

We Should Seriously Consider Segregating the Web | WIRED

By Jason Parham

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The days of June 1996 were honeyed with promise. In San Francisco's SoMa district, electronic music animated a loft dance floor as E. David Ellington and Malcolm CasSelle raised their glasses in celebration. Along with friends and colleagues, they had gathered to toast the success of their new platform, NetNoir Online, a hub of "Afrocentric culture."

Though scrubbed from so much official history, black culture on the web thrived in the mid-'90s. NetNoir launched on the 130th anniversary of Juneteenth, a day that marks the end of slavery, and users flocked to its news articles, online classes, and discussion forums.

The platform soon found itself among a loose constellation of digital havens that together constituted "the soul of the internet": Melanet, GoAfro, Universal Black Pages, and the Brooklyn-founded Cafe Los Negroes, whose advertising copy exclaimed "Representin' Bed-Stuy in Cyberspace" (years before the neighborhood assumed a ghostlier hue). Naturally, black users were not alone in jockeying for visibility. Sites like LatinoLink and CyberPowWow built communities of their own.

[...]

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