Votes for Women:
The Politics of Suffragette Fashion

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WHY THIS TOPIC?
AND IT'S 2020

The 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment.
Women's Role in Society

A 'cult of domesticity' was solidly entrenched.

Health and childbearing weighed heavy in the lives of women.

Women had no rights.
"A really good housekeeper is almost always unhappy. While she does so much for the comfort of others, she nearly ruins her own health and life. It is because she cannot be easy and comfortable when there is the least disorder or dirt to be seen."

The Household, January 1884
So what is the trouble with fashion?
Dressed as Dolls
Restrictive Dress

• From circle skirts mid-century to a bustle toward the end of the 1800’s.

• Complex undergarments needed to achieve the bustle silhouette received criticism from health experts and progressives of the time.

• Tight corsets were needed for the right silhouette.

• Some garments made it difficult for a woman to sit down.
1891 Corset
"That our dress may be more healthful, it must first be made looser about the waist, as loose as a man's."

The Household, 1874
THREE LEADING LADIES

Susan B. Anthony
Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Amelia Bloomer
Suffragists vs. Suffragette?
Susan B. Anthony

- An American social reformer and women's rights activist
- Played a pivotal role in the women's suffrage movement.
- Born into a Quaker family committed to social equality, she collected anti-slavery petitions at the age of 17.
- Believed everyone was equal who was created under God.
Elizabeth Cady Stanton

- Raised in a wealthy family
- Student at heart
- Wrote the Woman's Bible (criticized Christianity, church, and faith)
- Less excited to get in front of a crowd, but thrived on pushing women's rights forward, particularly with her writings.
Amelia Bloomer

- Briefly worked as a schoolteacher before marrying Dexter Bloomer.
- Became interested in social and dress reform after moving to Seneca Falls.
- Started *The Lily* as a newspaper for women.
THE LILY

DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF WOMAN.
Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Met through Amelia Bloomer.

Susan B. Anthony often wore black.

Both worked to fight against the restrictive style of women’s clothing so that women could work and earn wages the same as men.
SENECA FALLS CONVENTION

JULY 1848 (SENECA FALLS, NY)
Declaration of Sentiments

- This was not passed by any governing body.
- Declared what women wanted.
- Addressed voting rights, participation and representation in government, lack of property rights, inequality in divorce law, and inequality in education.
DRESS REFORM
Bloomer Costume

• The Bloomer costume consisted of a dress and trousers.

• Amelia Bloomer started the fashion movement that led to women wearing pants.

• She thought that corsets and other styles of women’s dress were too restrictive and even unhealthy.
"I omitted corsets when speaking of underthings. They have been banished from my wardrobe so long I had almost forgotten there was such an article. One feels so perfectly free and easy."

The Household, 1879
“As soon as it became known that I was wearing the new dress, letters came pouring in upon me by the hundreds from women all over the country making inquiries about the dress and asking for patterns — showing how ready and anxious women were to throw off the burden of long, heavy skirts.”
REFORM UNDERWEAR
Roles of Women: 1880-1910

• Change began with factory jobs opening and the growth of urban areas.

• Women in the workforce increased from 2.6 million to 7.8 million during this time period.
Late 19th Century

- Represented themselves as extremely feminine.
- Becomes a major part of rhetoric of the movement
- Strategies are reacting to the anti-suffragettes
The Gibson Girl

- Popularized in 1890’s through early 1900’s
- Emphasis on a nipped waist.
- Started the movement away from very tight and restrictive styles as more women were working factory jobs.
- A Gibson Girl may have been more active and outgoing, but not necessarily a suffragette, and would not have worn the bloomer style.
Picturesque America - Anywhere along the East Coast, 1900
The Problem with Dress Reform

- The Bloomer Costume was ridiculed by both men and women.
- Even Bloomer herself stopped wearing the style and switched to more relaxed dress silhouettes.
- Considered a masculine and unattractive style.
- Women “wanted to focus on more pressing political and social issues than what to wear.”
- Did women stop wearing it because it was just unfashionable?
The woman pictured works for a large retail firm in a middle management position. Responsibilities include writing reports, supervision and training of salespeople, research/market analyses, conducting meetings with top management, seminar presentations, large range strategic plans, manufacturers’ rep meetings, and public relations.
Subjects rated the manager wearing either the necktie or a scarf significantly more likely to possess managerial competencies.

Preference for promotability may be given to females who wear adaptations or feminized versions of masculine symbols.
White for Purity and Virtue

• Helped counter a negative view of the suffrage movement.

• A white dress may have been worn with a “votes for women” sash or sash with the suffragette colors.

• On March 3, 1913 over 8,000 marched down Pennsylvania Avenue
Gold

- Gold representative of the Sunflowers where both Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony campaigned in Kansas.

- Replaced by Green for the Suffrage movement in Great Britain.
Purple for Loyalty

- Also represented royalty in England.
- Color of loyalty, constancy to purpose, unswerving steadfastness to a cause
Dress Reform of the 20th century

Burning of the Bra to symbolically fight for women’s equality.

Protesting a Miss America pageant that was thought of as misogynistic.

“We were tired of making coffee but not policy”
Feminist Dress on the Runway

- Designers are more deliberate in sending political statements down the runway.
- Consumers wear clothing that openly advertises their views and use fashion as a means of political expression.
- Maria Grazia Chiuri, the first female creative director of Dior, sent a t-shirt with the slogan, “We should all be feminists” down her runway show in 2017.
A SIMILAR SCENE IN 1978, MARCH FOR EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT
Geraldine Ferraro in 1985 Democratic Vice Presidential Acceptance Speech
HILARY CLINTON
Suffragette Fashion: Current Day

Women of Congress wore white at the 2019 State of the Union address.
First ladies have an undeniable influence on fashion.

Their dress makes a political statement every time they appear in the public sphere.
The Leading Ladies

Jill Biden

- Has been dressing as a politician's wife for some time.

- More conservative dress style.

- Seen here wearing Stuart Weitzman “5050 vote boots” in Delaware this year.
The Leading Ladies: Melania Trump

- Previously worked in fashion before becoming first lady.
- Love of designer brands.
- Not afraid to wear trendy or bold looks.
- Seen here in an Alexander McQueen outfit at the 2020 Republican National Convention.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VC9kqFEnMoc
After the Presidency: Michelle Obama

- Received a mix of praise and criticism for her fashion choices while First Lady.
- Wore Balenciaga boots that created a media sensation while promoting her book in 2018.
THE ORIGINAL COLLAR

Worn in 1993 official portrait.
Not as elaborate as ones worn in recent years.
MAJORITY OPINION
COLLAR
DISSENTING
OPINION
COLLAR
Recognized as one of her favorite collars.

From Cape Town, South Africa.
2018 OFFICIAL PORTRAIT COLLAR

Sent to her by a fan and worn for the official Supreme Court portrait in 2018.
INSPIRED DESIGNS
"Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you." RBG

"My mother told me to be a lady. And for her, that meant be your own person, be independent." RBG
MOVIES TO WATCH

On the Basis of Sex (Ruth Bader Ginsburg)

Suffragette (2015)

Dreams of Equality (2013) National Archives
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9pxvRfKfxQ

EXHIBITS TO SEE


PLACES TO VISIT
Women's Rights: National Historical Park
Are we there yet?

About 2 hours by car
Things to do at the National Historic Park

- Visitor Center
- Wesleyan Chapel
- The Waterwall at Declaration Park
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton House
SENECA FALLS...

Perhaps the inspiration for the holiday classic, It's a Wonderful Life
Paris, Ontario- Ontario’s prettiest little town with great biking!!! (Near Buffalo, Niagara Falls)
Thanks to the leading ladies who have paved the road ahead. (And given me the opportunity to bike with shorts!)