

## The New Negro

Christian Thornton, University of North Texas, USA  
Mentors: Chanjuan Chen, University of North Texas, USA

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**Design Mentor Statement:** This design was a part of a yearlong senior collection project mentoring process. The aim of the mentorship was to assist the student in designing and creating a five-look fashion collection that showcased creativity and innovation through the application of research and advanced fashion techniques. Through the use of sustainable methods and a visually striking print design, this design successfully presents a unique menswear achieved through the implementation of black history and culture as well as various fashion technologies and techniques such as digital textile printing, CLO, and embroidery. The design research objective, research requirements, and strong visual impact were effectively conveyed through precise draping, patternmaking, sewing, and styling techniques.

**Statement of Purpose:** In Black American culture, you will often hear a variation of the phrase, “Before we were slaves, we were Kings and Queens.” While the expression is used to expand upon and uplift the complex history of African Americans, throughout time it lacked visual representation in popular culture. Artist Fabiola Jean-Louis has created full size paper dresses to document the history and culture visually (Valance & Zhurauliova, 2022). For this project, I chose to take it as an opportunity showcase what I envisioned when I heard that colloquialism. Comparing the European renaissance to Black American cultural renaissances of the recent past, I tasked myself with creating a piece that had meaning beyond its visual impact. Taking majority of this ensemble’s inspiration from Alain Locke’s (2015) book, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, the goal of this ensemble was to convey a sense of strength and pride as well as a visual representation of “The New Negro”.

**Aesthetic, Properties, and Visual Impact:** The three-piece ensemble consists of a shirt, pants, and floor length asymmetric cape, completed in denim and cotton shirting. This ensemble is an interpretation of a traditional suit fit for a king’s coronation. The denim suit commands attention, the fabrication itself being a nod to the early 2000s denim outfits I would see hip hop artist wearing on shows such as 106 & Park. The silhouette is a more stylized tailored adaptation of 2000’s baggy suits. The pants feature a double box pleated detail on the front. The shirt is a traditional button up with a collar. The jacket or cape draws most of its inspiration from the coronation robes of kings which is why I chose to make it floor length. Encapsulating the grandeur of a coronation I opted to include box pleats on the bottom half the cape for added

fullness and excitement. The top front panel of the cape features a topstitched abstract portrait of royalty in a traditional denim thread contrasting color. Lying beneath the asymmetric cape, is another abstract image on the collared shirt. The print features a black male figure drawing with the words “The New Negro” behind him in a repeating print.

**Process, Technique, and Execution:** After developing the final sketch, I began digitally mocking up the idea in a digital patternmaking program. Utilizing the program CLO, I was able to create and develop the garment on a 3D avatar, prior to creating my first muslin (Figure 1). The process allowed me explore changes in pleat placement, fabrication, print design and other design details in depth without creating unnecessary physical waste. Upon completion of the first muslin, I was able to pinpoint fit corrections on a live model, adjust the patterns accordingly in the design program, and began developing the graphic design for the shirt using an existing drawing from my personal archive (Figure 2). I began the graphic by first importing the image into Adobe Illustrator and tracing areas of light and shadow until I was satisfied with the appearance of the male figure. With the digital drawing complete, I then imported the shirt pattern from CLO3D into Adobe Illustrator and placed the image of the man on to shirt front that would be exposed. I completed the graphic by inserting the words “The New Negro” behind the



Figure 1. 3D prototyping.

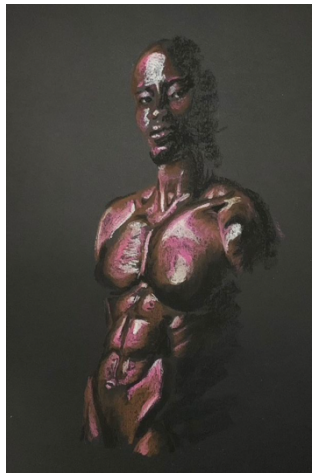


Figure 2. Original drawing.



Figure 3. Print design for the shirt.

figure (Figure 3). The file created from the graphic housed both the pattern for the entire shirt and the print and was sent out to be printed on organic cotton shirting. Upon its return both the denim suit and shirt were cut and sewn. After seeing all the elements together, I then decided to distress the denim with bleach for more visual interest, resulted in the varies tones of lightness within the jacket and pants.

**Cohesion:** This ensemble takes elements from multiple cultural renaissances throughout time and brings them together to create a sensational menswear look. Specifically drawing from the European Renaissance, the Harlem Renaissance, and the surge of hip-hop culture in the early 2000's, this is what I envision when I hear the term "The New Negro". Utilizing methods such as digital textile printing, machine embroidery, CLO3D, and surface treatments, this ensemble represents a man who can understand the history of his people and confidently wear that history with pride. This piece acts as one of many representations of a Black American king.

**Originality and Innovation:** This one-of-a-kind look transforms traditional American staples like denim and cotton shirts into a couture ensemble. It combined history, art, and fashion to tell a story of identity while employed various fashion technologies and techniques. From its digital mockup to its final physical form this piece acts as more than a fashionable garment. It acts as a piece of art, an impactful statement, and a sign of resilience.

### References

Locke, A. (2015). *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Martino Fine Books.

Valance, H., & Zhurauliova, T. (2022, November 17). *Interview with the artist Fabiola Jean-Louis*. Panorama. <https://journalpanorama.org/article/about-time/interview-with-fabiola-jean-louis/>

