

The Modern Era 1900-1980

The 1920's

HATS: A popular style, shown here, is the cloche. Notice that it is close-fitting and comes down to the eyebrows.

HAIR: Many women cut, or bobbed, their hair to chin-length or shorter. The styles had sharp angles and bangs.

SHAPE: The styles were straight and flat. Busts, waists, and hips were not emphasized. Special underwear flattened the bosom to achieve this look.

ACCESSORIES: Hats and gloves were worn for day and evening. Very long beads, scarves, or feather boas and small, fancy bags were popular.

COVERAGE: Bare arms, loose necklines, and shorter skirts were now popular and acceptable.

STYLES: The trend was modern, and designers were influenced by the new movie industry and jazz music.

PATTERNS: Geometric patterns were the style. This means that lines, angles, and shapes were used more often than flowers or swirls.

SHOES: Daytime shoes were flat and simple. Evening shoes often had chunky heels and fancy buckles or other decorations.



1900's Fashion Overview

Think about the size of your closet and how many clothes you have in it. People today often have coats in one closet, the clothes they wear for one season in another closet and more clothes stored in the attic or the basement. Homes from the 1800's and even the early 1900's don't have nearly as much closet space as the homes that are built today.

Why do people today tend to have so many more clothes? What happened to change the styles from clothing that covered up everything from the chin to the toes to clothes that reveal arms, legs, and sometimes much more? The 1900's is when it all happened.

At the beginning of the century, women wore long heavy skirts with many layers. Their dresses had high necks and tight sleeves. Women wore their hair long and used many pins to hold it in place. If a woman wanted to wear pants, she had to dress in men's clothing. Adult women wore hats outside both for decoration and to protect their complexions. For white women, a tan was a sign that a woman did hard work. It was desirable to have a pale complexion, to look like a lady who had servants to do all the work. At the time, women were considered too weak-minded to vote. A young woman was expected to live with her parents until she married a man who had the legal right to treat her like property. A young woman might work outside the home, but she contributed much of her income to the family rather than moving out and spending it on herself. When a woman became a doctor or tried to go to law school, or wanted to do what was considered men's work, she was rocking the boat.

By the end of World War I, women were breaking out of the old ways. They succeeded in gaining the vote. There were more schools for women and more job options. The 1920's were a hopeful time when women's clothing and hair reflected their freedom. Women cut their hair to bobs and they wore short skirts. Women smoked and went out at night without chaperones. Even for women who were cooks and maids, the times brought more freedom. In the 1800's, hired help lived in and were on call. In the 1900's it became increasingly common to do day work. Cooks and maids could come



and go, have their own families and lead their own lives. When the economy was good, people had money to spend on new clothing and on new inventions. Some people had running water in their homes or bought a car. Like everyday wear, bathing suits changed from items that covered nearly the whole person to clothing that showed arms and legs and allowed for more freedom of movement.

The Depression changed the free spirit feeling of the early 1920's. When the stock market crashed, it sent the country into a depression. Many working people lost their jobs, lost their life savings, lost their hope. If you know someone who lived during this time, they can probably tell you about how their family coped. Mothers mended and sewed, remaking old clothes for the younger family members. Some people made clothes out of old potato sacks. No one threw away something because it was out of style. That would have been wasteful.

World War II turned the economy around. Companies could hire and pay because there was plenty to do: uniforms to make, ammunition, aircraft and tanks. In the post-war era, the government built roads across the country. More people could afford updated washing machines and cars. The work that unions did to get higher wages and a shorter work day was paying off.

Women who were in the workplace needed professional clothing. During the 1930's and on, men's and women's professional clothing begins to look more similar. Women and men wore suits: a blazer and a button down shirt with either pants or a skirt. Women at this time still wore hats and gloves in public, but by the 1960's this was not so common. People still needed dress-up clothes, often for church. They had more leisure time for other activities too. Dressing for a ball game, a movie, to do the housework, all these activities had different costumes.



“It’s no joke to feed a big family on a food budget of \$9 a week!”

—Her food budget is one-third what it used to be.

Good Housekeeping, 1934

Television was the first step in technology that would bring people all over the United States (eventually, the world) together. TV actors set the styles. Everyone who watched the shows modeled their dress after what they saw on TV. The early 1950's were the years of fashion conformity. You watched television, read magazines and studied the favorite actors of the day. It was a time to be content. Television shows and movies had happy endings. The conformity in fashion reflected the attitudes of many Americans in the 50's. The nation was resting after ending a war. This conformity in fashion and social values reached all Americans, even the ones excluded from mainstream American life — Blacks, Hispanics, Asians. In minority communities, there was a rising tide of resentment due to the lack of opportunities and representation in mainstream American. Fashion, however, seemed to be the great equalizer—everyone tried to look the same, even though everyone was not treated the same.

In the 1960's young people made strong statements with their clothing. There were T-shirts that said things like "Black is Beautiful" and "Make Love Not War" and "Peace." African fabrics became very popular as black people claimed histories that they had been taught to view as shameful for so many years. The diversity of what people wear is part of our culture today. You can find jackets and shirts of colorful prints from Guatemala and Africa. You can find sweaters from Ireland and kilts from Scotland. In the north, hats with flaps over the ears are like the ones from Eastern Europe and Russia. Stores sell dresses with Indian prints and Asian style tunics.

In the 1900's the process for making clothing became much more complicated. First, there were synthetic fibers. Instead of cotton, wool, and silk, there were materials spun out of plastic and petroleum (like fleece and polyester). Second, when unions became strong enough to demand good wages and benefits for the workers, the companies looked for ways to keep more of their profits. They moved operations off shore, meaning that they could run a factory in Mexico or in Asia and pay the workers so much less that they still came out ahead even after shipping all the materials back to the U.S. Throughout the 1900's clothing has been mass-produced with fewer and fewer people wearing clothes they've made themselves. Mass-produced clothes tend to be cheaper and they might not last as long, so people can and need to buy more.

Styles in other eras changed from year to year in some ways, but in the 1970's and on, they changed drastically and quickly. Hemlines went above the knee to below the knee and back again. The legs of pants went from straight to bell-bottom to straight again. Wearing pants tight or loose all determine how others see us. People are judged not so much for being from the country or the city or for being newcomers, but more for the character that their clothing suggests.

The rules for what is correct to wear have gotten fuzzier over the course of the 1900's. At one time everyone knew that white shoes were not worn after Labor Day. Not cool. The rules may seem more casual, depending on your job, you might wear jeans to work, but the unwritten rules of what to wear to make a good first impression are still fairly traditional. They call for a tailored look, serious colors and a respectable neckline.

Timeline

Part 1

1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire – 145 young women die in a NYC factory fire because the building was a fire trap.

1912 Titanic sank – See the movie for fashion of the times.

Cars – More cars take to the roads. Major cities add new trolley lines

More IQ tests are developed and tried out on immigrants and soldiers.

1916 Margaret Sanger opened up the nation's first birth control clinic. She served 30 days in jail.

1917 The U.S. enters the World War I on the side of England and France, against Germany.

Great Migration begins – African-Americans move in large numbers to the industrial cities of the north

1919 Women's Suffrage – After 60 years of struggle, women finally earn the right to vote.

1920's The Harlem Renaissance begins. Jazz musicians, poets, and artists document and celebrate the African-American experience

1924 Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act, anti-immigrant legislation slows down the number of immigrants from Asian and East European countries. Northern immigrants (English and Scandinavians are still allowed in.)

1929 Stock Market Crashes – Banks don't have enough money to give people back the money they have put into savings. Panic.



1932 President Hoover orders the army to drive 15,000 World War I veterans out of D.C. They were camped out for two months, demanding a bonus from Congress.

1933 New Deal – President Roosevelt’s administration come up with several government programs to give people work. Most of these projects build the country’s infrastructure, bringing water, electricity, and roads to rural areas.

1940 Nylons for sale. In NY 72,000 pairs sold out in eight hours. There was a limit of two pairs per customer. The synthetic replacement for silk was invented in 1937.

1941 Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor. The U.S. declares war against Japan and Germany and Italy

Great Northern Migration continues

1942 The U.S. government sends citizens of Japanese descent to internment camps. The government seizes land and property

1945 World War II ends. Troops return home. The U.S. government passes the GI bill which enables many soldiers to go to college.



Late 1940’s The Baby Boom begins.

1948 The first McDonald’s opens in California.

1951 Saddle shoes and poodle skirts (with crinoline) are popular

1952 Beanies topped with propellers are popular (over 30 million sold)

1953 Aerosol cans are available to the public

1954 School segregation (with its separate-but-equal idea) is declared unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court

1954 TV dinners are first marketed and so are color televisions

1954 Velcro first marketed

1954 A popular television show is Davy Crockett and “coonskin” caps, raccoon coats and even raccoon print women’s underwear are sold.

1954 For college women, straight skirts and matching pastel sweaters were popular. Figure hugging suits and dresses are in style for women. Having an “hourglass” figure is standard in fashion magazines.

1955 In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to move to the back of a public bus. This led to a 381-day bus boycott (primarily by blacks). The boycott was one of the first direct actions against segregation in the south.

1956 Long, straight hair became popular for women. For many Black women this meant chemically straightening their hair. Alelia Walker becomes the first Black American woman millionaire by producing and selling hair and skin care products for Black women.

1957 President Eisenhower sends troops to Little Rock Arkansas to enforce school desegregation

1957 The Frisbee is introduced in California as one of its creators watched college students tossing metal pie tins to one another

1957 The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), led by Martin Luther King, Jr., is formed. SCLC is dedicated to non-violent protest

Congress passes the Civil Rights Act of 1957 which spawns the Commission on Civil Rights (to study racial conditions in the United States)

Many young women wear the bouffant hairstyle. The bouffant will remain in fashion until 1963.

1958 The first Barbie doll is marketed

The “beat” style (with figures like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg becomes trendy. The style is marketed as dark clothing, with black leather accessories (jackets and boots).

1959 The twist is a popular dance. The dance creates a whole new fashion movement with fringed dresses, cufflinks and fur-trimmed caps.

- \$283 million worth of children's "cowboy and cowgirl" clothes sell between 1959 and 1963 due to the popularity of western TV shows and movies

1950's Universities give up their quota systems for admitting only limited numbers of students, especially of Jewish and Asian heritage during this decade.

1950's Stirring up the fears of Soviets and Communists, Senator McCarthy leads a witchhunt to destroy citizens who have different political views, labeling them Communists, destroying their careers. This goes on for years

Part 2

1960 John F. Kennedy wins the presidential election. He gathers a huge amount of support after debating Nixon on television. JFK appeared healthy, boyish and much more like a TV star than Nixon.

The U.S. enters the Vietnam War on the side of South Vietnam. The goal is to stop the spread of Communism.

1960 A sit-in at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, NC marks the beginning of "direct action" strategy in the Civil Rights Movement.

Aluminum cans introduced

1961 Diet-Rite, the first diet soda, is introduced

1961 Detroit - 200,000 participate in March for Racial Equality

1963 Birmingham -16th Street Baptist Church bombed killing four children. Nationally publicized protests are held where police begin to use dogs and fire hoses to break up demonstrations.

Forced public school prayer ruled unconstitutional.

First reported American death in Vietnam (24th death overall). A reported 58,191 Americans died in the War.

1964 Beatles popularity spawns a \$50 million industry selling everything from wigs to buttons to t-shirts.

1964 Civil Rights Act of 1964 bans all discrimination in public facilities. Equal Employment Opportunity commission formed to guarantee equal voting rights to blacks.

1965 Malcolm X assassinated. When the movie came out in the 1990's, X t-shirts, sweats, and baseball caps were popular.

Afro begins a ten-year reign as the fashionable hairstyle for blacks.

Los Angeles - Riots in WATTS section cause 34 deaths and more than \$35million in property damage.

Body painting gaining popularity along with mini skirts and the "flower-child look."

1966 Oakland - Black Panther Party is organized by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

Chicago - Race riots take 4,200 National Guards to quiet.

"Mod" fashions in style - dutchboy caps, paper clothes, silk shirts, bell bottoms, thigh-high boots, and micro-minis.

1967 164 riots break out across the United States

Nehru jackets, granny glasses, anti-war buttons and Mickey Mouse watches popular.

Muhammed Ali refuses to serve in the US Army. He is stripped of his boxing title and receives a five year prison sentence.

Civil Rights Act of 1968 - prohibits discrimination in housing and harassment of civil rights workers.

Memphis - Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated.

1969 Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin took a 141-minute walk on the moon.

Students demonstrate against the war on college campuses.

1969 Stonewall – Lesbians and gay men in New York City resist arrest when the police raid a club and try to arrest them for cross-dressing.

1972 Roe v. Wade gives women the right to legal abortion

Late 1970's Oil Crisis – Arab countries raise the price of oil making home-heating and driving costs soar

1981 The Iran Hostage Situation – People wear yellow ribbons to show their concern for Americans held hostage by Iranians.

1980's Computers and answering machines become a part of most people's household as well as of their worklives

1987 The spaceship the Challenger is set to take off. Millions of children are watching in their classrooms when the Challenger blows up.



and AIDS are responsible for many deaths in the gay male community.

The government drags its feet in research and education efforts until the virus has spread far beyond the gay community. People wear red ribbons to show their concern.

1900's Cars and Car Outfits

Before Reading

Think about a time when you or someone you know was the first to own a new thing that other people were excited about too. What was it? Take a minute to think about the energy and the comments that were part of that time.

This story takes place in Cold Sassy, Georgia in 1906. A 14 year old boy named Will tells about the day his family got a car. His mother's name is Mary Willis, his father is Hoyt Tweedy. This part picks up on a Sunday morning right after church.

Reading: Shaking Red Chariot



If Santy Claus had been out there with his sleigh and his reindeer that hot Sunday morning, it wouldn't of been any more surprising than the sight of Papa grinning like a chessey cat from the driver's seat of a big shiny red Cadillac car! He was wearing a cap and goggles, and his Sunday suit just barely showed under a long linen coat.

The automobile had a black canvas roof, slotted rubber tires, and a brass horn, and was shimmying and shaking and backfiring to beat the band.

"Papa!" I yelled, forgetting I wasn't supposed to holler in the churchyard. Everybody else had forgot, too. I was the first one to reach the motorcar, but the congregation quickly crowded around. "Mama!" I called, looking towards the church steps. "Come on!"

. . . I opened a back door, jumped in, bounced on the seat, and started asking Papa questions. With all the engine racket, he couldn't hear a word I said. He was busy shaking hands with all the men, anyhow, and getting slapped on the back and being asked for a ride.

Boy howdy, that was some morning.

I'm not sure Mama ever would of made it to the Cadillac if Papa hadn't climbed out and gone to get her. The crowd parted like the Red Sea as he led her to his shaking red chariot. Picking up a new linen coat off the front seat, he held it out grandly for her to put on, then draped a big dust veil over her hat and face, and handed her in. When she turned toward the congregation and waved, everybody smiled and clapped.

About then the motor conked out. Papa was so excited he like to never got it started again. He cranked, then showed me how, and I cranked, but nothing happened. "Let me check the directions," he said, reaching in his pocket to take out a little booklet.

It said he had forgot to use the gas feed.

Away we went at last. But we went away lots slower than if we'd had the horse and buggy. Papa hadn't practiced his driving but for a few minutes before church let out, so he wasn't all that sure he could remember where the foot brake was or how much gas to feed. Also, every time he saw a buggy or wagon coming, he had to stop the car and shut off the motor so the horses wouldn't bolt. It was a slow progress till we were out in the country.

As we got to going faster, a grand cloud of dust rose behind us and folks ran out of their houses to watch us go by. Every time we hit a bump or just missed a squawking chicken we'd laugh like children. Boy howdy, what a day! Mama yelled over the racket, "Hoyt, I just cain't believe it! When did you buy it? Can we afford it?"

Excerpts from Cold Sassy Tree. Copyright (c) 1984 by Olive Ann Burns. Reprinted by permission of Ticknor & Fields/Houghton Mifflin Co. All rights reserved. New York: Laurel Trade Paperback (Dell Publishing Co.)p. 231-233.

After Reading

Discussion or Essay Questions

1. What are some of the details Will gives readers to let us know how driving was different then compared to now?
2. Why was riding in a car so much dustier then compared to now? When do you think it changed?
3. Think of the ways we get around today: car, subway, bus, motorcycle, bike, walk. For which of these do people wear special clothing? Pick one mode of transportation and describe and/or draw the ideal outfit for this way of getting around.
4. Write as much as you can about the pre-reading assignment. What caused the excitement? Describe it with as much detail as Will does in this excerpts.

Reading: A Dust Veil

A country woman . . . spent her egg money on a dust veil. Her husband was furious when he saw her draping the veil over her sunbonnet. Said you go git Mr. Blakeslee to give your money back. But she wouldn't. Straightening up proud on her cut-off chair in the wagon, she said, "The same dust as gits on them fancy ladies in artermobiles gits on me when they go racin' by. I got jest as much right to look nice in a cloud a-dust as they do."

from Cold Sassy Tree by Olive Ann Burns
New York: Laurel Trade Paperback (Dell Publishing Co.) 1984, p. 283.

Multiple Choice Practice

1. This passage shows that the woman most wants to
 - (1) Protect herself from dust
 - (2) Dress as well as wealthy women who ride in artermobiles
 - (3) Own a car even if her husband can't afford it
 - (4) Dress in a modern way
 - (5) All of the above

2. The husband is furious because
 - (1) His wife wasted the egg money on something that won't last
 - (2) The store won't give him his money back
 - (3) He wants to control how the egg money is spent
 - (4) When other people see his wife in a dust veil they will make fun of him
 - (5) All of the above

1900's Baseball

Before Reading

This passage is from a chapter in *The Glory of Their Times, The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It*. By Lawrence S. Ritter, New York, 1984 William and Morrow Co.

The first line of this reading says, "A funny thing happened in September of 1906 that I'm not too keen about talking about, but I guess it wouldn't be exactly right to act like it never happened." What do you predict Joe Wood will say?

Reading: "Joe Wood"

A funny thing happened in September of 1906 that I'm not too keen about talking about, but I guess it wouldn't be exactly right to act like it never happened. In a nutshell, that's when I started my professional career, and I might as well just take a deep breath and come right out and put the matter bluntly: the team I started with was the Bloomer Girls.

Yeah, you heard right, the Bloomer Girls.

One day in September this Bloomer Girls team came to Ness City. In those days there were several Bloomer Girls teams that barnstormed around the county, like the House of David did 20 or 30 years later. The girls were advertised on posters around Ness City for weeks before they arrived, you know, and they finally came to town and played us and we beat them.

Well, after the game the fellow who managed them asked me if I'd like to join and finish the tour with them. There were only three weeks left of the trip, and he offered me \$20 if I'd play the infield with them those last three weeks.

"Are you kidding?" I said. I thought the guy must have been off his rocker.

“Listen,” he said, “you know as well as I do that all those Bloomer Girls aren’t really girls. That their baseman’s real name is Bill Compton, not Dolly Madison. And that pitcher, Lady Waddell, sure isn’t Rube’s sister. If anything, he’s his brother!”

“Well, I figured as much,” I said. “But those guys are wearing wigs. If you think I’m going to put a wig on, you’re crazy.”

“No need to,” he says. “With your baby face you won’t need one anyway.”

So I asked Dad if I could go. He thought it was sort of unusual, but he didn’t raise any objections. I guess it must have appealed to his sense of the absurd.

Fact is, there were four boys on the team: me, Lady Waddell, Dolly Madison, and one other, the catcher. The other five were girls. In case you’re wondering how the situation was in the locker room, we didn’t have clubhouses or locker rooms in those days. We dressed in our uniforms at the hotel and rode out to the ball park from there. I think everybody except maybe some of the famer boys must have known some of us weren’t actually girls, but the crowds turned out and had a lot of fun anyway. In case you’re interested, by the way, the first team Rogers Hornsby ever played on was a Bloomer Girls team, too. So I’m not in such bad company.

from “Joe Wood,” The Glory of Their Times, The Story of the Early Days of Baseball Told by the Men Who Played It. By Lawrence S. Ritter, New York: William and Morrow Co., 1984 p. 156-157.

After Reading

1. What surprised you, if anything, about this passage?
2. Why does Joe Wood say: “A funny thing happened in September of 1906 that **I’m not too keen about talking about . . .**”
3. Why is he not proud of his time on the Bloomer Girls team? What other comments show his attitudes toward women? How would you describe his attitude?

4. If you got an offer to do something you really wanted to do, but you had to make some sacrifice in the way you appear, would you do it? For example, wear uncomfortable shoes or a uniform fabric that itched your skin or dress up when you like to dress casually or give up corn rows if that's the way you prefer to wear your hair?

(1) Write your answer.

(2) Talk about your reaction with someone else.

(3) Role play how you would refuse if you were pressured.

(4) Find out more about the laws that protect people from this kind of pressure. There are some laws that protect people from having to make these sacrifices, but you have to know your rights and you still might get fired. (ADA for physical problems, precedent w/workers' rights and corn rows – Anti-Discrimination law)

5. Have you ever had an item of clothing that you hated to wear because it was too girlish or too boyish? What happened to it?

