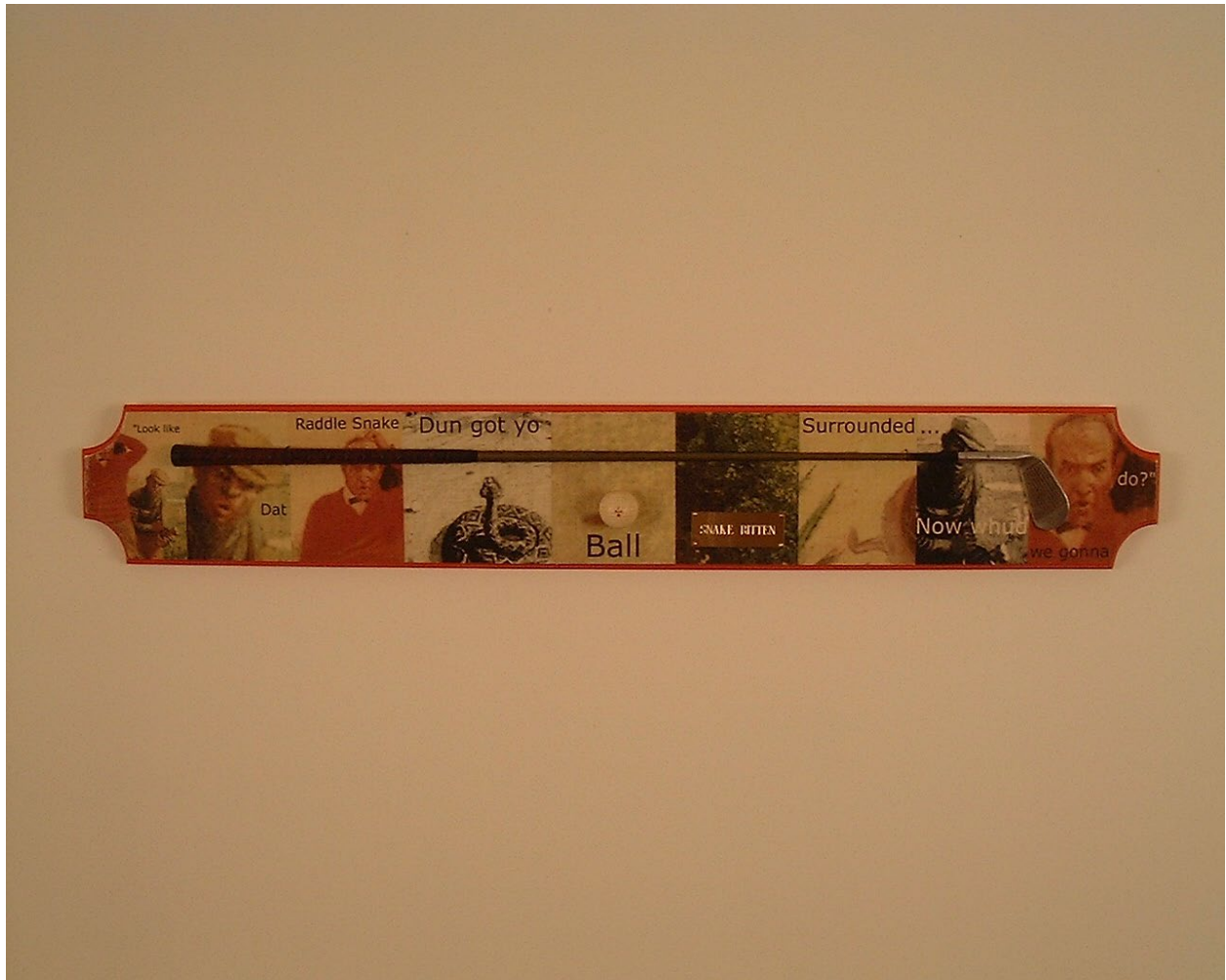
These celebrities are, after all, “getting paid.” They have, in a sense, forgotten where they came from. They are examples of personal entitlement and material possessiveness run amuck. We are the “don’t worry, be happy” generation. We are participating in an extended and self-imposed hibernation from political activism while grave conditions persist and worsen within the black community. The lifting of “the race” attitude is gone and duly substituted with product endorsements, corporate and movie studio pressures, and plush, opulent, demonstrative living.

“Why be on the front line when you can be on the front nine? Introducing the new Nigger 2000. The golf ball for revolutionaries who don’t have the time.”

This was the tagline for a fictitious product at Club Negro, which promised political and economic advances by

simply buying the item. One did not have to demonstrate and march en masse. They need only purchase the freedom and rights that normally come from pressures on the government to change and be more inclusive. One could reap the rewards without shedding blood, sweat, and tears. The lifestyle accompanying celebrity is too valuable to jeopardize, and the sport of golf was the perfect example of leisure not lending itself to radical political involvement and outspokenness on racial issues. After all, what would the membership

think? And what about that controversial clause in my endorsement contract?



Snake Bitten, 2000

The *Nigger 2000* ball was inspired by the thought of Malcolm X delaying the start of a rally in Harlem

because of a Sunday morning tee time in Westchester. The thought is ridiculous, of course.

Imagine Malcolm X involved in a recreational activity as frivolous as golf and placing *its* importance over the struggles of Black America.

He would not have allowed such distractions when so many dire conditions and issues needed direction and leadership. He was a committed man of principle and political conviction. He put his financial security and, in the end, his life on the line for what he believed in and on behalf of his children's future. He did not want his children to grow up with the shame and disgrace thrust upon him as a boy.



The Malcolm X Golf Ball, 2000

“...Now you can scare white folks and lower scores at the same time! Guaranteed to improve your game by any means necessary!”

Today, I live in an atmosphere that, although not perfect, has the benefits of his and many others' struggles and personal sacrifices. Men and women before me who made, at times, the ultimate sacrifice and any freedom I am experiencing possible. They made these decisions for the common, collective good of a people and not just the individual. Rosa Parks said no to the back of the bus. Martin Luther King spoke to march and boycott. Malcolm said by any means necessary. And in sharp contrast, Michael Jordan says do it and be like me. Tiger Woods says, don't leave home without *it* or your Buick. Spike Lee says do the right thing on the bus, or you'll get mo' better jungle fever from girl 6 in Crooklyn. Where are the sacrifices and the outspoken opinions which can prove effective in changing the way society thinks?

Hard To Swallow, 2000



The closest thing to conviction towards racial politics is politically conscious rap music, i.e., Chuck D of Public Enemy – a well-versed, intelligent man who knows what the issues of the day are and whom they affect. He is a politically astute man who can affect change in how young people think about their life and future. Another example would be Al Sharpton. Like him or not, he is the only black man who dares to confront and lend a voice to urgent matters.

Club Negro is the state of mind of Black Americans born in the post-Civil Rights Act era – or after 1964. This generation carries shame, guilt, and remorse for the sacrifices made by prior generations. The post-Civil Rights Era marks the birth of an entirely new form of racism – a more covert and subtle version. With legalized racism outlawed, we had to encounter the more understated forms, which were now embedded in hiring practices, loan distributions, college admissions, housing, and the like. In addition, it manifested in the practice of what is commonly referred to as racial profiling.



Plantation Golf, 2000

We have been pacified by material possession and the desire for economic gain. However, this generation has grown up with a psychological burden of racism that is ghostly, elusive, and sometimes a matter of opinion or perception. We carry with us the knowledge that we don't have to march, be denied basic public conveniences, or go to jail for our beliefs. How many of us would sit in jail indefinitely in favor of our strongly held-political convictions?

We are an ineffectual generation burdened by the fact that we have no boycotts or sit-ins, no real stage to protest collectively. In addition, we are undecided and largely ignorant of the issues that matter most to our children. We have had *staged* protests, but to what end? The Million Man March in Washington, D.C., and the so-called Million Youth March in Harlem were enormous failures because they were *events* and not part of a persistent series of collective actions. They imparted no pressure on the system because they were events – one-time mass gatherings that achieved little in the bigger picture.

Some t-shirts were sold along with a few buttons and banners, and that was it. Everybody went home, and it was a return to business as usual. What was accomplished? What was sacrificed? The Million Man March was televised but was far from a revolution.

It is only too obvious that we have not struggled for our freedoms and luxuries (for that, we have the previous generations to thank), and we've relinquished nothing on behalf of the next generation's accessibility to and assurance of the same freedoms. Our individual gain is far too important. We have forfeited nothing, and for this, we should be ashamed and held accountable. But instead, we have become de-sensitized by inactivity, and we are gathering moss. The decades prior to the 90s, where collective political activism was an

essential part of the landscape, were vital in securing any freedom we now enjoy. Without the efforts in the 50s black people would still be in the back of the bus.



Police Dog

(circa 1964)

Subtract the 60s, and we'd have no voting rights. Our freedom to choose where to live would be nullified. The schools we choose and our vacation destinations would still be segregated. Young people of today (and those born after 1964) have no idea what it was like to live in the Jim Crow era. The simple truth is that most of what we take for granted in the course of one day are some of the luxuries and opportunities not afforded past generations in their lives! If you are a young man or woman, sit down with your grandparents and ask them what life was like for them growing up.



Golfer and Caddy



Lunch Counter Sit-In (circa 1960)

The last real examples of persistent public activism in this country were the protests against Apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s. This was not only an American effort but also an international phenomenon that insisted on Apartheid's fall. The consistent political pressure and the continuing corporate action of economic divestment ensured its ultimate demise. Today, however, we are preoccupied and numbed by video games, meaningless Sunday NFL football marathons, and \$49.95 Pay Per View garbage. The chasm between our courage to change conditions and the declining compassion of society at large to care is widening quicker than we'd like to imagine. We don't see it because we are distracted and placated by a handful of wealthy black Americans, starring in their own sitcoms or signing new multi-year contracts to play baseball or some other sport. Instead, we are content to let others suffer without the fundamental human rights of education and sufficient health care. And for years now, young black men have been at the mercy of police forces that seem determined to impose the penalty of death before trial for infractions as minor as graffiti in a public place for carrying a wallet in one's hand!

We've become acutely aware of language and innuendo responding to our race-inspired interpretation of things rather than our potential for unbiased insight. We look out of our individual bubble-suit of cowardice and think only about ourselves and what things mean to us – how we're

affected. Our view of society has been limited by an overindulgence in the concept and relevance of race. We see everything through that lens! We have, in part, lost our minds or at least our ability to think and act rationally when encountering perceived slights. We cannot see rudeness for rudeness, impoliteness for impoliteness and anger for anger. It must be racially charged anger, rudeness, and, more recently, biased crimes. A crime is a crime, and violence is violence. I don't mean to infer that bigotry does not exist. That would be naïve. But I suggest that our perception and interpretation of things is more important than our propensity to channel everything through race.

LYNCH

Be Prepared.
Play The Lynch Ball.
Because...

CHARLES MCGILL

Sometimes It's Just Not Your Day.

Lynch Ball Tag Line: *When Your Game Starts To Go South, Be Prepared. Play The Lynch Ball Because Sometimes It's Just Not Your Day.*

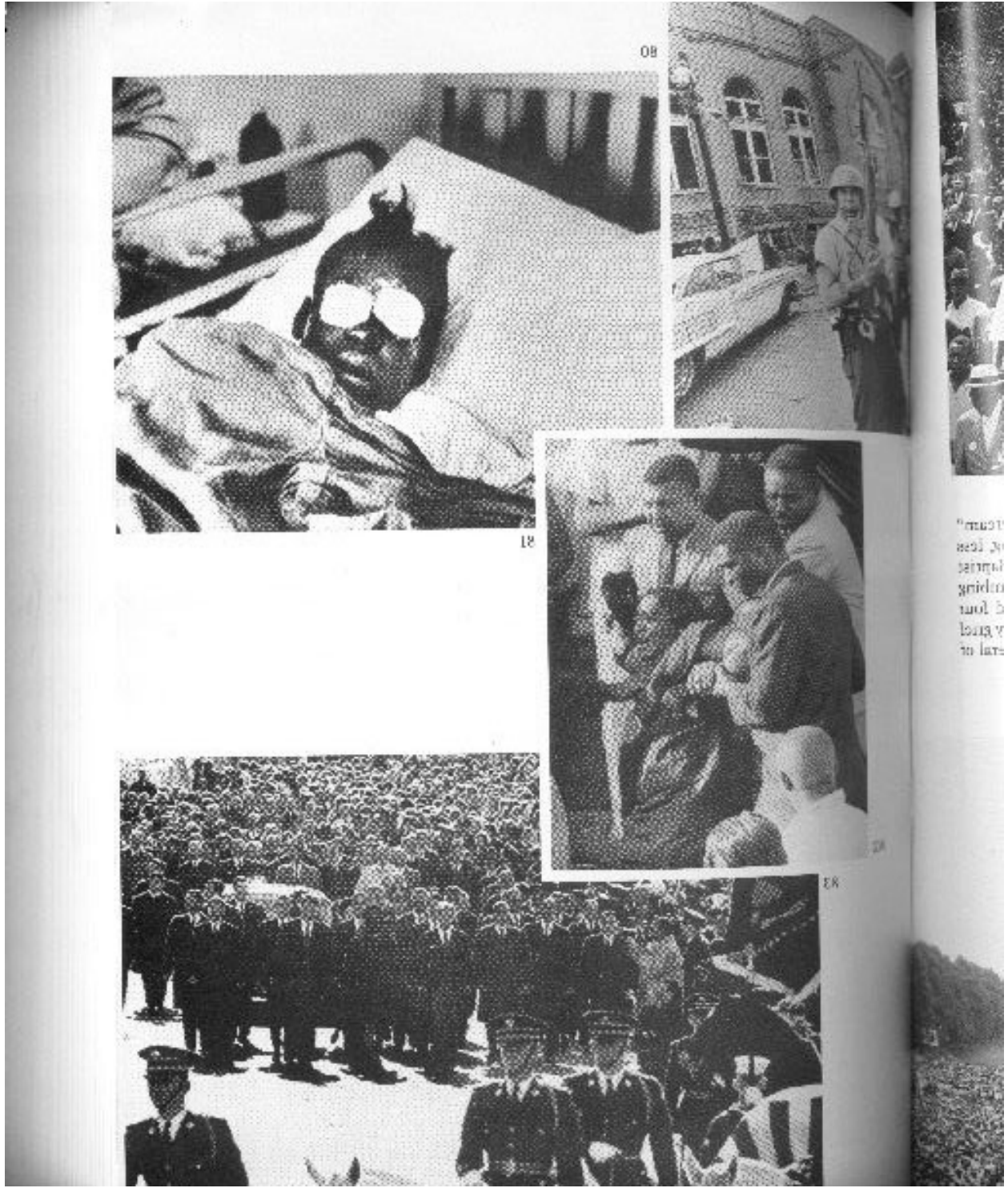
We are baffled by perception and coincidental exclusion from aspects of the workplace and society in general. Whether in housing, a simple taxi ride, or the discomfort that comes with being watched in a convenience store or high-end electronics shop, we are saddled with being on alert at all times, in every circumstance. “Is it my imagination, or are they watching me? Or “Maybe the taxi really *didn't* see me.” We are in a constant conversation with ourselves as to how we are perceived. We are constantly under the assumption that people see only skin color. Sometimes, and to our detriment, we act according to what others believe us to be. In the last 30 years, we have acquired the unenviable social characteristic of a race-based paranoia that cannot distinguish between real and imagined discrimination.

This active imagination and emphasis on how society views us are where most expressions in this exhibit are derived. They originate from the casual language of our white friends, acquaintances, or co-workers. They are inspired by “black on black” perceptions of race and social differences, prime-time portrayals of black families (The Cosby Show included), Funk, Rap and Soul music, politics, and literature. The expressions are evasions of reality and indulgences in misunderstanding and ignorance. Is there really such a thing as a black man? And if so, who is he, and what does he look like? Is there really such a thing as talking white or sounding black? Can white men

jump? Can black people really not swim? Can black men be third-base coaches, quarterbacks, airline pilots, surgeons, or CEOs of fortune 500 companies? Or are we George Jefferson, Fred Sanford, and Kid Dynamite all rolled into one? Can we all dance, play basketball and have intercourse all night long?

There are as many questions as confirmations of the truth and invalidations of the many much-coveted points of view on race.

This body of work attempts to strip naked the person to whom these perceptions are applied. The statements are both true and false. They are meant to disown and discard the labels and standards in which society and individuals invest so much energy. They are meant to be accepted and denied, embraced and abandoned. They are expressions that compel the viewer to see the man, the individual, as he really is in the eyes of God - the human being to whom all these beliefs were attached and cultivated into living misperceptions. Who is the real man without these perceptions heaped upon him? He may or may not be what you believe him to be or not to be. But, as a friend once said, contempt prior to investigation is ignorance. Are we all this contemptibly ignorant?



Various Images of the 1960s Including One Little Girl From the Infamous Alabama Church Bombing by the Ku Klux Klan.

Our perceptions can prove more powerful than race, yet the misguided ideas of race govern our perceptions. So we have trapped ourselves in a web of racial confusion that is of our own making. We have painted ourselves into a corner and against freshly painted walls, and there we stand, baffled as to how we got there, blaming others for our condition. We have narrowed our choices down to two things – material and economic gain or denial. Furthermore, we have tapered our ability to see people for whom they really are, based on our own experience, through such a small lens that we'd accept someone else's point of view before forming our own. From our own experiences, the ability to deduce reason and common sense as we encounter new people has been abandoned for presumption, prejudice, and generalization based not in fact but in deceit and fabrication. We are acting on false information derived from a fear of who or what a person may be, what he may do, or what he may have done. We apply our learned misperceptions to people from a distance before they even open their mouths to us.

Why were the police in Montgomery county, Maryland looking for a lone white male sniper suspect? The driver of the Caprice was a black man, and the police profiled the obvious perpetrator as a white male loner. If the unwritten rules of racial misperception weren't so strong a force in our decision-making, would fewer people have died as a result of the three-week, bloody rampage? Would racial open-mindedness have solved the case earlier? How many of us were surprised to discover that, although most serial killers are white men, the sniper, in this case, was actually *two* black men who were stopped and let go by police *no less than ten times* during the course of the spree, sometimes hours before or after a shooting? One could

be sure that if a Susan Smith-type kidnap of two white children story were front-page news, these men, had they been stopped, would have been detained and questioned thoroughly. But a black sniper?

And why was the media grading Chief Moose's "performance" as the task force's leader? How did the black cop do in a typically white man's role? Is John Muhammad every black man, and does he reinforce racial stereotypes about the African-American businessman looking for a taxi, a loan, or a house? Finally, why isn't Colin Powell a dark-skinned Bush cabinet member, and why won't he run as vice president even though he is an experienced and formidable candidate? Is it because he may very well become the first assassinated vice president?

Why do people fear Manhattan above 110th street? Why isn't James Bond a strong black man, and why was Shaft resurrected? Why did Halle Berry have to get naked and nasty with a white man before a black woman could earn an Oscar for best actress? And why is any outspoken black man, no matter how ridiculous, a spokesman for the entire population of black America? Is there really a Black America? Are the walls of this room and the floor on which we stand so wet with indecision and cowardice that more of us will have to die and be relegated to lives in obscurity before we collectively make moves to change? Is the configuration of the self-spun web so complex that we cannot navigate ourselves back to common sense, compassion, and racial impartiality?

So Club Negro encourages self-examination relative to political involvement. It is a state of mind that continually questions the

validity and existence of race. It is the gray area between pride in self and acknowledging a *racial* identity versus the need for an exclusively *personal* one. The psychological state of being surfaced once the Civil Rights Act went into law and overt, government-sponsored racism went underground – where it became even more insidious.

The questions now are – Will we ever stop rationalizing the anti-social behavior of celebrities and athletes? When will we start acting according to the fundamental principles that value all human life and ourselves? Why do lyrics, innuendo, and the sideways looks that society continually washes over us so easily influence us? Do we adhere to this acquired identity or forge a reality of self that is closer to the nature of God? Do we abandon the labels, classifications, and categories for what would remain? Do we pick up the remnants of what's left and accept that we are not what white or black people think we are? Are we even *who* we think we are anymore?

“Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.” This Bob Marley lyric could easily serve as the motto for Club Negro.

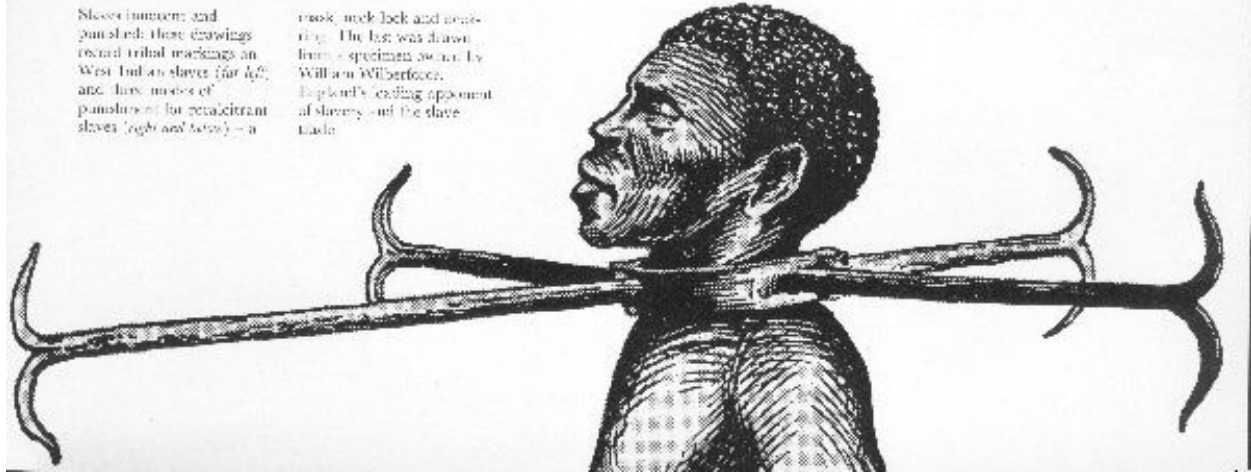
Bristol and Liverpool. The gruesome accessories of the slave trade were on display in shop windows: 'chains and manacles, devices for forcing open Negroes' mouths when they refused to eat, neck-rings enhanced by long projecting prongs . . . thumbscrews and all

kind, so that, so dazzled their imaginations that almost every order of people is interested in a Guinea cargo.'

As the private slave merchants prospered, they bought, among other things, public recognition through philanthropy; Brian Blundell, twice mayor of Liverpool, founded

Slaves innocent and punished: these drawings record tribal markings on West Indian slaves (far left) and lists modes of punishment for recalcitrant slaves (legs and torso) — a

crank, neck lock and neck-ring. The last was drawn from a specimen owned by William Wilberforce, England's leading opponent of slavery, and the slave trade.



Neck Ring for Run Away Slaves from The Former Club Negro