



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

This is a repository copy of *36 - Producing and Predicting Fashion in Twentieth-Century America and Europe*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/191844/>

Version: Accepted Version

Book Section:

Blaszczyk, R.L. (2023) *36 - Producing and Predicting Fashion in Twentieth-Century America and Europe*. In: Breward, C., Lemire, B. and Riello, G., (eds.) *The Cambridge Global History of Fashion: From the Nineteenth Century to the Present (Volume 2)*. *The Cambridge History of Fashion*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 1249-1291. ISBN 9781108862349

<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108862349.018>

This item is protected by copyright. This material has been published in revised form in *The Cambridge Global History of Fashion* edited by Breward, C., Lemire, B. and Riello, G. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108862349>. This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution or re-use.

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

Producing and Predicting Modern Fashion for America and Europe

Regina Lee Blaszczyk

In a bold cultural move, some style-conscious American activists of the twenty-first century have engaged with the material history of the Civil Right Movement (1954-1968) to make a powerful statement about clothing, class and community. Whether commemorating historic 1960s marches or fighting for racial justice as part of Black Lives Matter (BLM), activists have taken to the streets in their ‘Sunday best’: sharply tailored suits for the men, and fancy party dresses for the women. Casting aside the oversized T-shirts, gym shorts, and baseball caps that have become synonymous with street style, elegant protesters have looked back to the 1960s when the dapper Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968), the future U.S. Congressman John Lewis (1940-2020), and countless other American activists proudly embraced the dress code of respectability that earmarked White middle-class culture of the modern era.¹ King and his cohort had in part hoped to advance social uplift and political change by dressing the part. (fig. 1) By extension, the vintage fashion choices of a discrete group of twenty-first century protesters is a declaration about the material world that goes beyond the phenomenon known as ‘passing’. Like the protesters before them, these activists have consciously and carefully reinterpreted modern dress codes to suit their individual needs, collective circumstances, and social justice agenda.

[insert fig.1 here]

The judicious embrace of vintage dress codes by twenty-first century social justice activists is testimony to the power of memory and the lingering influence of modern moment in the fashion system. The years between 1870 and 1970 were a transformative period for fashion producers and apparel consumers in America and Europe. During the Second Industrial Revolution, Paris couturiers and London tailors set trends for the wealthiest consumers, but a combination of social, cultural, and economic factors challenged the hegemony of elitist styling and allowed for the dissemination of fashion to a broader swath of society. Business enterprise welcomed the expanded markets that sprang from changing demographics, the rising standard of living, and consumers' hunger for affordable fashion that signalled middle-class respectability. The end result was the triumph of everyday fashion for the mass market.

The ascendancy of mass-market fashion was a tsunami that swept across the transatlantic world. The phenomenon drew sustenance from five inter-related developments: 1) the rationalization of the ready-to-wear industry and the growth of regional production centres that developed signature regional looks; 2) changes to the distribution system that downplayed the role of wholesalers and empowered retailers to exert sway over consumer tastes; 3) improved mechanisms for the dissemination of information about colour and style trends, both within the fashion trade and in the consumer domain; 4) the introduction of man-made and synthetic fibres and the growing voice of the textile and chemical companies that produced them; and 5) the rising tide of individualism that encouraged consumers to modify top-down prescriptions to create their own personalized style statements. This chapter explores those developments.

Respectability and Ready-to-Wear

Industrialization brought enormous social, cultural and economic change to the Western world and laid the foundation for the rise of mass-market fashion. Britain led the way with the modernization of the textile industry in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The giant fabric mills of Manchester, England, were inexorably linked to the cotton fields of the American South through transatlantic trade networks and slave labour. While the American Civil War (1861-1865) led to the abolition of Southern slavery, the Reconstruction era (1865-1877) introduced a new system of agricultural peonage that sustained Southern agriculture and the lucrative cotton trade.² As the British-led First Industrial Revolution yielded to the Second Industrial Revolution in the mid nineteenth century, Germany and the United States took the reins. A broad swath of consumer goods achieved wider circulation and greater cultural currency, among them, everyday fashion.

The Second Industrial Revolution coincided with major political and demographic transformations, including population shifts within Europe and the mass exodus of poor and persecuted ethnic groups to America. In particular, the European political upheavals of the mid-nineteenth century—the uprisings of 1848, the Crimean War (1853-1856), and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871)—put a tremendous strain on populations of Central Europe, and spurred decades of mass migration to Western Europe and North America. Jewish immigrants from commercial centres like Berlin brought their talents as skilled tailors to manufacturing cities like Paris, France; Leeds and London in the United Kingdom; and Boston, Cincinnati, New York, and Philadelphia in the United States.³

This mass migration coincided with the spread of the culture of respectability, which prescribed certain genteel norms for people who wanted to ‘fit in’ to White mainstream Euro-American culture. Industrialization and urbanization encouraged the development of a ‘new’ middle class of professionals—accountants, bank clerks, telegraphers, schoolteachers, factory managers, and the like—who joined the ‘old’ middle class of physicians, bankers, mayors, business owners, and professors. Nearly everyone—the stable ethnic communities of Europe and North America, free Blacks in the United States, migrants who traced their roots to Eastern and Southern Europe—aspired to achieve some degree of gentility and climb the social ladder into the middle class. Consumers displayed their awareness of respectability by showing good manners, by selecting certain types of furnishings for their homes, and by wearing the right set of clothes on their backs.⁴

The widespread acceptance of respectability as an aspirational norm stimulated the demand for affordable, presentable clothing. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the garment industries of Britain, the United States and Central Europe modernized to accommodate the new genteel market, and in turn, helped to shape the appetite for middle-class apparel. Entrepreneurs adapted labour-saving methods that were developed for the rapid production of military uniforms to civilian clothing. The sewing machine, an American invention, was installed in garment factories, workshops, and homes around the world. An expanded outwork system, whereby capitalists paid workers to sew up garments at home, sidestepped the overheads associated with factory production and helped to reduce the retail price of clothes. Jewish entrepreneurs facilitated the transition from handcraft to mass production, sometimes as outwork

capitalists, as the proprietors of small tailor shops, and ultimately as the owners of garment factories. Menswear manufacturers used the sewing machine and the division-of-labour to generate a high volume of stylish garments that met the expectations of male consumers striving for gentility. In menswear, the dark wool suit worn with a crisp white shirt and a starched white collar, most famously sold under the Arrow brand, became the sartorial symbol of middle-class respectability up and down the social ladder.⁵ (fig. 2)

The women's wear market was slower to modernize no matter where, but this was particularly the case in Britain and France. Most women sewed simple garments themselves and relied on their neighbourhood dressmaker for more complex items such as the tight-fitting bodices or blouses of the period.

[insert fig. 2 here]

By 1900, however, the average urban consumer in the United States and Germany was dressed mostly in ready-made attire. By this time, Jewish immigrants in industrial cities around America had adapted the methods of menswear tailoring to ladies' apparel. As more women took jobs in stores and offices, they needed work-appropriate clothing—apparel that was attractive, affordable, practical, and washable. The American commercial artist Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944) captured the vogue of the times in his magazine sketches of the 'Gibson Girl', a Victorian office worker in the stylish outfit of the moment: a man-tailored jacket and skirt with a handsome, feminized 'shirtwaist' or blouse. (fig. 3) Few real-life Gibson Girls knew that low-paid immigrant workers made their clothes in crowded sweatshops or tenements until 1911 when press coverage of the infamous Triangle shirtwaist factory fire in New York exposed the dark side of the Second Industrial Revolution.⁶ Still, as capitalism matured, the average fashion consumer

became ever more dissociated from the origins of the things that she used every day— while growing more accustomed to browsing through the shops for commonplace necessities like soft kid gloves, occasional luxuries like fresh ribbons for her bonnet, or major wardrobe updates like a new Easter coat.

[insert fig. 3 here]

New Ways to Sell Mass-Market Fashion

Classic cultural histories of shopping have focused on the large, high-end urban department stores of the Victorian and Edwardian periods as palaces of consumption that tempted shoppers with a pantheon of luxuries, from pianos and oil paintings to apparel, shoes, hats, and other fashion accessories.⁷ More recently, however, historians have examined the role of chain stores, or multiples, in the dissemination of fashion. This research has considered Montague Burton, a menswear manufacturer in Leeds, England, that distributed suits through its own Burton stores on the High Street; Marks and Spencer Ltd, a British penny bazaar that diversified into family apparel; and C&A, a Dutch-German chain that sold practical stylish clothing to shoppers in Europe, Britain, and very briefly, the United States.⁸ The chains co-existed with department stores, haberdasheries, tailors, dressmakers, milliners, shoe shops, dress boutiques, catalogue houses, and other apparel retailers. The proliferation of stores created an atmosphere of abundance and availability, a fulsome, sensual shopping experience that taught consumers to think about clothing as an affordable luxury that could be used to express personal identity and middle-class respectability.

The factories and workshops of the Second Industrial Revolution were in part clustered in cities, many of which became fashion centres. Historians have studied the four major ‘fashion cities’ revered for their design prowess after World War II—London, New York, Paris, and Tokyo—with some reference to Florence, Milan and Rome.⁹ Today, Paris is celebrated as the world’s fashion capital because of the presence of Chanel, Louis Vuitton, and other global luxury brands, while London is revered as an innovator in street styles. But the focus on cities associated with brilliant brands and saucy subcultures belies the deep, rich history of everyday fashion and the secondary fashion cities that helped to promote it. During the Second Industrial Revolution, London was part of a national and international fashion eco-system that included dozens of major clothing production centres. Garment manufacturers in London’s East End competed with firms around the United Kingdom for a share of the British ready-to-wear market. The textile hubs of Manchester and Leeds in the United Kingdom were home to the distinctive, nationally recognized ‘Northern style’ in ladies’ fashion.¹⁰ As the home of both Burton and its rival Joseph Hepworth & Son, Leeds led Britain in the production and distribution of popular menswear, but its factories also made large quantities of affordable ready-to-wear for women and children. Manufacturing hubs elsewhere in Europe and America followed a similar path to become regional fashion centres. Central Europe had secondary fashion cities such as Berlin, Prague, Vienna, and Zürich, among others. In the United States, New York City was the largest apparel producer, but there were significant regional manufacturing clusters in Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Rochester, and other industrial cities.¹¹

Many textile and apparel centres had busy retail districts that catered to the rising demand for respectable attire for men, women, and children. Locally made clothing found a ready market in the downtown stores, and a combination of local pride and consumer aspirations stimulated the demand for fashion. For example, Boston, Massachusetts, identified itself as a regional shopping mecca for everyone in New England, with a thronging downtown at Washington Street where stores stocked all the new fabrics and fashions made in the local mills or shipped in from New York. In Britain, Michael Marks, a Jewish immigrant from the Polish lands, started his penny bazaar in Leeds, but his company, Marks and Spencer Ltd, eventually set up headquarters first in Manchester and then in London for greater proximity to wholesalers and access to a larger consumer market. Regardless of their size, many fashion cities had strong communications sectors that supported the retail trade. Printers, publishers, and advertising agencies helped to disseminate all of the style gossip with circulars, posters, trade cards, magazines, and newspapers. In the United States in particular, local newspapers developed a symbiotic relationship to local stores, with the press relying heavily on revenues from the retailers who, on a daily basis, paid nicely to place full-page advertisements illustrated with sketches of ladies' fashions.

A vignette of one American fashion city—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—provides insight into the regional and international dimensions of style creation and clothing distribution in the modern era. Centrally located on the East Coast between New York and Washington, Philadelphia was the largest textile city in America, home to countless fabric and apparel factories. Before the age of the internal combustion engine and petrol-powered cars and buses, consumers from around the Mid-Atlantic region could easily

travel to downtown Philadelphia via a well-developed regional railway network. A major freshwater port since the colonial era, the city gained traction as a regional fashion centre with the founding of Oak Hall, a ready-made clothing store for men and boys operated by the partners Wanamaker & Brown starting in 1861. After amassing a fortune making soldiers' uniforms during the Civil War, John Wanamaker (1838-1922) hooked his star onto the newest promotional idea of the Victorian era: the great exhibition. Wanamaker joined other Philadelphia entrepreneurs to plan a world's fair, the Centennial Exposition of 1876, to honour America's hundredth birthday, and just in time for the festivities, he opened the Grand Depot, a cavernous store right in the city centre. The Grand Depot stocked merchandise of such quantity and variety that it is generally considered to be the first department store in America. For our purposes, it is salient to note that all of John Wanamaker's clothing stores sold ready-to-wear produced in his own factories around the city. (fig 4) In 1912, Wanamaker made the strategic decision to reach upmarket when he replaced the Grand Depot with a gargantuan skyscraper store designed by the office of the renowned Chicago architect Daniel H. Burnham (1846-1912). (Around the same time, Wanamaker's great rival, Marshall Field, also invested in a new Burnham-designed skyscraper store in Chicago, the shopping mecca of the American Midwest).

Architectural amenities included electric lighting, elevators, display windows, restaurants, tearooms, concert halls, and the world's largest organ. The new John Wanamaker facility—a true palace of consumption—dominated downtown Philadelphia and was acknowledged to be the most prestigious shopping destination on the East Coast (fig. 2).¹²

[Insert fig. 4 here]

In terms of fashion, the John Wanamaker store became the go-to destination for wealthy shoppers and for middle-class strivers with enough discretionary income to emulate the upper crust. Philadelphia socialites—motivated to out-dress each other at debutante events, dinner parties, lunch at their country clubs, tea at their downtown clubs, the opera, and the symphony—shopped there. The store imported the latest Paris couture gowns, showcased the originals at invitation-only events, and filled its salons with spin-offs made by its own factories. Back in 1880, John Wanamaker had become the first American retailer to open a Paris buying office for sourcing ladies' coats, wraps, and cloaks from Paris, Berlin, and other European fashion cities. The store enlarged its Paris office over the years. By 1899, the Wanamaker Paris Bureau inhabited a large facility at 44, rue de Petites Ecuries, an old mansion nestled among the wholesalers of the 10th arrondissement, from whence it served as a 'watch-tower' for Paris fashion.¹³

Emulation was the engine of modern consumer society, and it was not long before numerous Philadelphia retailers copied John Wanamaker's display techniques, pricing policies, and merchandising strategies. By World War I, downtown Philadelphia was filled with department stores and clothing shops that catered to all different market segments. Department stores like Gimbel Brothers, Lit Brothers, and Strawbridge & Clothier targeted the old middle class of lawyers and doctors and the new middle class of white-collar professionals, while Frank & Seder and N. Snellenberg & Company catered to working-class shoppers. Recent immigrants and Blacks patronized smaller downtown shops, market stalls, and neighbourhood stores that helped them dress the part on a budget. The Philadelphia story is instructive for what it tells us about geography and

space, the symbiotic relationship between production and distribution, and the importance of respectability as a driving force for retail innovation in the modern fashion system.¹⁴

As the white-collar class expanded, menswear manufacturers in Leeds and in Rochester, New York, diversified into retail distribution with their own chain stores. In the ladies' trade, the Paris-led vogue for simplified lines, which came to the fore in the years before World War I, spawned the growth of ready-to-wear chain stores on Main Street. The pages of *Women's Wear Daily*, the major newspaper for American retailers, were filled with reports on countless regional and national fashion chains, many of which have closed their doors. Two companies had better luck than most. In 1918 in New York City, one shirtwaist maker established a chain called Lerner Shops to retail its ready-to-wear at affordable prices. Lerner Shops eventually traded as Lerner New York and then New York & Company, selling youthful styles to high-school students and urban office workers. Founded in New York in 1904, Lane Bryant started out selling maternity wear but quickly diversified into 'stout' sizes for the mature figure. Managers at Lane Bryant studied women's body measurements, developed reliable sizes for large and tall women, and dominated the 'plus' market into our own time.¹⁵ Both of these national fashion chains successfully transformed themselves into suburban mall stores in the late-twentieth century but have recently experienced major setbacks and closures due to the rise of online shopping and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Besides regional and national chains, another type of clothing retailer—the large fashion specialty store—appeared on the East Coast of the United States in the early 1900s. One such innovator was William Filene's Sons Company, established in Boston in 1912. In an advertising pamphlet, the store explained what made it distinctive: 'Filene's

is NOT a Department Store. Filene's sells almost entirely wearing apparel and accessories, grouped in small specialty shops. It is probably the largest store in America devoted to the personal outfitting of women, children and men'.¹⁶ Other retailers emulated the Filene's model, opening large multi-level stores that only sold fashion and accessories. Prominent names included Lord & Taylor, which moved from lower Manhattan to Fifth Avenue in 1914; Bergdorf Goodman, which opened a Fifth Avenue location in 1914; and Saks Fifth Avenue, founded in 1924. While the New York stores homed in on upmarket shoppers, Filene's catered to consumers at a range of price points to attract customers from all around the New England region.¹⁷

Astute European businesses tuned in to the fact that the United States was setting the pace in everyday fashion. In the 1920s, executives from Marks and Spencer Ltd visited America to learn from the retail scene as they planned the diversification of their penny bazaar. Within a few short years, the company was selling ready-made apparel for the entire British family in bright modern stores that had been updated along American lines. Following the American example, Marks and Spencer Ltd also established a testing laboratory that had oversight for ensuring that all of its merchandise, including everyday fashion, met the highest standards for quality.¹⁸ After World War II, other Europeans ventured abroad to study American modernity. They wanted to see for themselves the squeaky-clean chain stores filled with glamorous Hollywood-inspired ready-to-wear and to get tips on merchandising innovations such as standardized sizes, popular pricing, and market segmentation. One enthusiastic student of American retailing was the Swedish entrepreneur Erling Persson, who went on a reconnaissance mission to the United States in 1947. Persson returned home determined to emulate American practices and set up a

small shop called Hennes, or ‘Hers,’ to sell affordable ready-to-wear made by Swedish factories. By mid-century, American fashion retailing had thus established a strong influence in Europe, most notably serving as the template for the Stockholm-based global brand today known as H&M.¹⁹

Predicting Fashion Futures

The modernization of apparel production and distribution generated the need for better communication networks among the fashion trades. This business-to-business (B2B) function was largely invisible to the public eye, and until recently, has not been examined within fashion studies. For much of the Second Industrial Revolution, wholesale cloth distributors like the mammoth drapery warehouses near St. Paul’s Cathedral in the City of London acted as the major intermediaries between textile mills and commercial fabric buyers. (fig. 5) The drapers tracked trends among the Paris couture houses and the London high-end tailors for the benefit of their customers—the haberdasheries, milliners, tailor shops, and apparel factories that purchased fabric, feathers, buttons, and other soft goods needed for clothing production. We can imagine a knowledgeable drapery clerk telling a customer ‘The French couture favours eggshell blue for the spring’ or ‘Boucle weaves are making headway on Bond Street’. The customer was free to use the draper’s advice as they saw fit, perhaps mixing this trade gossip with information personally gathered by reading the newspapers and business journals, studying fashion magazines, browsing the shops, and sizing up consumers back home.²⁰

[insert fig. 5 here]

The London drapers, however influential, were not the first businesses to provide trend advice. Some of the first forecasting businesses appeared in nineteenth-century Paris. In 1825, the French designer Victor Jean-Claude set up a studio to make sketches and procure Paris samples for textile mills in an isolated part of eastern France. By the 1850s, Victor and his brother François Claude ran an enlarged sampling bureau that sold information on the latest Paris trends to mills and design schools around France. Eventually, creative businesses throughout the transatlantic world—textile mills, garment workshops, milliners, lace makers, dressmakers, and retailers—subscribed to the J. Claude Frères service. Some businesses, like John Wanamaker, preferred to do their own investigations through their own Paris offices. But for the most part, it was cheaper for foreign firms to pay a fee to a Paris bureau for reports, sketches, and swatches rather than incur the expense of sending their designers, buyers, and merchandisers to Europe to check out the new styles.²¹

A parallel development is worth noting. The birth of synthetic textile dyes led the large German chemical companies, who by the 1870s dominated the global dyestuff trade, to perfect a new marketing tool: the shade card or colour card. Created to promote dyes, shade cards eventually took on a life of their own in the marketplace, becoming a major source of colour trend information within the global fashion business. Textile designers in Lyon, Manchester, and Lowell studied the German colour cards to learn of the latest European colour trends. Eventually, local dye houses in industrial districts like Lyon and style bureaus like J. Claude Frères in Paris started to publish colour cards that showed the latest shades from Paris.²² (fig. 6)

[insert fig. 6 here]

Although the French invented colour forecasting, it was the Americans who, with their penchant for efficiency, rationalized and systemized the prediction process. The American organization that led the way was the Textile Color Card Association of the United States (the TCCA, later known as the Color Association of the United States), a trade group founded in New York City in 1914 shortly after outbreak of World War I. For decades, the American textile and garment industries had simply copied the colours shown in the French shade cards. But when transatlantic shipping slowed down during World War I and the French cards disappeared, the TCCA transformed the business of information dissemination within the American fashion trades by introducing a set of colour management tools that addressed the specific needs of industry in the United States.²³

The TCCA's first managing director, Margaret Hayden Rorke, looked to Paris for inspiration, but her principle objective was to provide American industry with colour management tools that suited the diverse tastes of a large, multicultural mass market. 'Mrs. Rorke' (as she was known in the trade) had a lasting influence. She created a system of practical design tools—colour standards, seasonal colour forecasts, and occasional trend reports—that provided professionals in the American creative industries with guidance on long-term trends, seasonal style variations, and fads in popular culture. The TCCA's colour management tools were widely used by creative firms, ranging from textile mills and fashion designers to automakers and chemical companies. The objective was not to run a colour cabal that manipulated consumer choice but to increase business efficiency in design-driven industries by disseminating reliable information on the new

hues. Colour management, it was believed, would help American industry avoid the waste associated with making products in colours that nobody wanted to buy.²⁴

Rorke and the TCCA watched others jump on the bandwagon for trend reporting and colour forecasting. In the United States in the 1920s, Tobé Coller Davis started the Tobé Report, a style service to American retailers that wanted Paris fashion news before it hit the pages of *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*.²⁵ Emulation continued into the 1930s. Taking advice from Rorke during some of her European travels, British industrialists created a mirror-image twin to the TCCA called the British Colour Council and charged it with the mission to provide colour directions to their textile mills. In France, J. Claude Frères continued to sell its services internationally, but rival entrepreneurs like Fred Carlin, a textile engineer, set up a company that sold swatch books of Paris fabric samples. After World War II, the trend field grew more crowded as trade associations like the Committee for the Coordination of Fashion Industries, a French women's wear trade group, and the International Wool Secretariat, the public relations arm of the wool growers in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, ventured into colour forecasting. But the impact of Margaret Hayden Rorke and the TCCA should not be discounted. Today, whether they acknowledge it or not, colour services like Pantone, Inc., Première Vision and WGSN (formerly the Worth Global Style Network) create colour standards and predict colour trends for the global business environment using techniques that Rorke perfected in the modern era.²⁶

Miracle Materials: A Game Changer

From the 1920s through the 1960s, the rise of affordable fashion was greatly advanced by technical innovations in the textile and chemical industries. Until World War I, the fabric industry relied heavily on four major natural fibres: cotton, wool, silk, and linen. While these materials had many advantages, the supply chain was unreliable because of the unpredictability of Mother Nature and the fluctuating prices of agricultural commodities. A major drought in Australia could kill thousands of sheep, curtail the wool supply, and put a major kink in the textile supply chain. In the nineteenth century, chemists started to experiment with alternative fibres that could be made from abundant natural materials like cotton and wood. Ultimately, these efforts generated a family of plant-based fibres that would be collectively known as ‘rayon’ from the mid 1920s onward. While early experiments on artificial fibres were conducted in France and Germany, the British textile industry soon jumped ahead due to first-mover advantages rooted in its leadership role in fibre management dating back to the First Industrial Revolution.²⁷

The rayon age blossomed in Europe and North America alongside the growth of the ready-to-wear industries in Germany, Britain, and the United States during the interwar period. In the 1910s, the simplification of Paris styles combined with the wartime need for practical attire spurred the demand for large quantities of textile yarns to be used in knitted and woven fabrics. As skirts got shorter in the 1920s, there emerged a desire for inexpensive ladies’ stockings that looked and felt like silk at a fraction of the cost. The abandonment of the tight Victorian-style corset for looser undergarments further stimulated the demand for silky materials, but there simply was not enough natural silk to go around. The makers of the new artificial yarns stepped up to the plate.²⁸

Within a few short years, it became clear that rayon was the fibre of the future, and the field grew crowded. The British silk maker Courtaulds was the leader in artificial fibres, with manufacturing facilities in Great Britain and the United States. But the organic chemicals industry also sought to capitalize on the rayon boom, with countless firms rushing forward. By the late 1930s, the leading rayon-producing countries were Japan, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, all of which had advanced chemicals, textile, and garment industries.²⁹

In the United States, the Viscose Company, a Courtaulds subsidiary, was the pre-eminent manufacturer of artificial silk for many years until new players crowded onto the field. One of the fiercest new entrants was E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Company, a chemicals manufacturer that diversified into textile fibres in 1920. Having made a fortune on explosives during World War I, DuPont had enormous financial resources at its fingertips, along with some of the world's best chemists, chemical engineers, product developers, and marketing experts. By the 1930s, skirmishes over who would dominate the rayon age exploded into a full-blown war. Inexpensive rayon dresses became the must-have fashion sensation of the Great Depression, spurred by the deflationary economy, price competition, and massive consumer advertising. In Britain, the testing laboratories at Marks and Spencer Ltd in central London collaborated with textile mills to develop high-quality rayon fabrics that went into dresses, lingerie and other garments sold under the St. Michael label. The rayon explosion continued during World War II as the major natural fibres--cotton, wool, and silk--were requisitioned for the military. With wool being reserved for blankets and soldiers' uniforms, home-front consumers on both

sides of the Atlantic Ocean were encouraged to ‘make do’ with stylish, colourful rayon fashions.³⁰ (fig. 7)

[insert fig. 7 here]

Rayon continued to be popular in mass-market fashion well into the post-war era. A major shift away from first-generation artificial fibres occurred with the widespread adoption of newer synthetic materials in the 1960s. Nylon was the world’s first synthetic fibre, with DuPont in the United States leading the way with nylon 6.6 and I. G. Farben in Germany following with nylon 6 before World War II. While rayon was a plant-based textile, nylon was synthesized from chemicals, and as such, was often called a ‘test-tube’ fibre. At DuPont, nylon was born of a concerted effort in research and development (R&D) and chemical engineering to create a test-tube fibre that improved on silk and rayon in terms of appearance, durability, performance, and price. In 1939, DuPont publicized nylon to great fanfare at two world’s fairs—one in San Francisco, the second in New York City (fig. 8). Nylon was touted as a new miracle material, the child of the science and technology that was so revered in modern times.³¹

[Insert fig. 8 here]

Building on nylon, chemicals manufacturers and fibre producers ventured deeper into laboratory science and chemical engineering to develop other synthetic fibres. British industry advanced the synthetics revolution when scientists at the Calico Printers Association (CPA) in Manchester invented Terylene polyester and researchers at Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) in Huddersfield prepared the new fibre for commercialisation during World War II. But DuPont stole the show and came to dominate global fibre production with a distinctive family of fibres that included viscose rayon, cellulose

acetate, nylon, polyester, a mock wool called acrylic, and a stretchy material known as spandex. Besides its unparalleled scientific and engineering prowess, in the 1950s and 1960s DuPont enjoyed considerable advantages over the chemicals manufacturers of England, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan, where industry had suffered major wartime devastation.³²

The synthetics revolution latched on to the consumer boom that exploded in concert with post-war economic growth. While historians have studied DuPont as a leader in managerial innovation and R&D, the firm's history as a marketing pioneer in textile fibres and fashion is less well documented.³³ To promote the new world of synthetics, DuPont invested heavily in product development, consumer research, marketing, branding, and advertising. The goal was to educate textile designers, garment makers, retailers, home economics teachers, and consumers about its family of fibres. DuPont first undertook in market research in the interwar years, conducting motivation studies on consumers' tactile experiences with fabrics, and considerably expanded those efforts in the post-war era.³⁴

DuPont's hefty expenditures on advertising and promotion helped to elevate the public image of synthetics in fabrics and fashions. During the interwar period, rayon makers had worked with the French couture houses to integrate man-made fibres into the Paris collections and publicized those designs in major fashion magazines. But these early rayon promotions paled next to the post-war efforts of DuPont, the Celanese Fiber Marketing Company, and other American synthetic fibre makers. In 1952 and 1953, DuPont marketers entertained two prominent Paris couturiers—Christian Dior and Herbert de Givenchy—during their tours of the United States. The investment paid off.

In 1954 and 1955 alone, Givenchy used DuPont's Orlon acrylic in his prêt-à-porter (high-end ready-to-wear) collections and in his designs for the American sweater manufacturer, Talbott Knitting Mills (not to be confused with the fashion chain Talbots). When the First International Congress of Man-Made Fibers met in Paris in 1954, the couture houses mounted runway shows featuring mannequins dressed in outfits made from the 'Textiles of Tomorrow'. The couturiers were fully aware that synthetics were here to stay and that good fortune would come their way if they collaborated with fibre makers. Over the next two decades, DuPont fibres were a regular feature of prêt-à-porter and ready-to-wear created in Paris, Milan, London, New York, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and Dallas. The new designer synthetic fashions were widely promoted in North America and Europe through publicity photographs, press releases, advertisements, and other marketing materials. (fig. 9) DuPont sales offices in New York, London, and Geneva served as liaisons to the textile industry, garment manufacturers, and the fashion press.³⁵

[insert fig. 9 here]

The collaborations among DuPont fibre developers in Wilmington, DuPont publicists in New York, and high-end fashion creators in Paris benefitted both the chemical company and the couture houses. The arrangement lent prestige to the synthetics revolution and enhanced the DuPont brand within the global fashion business. Concurrently, the public relations effort infused cash-strapped European fashion creators with American dollars at the moment when the couture business was in free fall, enabling couturiers to capitalize on the cachet of American business on the heels of the celebrated Marshall Plan (1948-51). How did the collaboration affect the fashion choices of American consumers? In the United States, the socialite who pored over the women's

pages of the local newspaper saw photographs of the DuPont-couture ensembles juxtaposed with advertisements from downtown stores that sold copies of Paris originals. DuPont thereby helped to disseminate high-end European fashion in the United States, augmenting the efforts of highbrow fashion specialty stores like Neiman Marcus in Dallas and department stores like John Wanamaker in Philadelphia.³⁶

But debutantes who needed party dresses were a small part of the vast American market. DuPont recognized that a broader audience for synthetic fashions could be found among Americans whose purchasing power had grown with post-war prosperity. In the mid-1950s, these groups included young white-collar and blue-collar families in new suburban developments, hyphenated-Americans in the old urban neighbourhoods and homemakers in the small towns of rural America. By the 1960s, the market further divided to include high-school students, college students, Black urban consumers, and men from different ethnic groups who wanted to distance themselves from the corporate look exemplified by the film *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1956) and, more recently, by Don Draper in the *Mad Men* cable television series (2007-2015). DuPont applied market research to the problem. The prominent DuPont consultant Ernest Dichter (1907-1991), one of the fathers of motivation research, identified men of Mediterranean descent—Italian-American working-class consumers—as a distinctive group who appreciated expressive, stylish body-hugging clothing. While British observers had compared London dandies to peacocks, it was Dichter who, speaking to a convention of menswear retailers on behalf of DuPont in February 1966, coined the term ‘peacock revolution’ to describe the American male’s newfound interest in fashion.³⁷ There was no more flamboyant a peacock than the actor John Travolta who, as the fictional Brooklyn

stud Tony Manero, slithered across the disco dance floor in the Hollywood box-office hit film *Saturday Night Fever* (1977). The fibre makers, often overlooked within fashion history, played a significant role in changing the materiality of everyday apparel—and the ways in which the fashion business thought about market segments.³⁸

The Post-war Consumer Boom: Ready-to-Wear in America, Britain, and France

In the post-war era, the ready-to-wear industries in the United States and Great Britain were running full throttle. At the start of this period, the French haute couture houses still lorded over handmade luxury fashion from their swank Paris salons on the avenue Montaigne and other posh addresses. The couture business enjoyed a brief renaissance after 1947 when Christian Dior introduced the New Look, but by the time of his death in 1957, French dressmaking for the upper crust was in a downward spiral.³⁹ Ready-to-wear was the fashion of the future, as became crystal clear in the two decades between 1950 and 1970.

The French continued to promote Paris couture as a national treasure, even as economic and social changes eroded the market for custom-fitted garments for the wealthy few. In the 1950s, admirable efforts to launch a French ready-to-wear industry bubbled up in Paris and in Côte d'Azur, the latter focused on resort clothes. A group of Parisian garment manufacturers had visited the United States to study the American fashion industry under the auspices of the Marshall Plan.⁴⁰ One trade association, L'Association des Maisons Françaises de Couture en Gros, was particularly keen to develop an export business and used the label *Trois Hironnelles* (Three Swallows) to

promote French ready-to-wear around Europe and in the United States.⁴¹ By 1959, sales of French readymade fashion had picked up, and more couturiers had ventured into prêt-à-porter. Around this time, the French garment industry sponsored La Semaine du Vêtement Féminin, a semi-annual women's clothing week, where foreign retail buyers could see ready-to-wear lines made in Paris and Côte d'Azur. These modest efforts showed that some French fashion producers were awakening to modern life.⁴² But the French ready-to-wear industry of the 1950s and early 1960s foundered, a victim of traditions associated with luxury production and the stark realities of the post-war economy. Strapped for cash, most French women still sewed at home or looked to a neighbourhood dressmaker for the few stylish items in their wardrobes. Despite their noble ambitions, the Three Swallows, dependent on handicraft workshops, could not sufficiently reduce production costs and sell their output at competitive prices.

The United States was still widely acknowledged to be the world's ready-to-wear leader in terms of productivity, volume, quality, marketing, and retailing. America had the world's largest, most advanced garment industry, serving an internal market of 180 million people by 1960. One cannot generalize about the typical American fashion consumer because of the variety of tastes and lifestyles within the United States. The vast American market was segmented by overlapping factors such as locale, climate, income, occupation, age, class, race, ethnicity, marital status, and subculture. The garment district clustered around Seventh Avenue in New York was the major design and production centre, accounting for two thirds of the clothing industry's output. In descending order, secondary women's wear manufacturing clusters were located in major commercial cities from coast to coast: Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Chicago, Boston, St. Louis, Dallas,

Cleveland, Kansas City, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Milwaukee, San Francisco, and Miami.⁴³ Chicago, New York, and Rochester were among the cities with major menswear sectors.

The Americans had perfected techniques for the quantity production of ladies' garments, and over the first part of the twentieth century, they had evolved a distinctive style of casual clothing. American 'sportswear' was suited to an active lifestyle that involved golf, tennis, horseback riding, bicycling, walking, and hiking. In the interwar years, the growing number of high-school and college students had created a demand for practical everyday clothing that could be worn to class, the library, dance parties, and football games. In the post-war years, Los Angeles and Miami developed new casual clothing styles appropriate for beaches and resorts, but Midwestern apparel centres like Cleveland produced sportswear that could be worn every day in a range of climates, from the bone-chilling upper Midwest to the sweltering Texas-Mexico border.⁴⁴ The most important sportswear company in Cleveland was Bobbie Brooks Inc., which cornered the market for teen fashions with a system of inexpensive colour-coordinated separates called 'go-togethers'. Sales went from \$9.8 million in 1952 to \$147 million in 1970. The high-school student who spent her weekly allowance on a Bobbie Brooks wardrobe was investing in practicality and versatility. She could mix and match five or six separates, changing the combination of blouse, sweater, skirt, trousers, jacket, and accessories for a different look each day.⁴⁵(fig. 10) In a tribute to American manufacturing prowess, Bobbie Brooks had adapted Henry Ford's concept of interchangeable parts to casual clothing to become one of the best-known apparel brands in the United States. In doing so, Bobbie Brooks helped to make separates into a hallmark of American style.

[insert fig. 10 here]

The British fashion business was built on a model that sat squarely between the luxury orientation of France and the volume production of the United States. With a strong history of readymade tweed tailoring, the British admired American styling and production methods—and were eager to learn more. During the golden age of Hollywood in the 1930s, the energetic British garment manufacturer Percy Trilnick visited the United States, and back in London, set up a firm for importing American frocks.⁴⁶ At the start of World War II at the urging of the Board of Trade, British garment makers sent trade missions to the United States to study the fashion scene and see what could be emulated back in England, but these efforts were curtailed as the conflict accelerated.⁴⁷ In the 1950s, the transatlantic exchanges resumed, with London ready-to-wear designers like Frederick Starke visiting the United States on a regular basis and large East End garment manufacturers like Steinberg & Sons setting up sales offices in the Seventh Avenue fashion district.⁴⁸ On the textile end of things, British tweed makers established a strong presence in North America, which became one of their major export markets. Oozing stereotypical British-ness that appealed to Anglophiles, tweeds from Scotland and Yorkshire found ready customers among textile wholesalers and garment factories at the top end of the North American market.⁴⁹ One fashion specialty retailer, Neiman Marcus in Dallas, showcased high-end British imports in some of its famous annual extravaganzas, the Fashion Fortnight.⁵⁰ But the average British apparel manufacturer, straddled with high wages at home and hit with protective tariffs imposed by United States customs, was unable to meet the low price requirements of the American mass market.

By the 1950s, Great Britain boasted the most highly developed ready-to-wear industry in Europe. The largest manufacturing clusters were in Leeds, Manchester, Glasgow, and London, but garment makers had started to build new factories around Britain. Steinberg & Sons, whose 1904 origins can be traced to the immigrant Jewish garment industry of the East End, produced women's wear at factories in London, south Wales, and County Durham in northeast England. Steinberg hoped to expand exports, but foreign markets were a challenge as many nations, seeking to rebuild their own industries, imposed tariffs or import quotas. The bulk of Steinberg's output was created for the British market and was sold in high-street department stores and dress shops under labels such as Alexon, Dellbury, and Youngset. In keeping with the British tailoring tradition, the mainstay of the Steinberg business consisted of women's coats, suits, and skirts.⁵¹

The British demand for clothing started to change in the 1950s, under the influence of American films, magazines, and music, and with the rise of a new market segment: young working-class consumers. In 1956, the British sociologist Mark Abrams (1906-1994) published a landmark study on this group, noting how young men and women aged 15 to 34, mainly those from blue-collar backgrounds, used their spending money to buy snacks, music, and fashion. Before World War II, middle-class consumers had constituted 30 per cent of the population and accounted for two thirds of retail clothing purchases. By 1956, the main consumer group for clothing was the blue-collar market segment, which spent £600,000 annually out of a national total of just over £1 million. On top of this, while young consumers accounted for only 35 per cent of the population, they bought 40 to 50 per cent of men's ties, men's shirts, women's nylon

stockings, and women's foundation garments.⁵² Abrams' study, and a follow-up report, were condensed and widely circulated in the British press.

Although protective tariffs and restrictive quotas circumscribed international trade in the post-war years, nothing could prevent the British fashion industry from studying American business practices and copying them. One innovation from the United States that had a major impact on British apparel manufacturers was the American system of standardized sizes for ready-to-wear. We have already noted how the retailer Lane Bryant developed reliable sizes for fuller-figured ladies in the 1920s. Further efforts to quantify female measurements on the part of trade associations, home economics groups, and government agencies produced results. The Americans had better standardized sizes than anyone else, and British were quick to study and emulate.⁵³ Notably, American sizing was adopted by Marks and Spencer Ltd as the High Street giant delved more deeply into apparel retailing during the 1950s.

By the early 1960s, High Street retailers and fashion manufacturers were looking for ways to capitalize on the demographic changes identified by Mark Abrams. Out of this cauldron emerged the London look of Carnaby Street and the Kings Road. The retail entrepreneur John Stephen is best known for turning Carnaby Street, a shabby West End thoroughfare, into a fashion mecca for devotees of the peacock revolution. Numerous young British designers made their reputations on the London Look, among them among them Roger Nelson, Foule and Tuffin, and Mary Quant. Quant is significant for her connection to Steinberg & Sons, the large London clothing manufacturer with ties to the American market, and for her own pioneering efforts to introduce youthful British style to the United States.⁵⁴

The Quant-led British fashion invasion of North America predates the better-known Beatles-led British music invasion launched in 1964. In the autumn of 1960, Mary Quant and her husband and business partner Alexander Plunket Greene flew to America to check out the fashion scene. Two years later, the J. C. Penney Company, a major American retailer, asked a young executive named Paul Young, a Brit, to recruit design talent for an exciting new promotion on youth fashion. According to the recollections of one seasoned retailer who knew the London scene of the 1960s, Young spotted Quant's designs in a Knightsbridge store and snatched her up for Penneys.⁵⁵ Way back in 1903, James Cash Penney had established the J. C. Penney Company as a Main Street family clothing store for small towns west of the Mississippi River. Penneys continued along these lines until the 1950s, when a new chief executive, William M. Batten, reinvented the store to suit new post-war realities, including suburban growth and the buying power of the American teenager. In a widely publicized turnaround, Batten revamped and expanded Penneys into a cutting-edge national retailer for the American suburbs. Under his direction, Penneys opened stores in the new upmarket malls in East Coast suburbs, and in 1963, introduced edgy young fashions to rural consumers with a new mail-order catalogue. Batten's fashion-first strategy included collaborations with young designers like Quant who created exclusive clothing lines for Penneys. She collaborated with Penneys staff in New York and Seventh Avenue garment factories to adapt Mod British styles to the tastes and pocketbooks of middle America. (fig. 11) Quant designed apparel for Penneys from 1963 to 1971 and extended her American influence by creating clothes for the Puritan Fashions Corporation, a New York garment manufacturer that ran a short-lived chain of boutiques called Paraphernalia.⁵⁶

[insert fig. 11 here]

Fashion prediction also took a youthful, playful turn in the 1960s. Veteran trend spotters—the Color Association of the United States, Tobé Reports, and Fred Carlin—were challenged by a group of young fashion intermediaries with a new approach to fashion prediction. The upstarts aimed not to report on accepted styles but to anticipate major trends before they appeared on the runway. Starting at mid-decade, young French entrepreneurs launched three new forecasting bureaus—Promostyl, Mafia, and Peclers Paris—that helped French industry learn from street styles. The Anglo-American innovator in trend forecasting was IM International, founded in London in 1968. Sizing up the hip fashions in boutiques on the Kings Road, IM International advised its American subscribers on the European looks that would next be in fashion. Whereas Tobé Coller Davis sent retailers lengthy descriptions of expensive Paris dresses and hats, IM International focused on trendy European subcultures and the possibility that youthful styles might have an impact on the middle-class closet. The IM trend forecasts described what people wore on the streets, in the discos and on the beaches, and speculated on how elements of those looks might go mainstream. The trend watchers of the 1960s differed from Tobé in a significant way—they reported less and speculated a whole lot more. They relied on intuition—a ‘sixth sense’—to anticipate the likely direction of fashion in the future.⁵⁷ The era of high modernism—with its social hierarchy, trickle-down styles, prescriptions for respectability and cultural engineering—had entered its twilight moment.

Respectability in Retreat

Following the post-war expansion of consumer society, the mass-market fashion business of Europe and America entered a new phase in the 1970s. Changes to the global political economy played an important role, as did evolving cultural expectations that eroded the manners and norms of respectability. The full story of this sea change is beyond the scope of this study, but we bring this chapter to closure with a short reflection on everyday fashion at the end of modern times.

In 1969, a research report commissioned by the British government examined the domestic ready-to-wear industry. The report praised the ‘greater fashion consciousness’ of British consumers that had emerged in the recent past. The researchers identified several contributing factors: rising disposable incomes; the amelioration of class differences; the consumer desire to express individuality; the garment industry’s greater attentiveness to young people, especially teenagers; the proliferation of boutiques on the High Street and within department stores; and the emergence of professional designers interested in the mass market. The synthetics revolution had shaped consumer expectations by introducing easy-care clothing that reduced the burden of wardrobe maintenance. Chain stores had created appealing high-street merchandise by collaborating with garment factories. Retailers ruled the roost. When asked to name a favourite brand, the average consumer was tongue-tied—but she never forgot her favourite store. Marks and Spencer Ltd came out on top because of the ‘absolute reliability of their sizing’.⁵⁸

British consumers had long relied on the Marks & Spencer brand for good quality fashions at a modest price. For decades, the store adhered to a ‘Buy British’ policy that led it to source fashion merchandise from British manufacturers. But starting in the late

1960s, fierce competition on the High Street forced many British retailers to look far and wide for lower-priced merchandise. In 1967, the European Free Trade Agreement (EFTA) abolished import-export duties on many goods, creating an open market between member states and affiliated nations like Great Britain. High-street retailers turned to low-wage EFTA economies such as Portugal for cut-rate prices on ready-to-wear, shoes, and accessories. A similar story played out throughout the West, intensifying into a cost-cutting frenzy as the twentieth century drew to a close. Domestic manufacturing was devastated in the powerhouse economies that had dominated the early days of the Second Industrial Revolution. The output and profitability of textile mills and clothing factories in Britain, Germany, and the United States took a nosedive. These transformations in the business sphere paralleled shifts in consumer values.⁵⁹

The heyday of disposable ‘fast fashion’ lay in the distant future, but by the late 1960s, mass-market shoppers had started to think of apparel as a splurge rather an investment. When Mark Abrams wrote about consumer choices in the mid fifties, clothing was still a relatively expensive purchase, whether you were a Teddy Boy, a Scottish schoolteacher, a Welsh policeman, or a Yorkshire grandmother. But during the consumer explosion of the sixties, rivalries among High Street retailers led to major price wars. Cheap High Street fashion was coveted by easy-spenders, mainly the young. C&A Modes, a subsidiary of the German-Dutch chain C&A, fed the teen hunger for a fashion fix by sourcing cheap Mod clothes from makers up in the East End of London and selling them to youngsters at rock-bottom prices.⁶⁰ Across the English Channel, the French finally found their entrée to mass-market fashion. Back in the 1930s, the famous Printemps department store had established Prisunic, a mini department store that

targeted budget shoppers. By the late 1950s, Prisunic had 223 stores scattered around France and North Africa and initiated an expansion plan built around emulating the American ‘democratized’ practice of ‘promoting ready-to-wear for the average consumer’. This effort gained more traction over the course of the sixties.⁶¹ Meanwhile in the United States, downtown retailers continued to business as usual even as danger signs appeared in their peripheral vision, with discount stores, strip malls, and regional indoor shopping centres proliferating in the new car-oriented suburbs.⁶²

Another disruption to the modern fashion system was the rise of the ‘designer brand’. In France, the surviving couture houses wisely acknowledged that their fortunes lay in fragrances, prêt-à-porter, luxury boutiques, and generally capitalizing on the founder’s name through licensing deals. Targeting the upper end of the mass market, Paris-based ready-to-wear innovators like Daniel Hechter helped to introduce French consumers to the concept of the designer brand.⁶³ In the United States, new American designer brands infiltrated department stores and specialty fashion stores through aggressive marketing by entrepreneurs like Ralph Lauren, Anne Klein, and Gloria Vanderbilt. These designers thrived by putting their names on everything from men’s ties to practical office wear to form-fitting ladies’ jeans. By the late 1970s, consumers in America and Europe were learning to recognize fashion brands and were beginning to associate brand names with quality. The power of the mass-market fashion retailer was diminished in this process.⁶⁴

The stylish consumer of the modern era who dressed in a genteel manner had assembled her respectable look by browsing through the shops, flipping through fashion magazines, watching Hollywood movies, and sharing glamour tips with her peers at work,

school, social club, or church. In the 1970s, this modus operandi yielded sway to a more powerful, media-driven celebrity culture. To be sure, many consumers still appreciated the classic styles sold by department stores, chains, second-hand shops, and vintage fairs. But as the historian Christopher Lasch noted, an emerging ‘culture of narcissism’ that privileged self-indulgence over respectability give birth to the experience-driven consumption of the post-modern era.⁶⁵

Experience-driven consumption elevated celebrity culture to new heights, which had important repercussions for fashion. Whereas the Victorians had admired royalty and the moderns held Hollywood stars in esteem, the new type of celebrity culture—wherein people are simply famous for being famous—gained sway. Post-modern celebrity culture was exemplified by *People*, an American gossip magazine that hit newsstands in 1974, and by David Bowie’s *Young Americans* album of 1975, featuring the hit song ‘Fame’. The American primetime soap operas *Dallas* (1978-1991) and *Dynasty* (1981-1989) showcased the extravagant lifestyles of the rich and powerful, while music stars like Madonna and Michael Jackson, who owed their success to the rise of cable and MTV, further popularized glitz, glamour, and fame. Cable TV not only made actors and singers into superstars, but also turned fashion brands and their creators into global celebrities. The handsome actor Don Johnson, starring in the *Miami Vice* TV police drama (1984-1990), wore Italian styles by Giorgio Armani that familiarized global viewers with the metrosexual look of European designer brands. The fanfare turned Armani into a fashion celebrity and created the demand for his brand.⁶⁶

The designer brand was the ultimate material manifestation of the new cult of personality and global celebrity culture. A Ralph Lauren designer jacket was inherently

no different from St. Michael jacket from a Marks & Spencer store with the exception of the logo of the polo player on the breast pocket of the designer jacket. Consumers who were uncertain about their place in postmodern society could anchor themselves to something solid by identifying themselves with a tribe, be it the celebrity of Ralph Lauren, Chanel, Liberty, Hugo Boss, or Gianni Versace. Another facet of postmodernity was reflected in the individualism of street styles like hippie, disco, punk, and hip-hop. The regime of gentility, deeply rooted in European social hierarchy, slowly yielded its cultural authority to powerful globalizing forces. The changes in marketing and distribution that gained currency in the 1970s and 1980s paved the way for the bifurcated fashion system of the twenty-first century: global luxury brands for the super rich and their emulators, and cheap disposable everyday fashion for everyone else.

Summary

In the century between 1870 and 1970, global industrial output, urbanization, and respectable everyday fashion grew hand-in-hand. This era witnessed the Second Industrial Revolution rise and fall throughout much of Europe and North America. Generations of economic and business historians have long associated this phase of industrialization with heavy industries like metalworking, electrification, food processing, and transportation, but a new generation of business historians have demonstrated that the creative industries associated with fashion also contributed significantly to the economy and culture.⁶⁷ A heightened focus on novelty in product design emerged in response to the rising demand for affordable luxuries. Ever more textile mills, garment factories,

millinery shops, and retail stores catered to consumers who embraced gentility and respectability as vehicles for improving their material circumstances and their social standing. People who sought acceptance within mainstream White, middle-class society looked to dress the part, and a host of businesses scurried to produce affordable everyday fashion to meet their needs.

This chapter has discussed some of the most important actors in modern fashion production, prediction, and distribution, mainly focusing on business operations in the United States and United Kingdom. The modern fashion system, with its emphasis on affordable respectability, foremost depended on retailers—department stores, chain stores, and speciality shops—to bring ready-to-wear clothing, inexpensive shoes, whimsical millinery, costume jewellery, furs, and other fashion goods to Main Street and High Street. Another important group of actors was the fibre and fabric makers that supplied cloth to the garment factories of New York, Los Angeles, Berlin, Leeds, and London. And unbeknownst to the average shopper, the modern fashion system was populated by a slew of creative workers dedicated to managing the flow of style information among fashion enterprises, from creating shade cards for the French silk mills to publishing trend forecasts in mod London. Without these business actors, the stiff white collar worn by the Arrow Man and the fancy hat perched atop the head of the Gibson Girl would not have been possible—and respectability would have been out of reach to the masses.

The modern fashion system reached its apex in the decades after World War II, and soon thereafter, was challenged by new paradigms: youthful styles, experience-driven consumerism, the rise of designer brands, celebrity culture, disposable fashion, and globalization. By the twenty-first century, few teenage shoppers looking for a quick

style fix at H&M or Boohoo had ever heard of the Gibson Girl, the once-ubiquitous symbol of keepsake fashion.⁶⁸ Only a few astute consumers of vintage styles had the critical wherewithal to acknowledge the meaning and value of modern dress-up fashion as a cultural force for improving the self and the larger society. We would be remiss not to cheer the intelligence and sensitivity of the Black Lives Matters (BLM) marchers, discussed at the start of this chapter, who took special care to spruce up for the rebellion. Their fancy outfits were more than just vintage nostalgia. The activists' display of fancy attire honoured the cultural power of the middle-class dress codes that, once-upon-a-time, had been mandated and widely accepted within the culture of respectability.

¹ Vanessa Friedman, 'The Dress Codes of the Uprising', *New York Times* (16 June 2020).

² Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014). Catalogue information for Figure 1: Protesters in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 8 March 1963, LC-U9-10364-37, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

³ Claudia Brush Kidwell and Margaret Christman, *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974); Nancy L. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Katrina Honeyman, *Well Suited: A History of the Leeds Clothing Industry, 1850-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); [Phyllis Dillon], *A Perfect Fit: The Garment Industry and American Jewry* (New York: Yeshiva University Museum, 2005); and Gabriel M. Goldstein and Elizabeth E. Greenberg (eds.), *A Perfect Fit: The Garment Industry and American Jewry, 1860-1960* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2012).

⁴ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society, 1865-2005: From Hearth to HDTV* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2009).

⁵ Christopher Breward, *The Suit: Form, Function and Style* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016).

⁶ David Von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire that Changed America* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003).

⁷ Michael Miller, *The Bon Marche: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994); and Erika Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Woman in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁸ E. M. Sigsworth, *Montague Burton: Tailor of Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Rachel Worth, *Fashion for the People: A History of Clothing at Marks & Spencer* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); and Mark Spoerer, *C&A: A Family Business in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, 1911-1961* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2016).

⁹ Christopher Breward and David Gilbert (eds.), *Fashion's World Cities* (London: Berg, 2006)

¹⁰ Christine Boydell, *Horrockses Fashion: Off-the-Peg Style in the '40s and '50s* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010); Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Fashionability: Abraham Moon and the Creation of British Cloth for the Global Market* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

¹¹ See Véronique Pouillard, 'From Ready to Wear to Fast Fashion: Manufacturing in the Postwar Era', in this volume.

¹² Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *Selling Fashion: Retailing and Consumer Capitalism in the Transatlantic World* (work in progress).

¹³ *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores: Jubilee Year 1861-1911* (Philadelphia: John Wanamaker, 1911).

¹⁴ Blaszczyk, *Selling Fashion*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ William Filene's Sons Company, *What Is Personal Service?* (Boston: William Filene's Sons Company, n.d.), brochure, author's collection.

¹⁷ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, 'The Rise and Fall of European Fashion at Filene's in Boston', in Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Véronique Pouillard (eds.), *European Fashion: The Creation of a Global Industry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 170-200.

¹⁸ Blaszczyk, *Selling Fashion*.

¹⁹ Ingrid Giertz-Mårtenson, 'H&M: How Swedish Entrepreneurial Culture and Social Values Created Fashion for Everyone', in Blaszczyk and Pouillard (eds.), *European Fashion*, 201-219.

²⁰ Blaszczyk, *Fashionability*, chaps. 3-4; Regina Lee Blaszczyk, 'What Do Baby Boomers Want? How the Swinging Sixties Became the Trending Seventies', Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Ben Wubs (eds.), *The Fashion Forecasters: A Hidden History of Color and Trend Prediction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 116-117.

²¹ Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Ben Wubs, 'Beyond the Crystal Ball', in Blaszczyk and Ben Wubs (eds.), *The Fashion Forecasters*, 1-32.

²² Ibid. Catalogue information for Figure 6: Shade card, J.-B. Chambeyron Fils, Item 118, Inter-Society Color Council Records (Accession 2188), Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, DE 19807.

²³ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *The Color Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012); Regina Lee Blaszczyk, 'The Color Schemers: American Color Practice in Britain, 1920s-1960s', in Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Uwe Spiekermann (eds.), *Bright Modernity: Color, Commerce, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 193-194; and Regina Lee Blaszczyk, 'The Rise of Color Forecasting in the United States and Great Britain', in Regina Lee Blaszczyk and Ben Wubs (eds.), *The Fashion Forecasters*, 35-62.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Véronique Pouillard and Karen Jamison Trivette, 'Tobé Coller Davis: A Career in Fashion Forecasting in America' in Blaszczyk and Wubs (eds.), *The Fashion Forecasters*, 63-85.

²⁶ Blaszczyk and Wubs, 'Beyond the Crystal Ball'.

²⁷ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, *The Synthetics Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2023).

²⁸ Blaszczyk, *The Synthetics Revolution*.

²⁹ Geoffrey Owen, *The Rise and Fall of Great Companies: Courtaulds and the Reshaping of the Man-Made Fibres Industry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Blaszczyk, *The Synthetics Revolution*.

³⁰ Rachel Worth, *Fashion for the People: A History of Clothing at Marks and Spencer* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Blaszczyk, *The Synthetics Revolution*.

³¹ Susannah Handley, *Nylon: The Story of a Fashion Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Blaszczyk, *The Synthetics Revolution*. Catalogue information for Figure 8: DuPont Company photograph, 1939, 1984259_121912_041, Box 12, Folder 21, DuPont Textile Fibers Product Information Photographs (Accession 1984.259), Audiovisual Collections and Digital Initiative Department, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington DE 19807.

³² Blaszczyk, *The Synthetics Revolution*.

³³ Alfred D. Chandler Jr. and Stephen Salsbury, *Pierre S. du Pont and the Making of the Modern Corporation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); David A. Hounshell and John Kenly Smith Jr., *Science and Corporate Strategy: R&D at DuPont, 1902-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³⁴ Blaszczyk, *The Synthetics Revolution*; Regina Lee Blaszczyk, 'Styling Synthetics: DuPont's Marketing of Fabrics and Fashions in Postwar America', *Business History Review* 80 (Autumn 2006), 485-528.

³⁵ Blaszczyk, 'Styling Synthetics'; Regina Lee Blaszczyk, 'Du Pont de Nemours: mode et révolution des textiles synthétiques', in Dominique Veillon and Michèle Ruffat (eds.), *La Mode des Sixties: L'entrée dans la modernité* (Paris: Editions Autrement, 2007), 202-219. Catalogue information for Figure 9: DuPont Company photograph of Christian Dior ensemble, 1984259_5792, Box 36, Folder 10, DuPont Textile Fibers Product Information Photographs (Accession 1984.259), Audiovisual Collections and Digital Initiative Department, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington DE 19807.

³⁶ Blaszczyk, *The Synthetics Revolution*; Blaszczyk, *Selling Fashion*.

-
- ³⁷ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, 'Ernest Dichter and the Peacock Revolution: Motivation Research, the Menswear Market and the DuPont Company', in Stefan Schwarzkopf and Rainer Gries (eds.), *Ernest Dichter and Motivation Research: New Perspectives on the Making of Post-War Consumer Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 126-139.
- ³⁸ Blaszczyk, *The Synthetics Revolution*.
- ³⁹ Véronique Pouillard, 'Recasting Paris Fashion: Haute Couture and Design Management in the Postwar Era', in Blaszczyk and Pouillard (eds.), *European Fashion*, 35-62.
- ⁴⁰ Didier Grumbach, *History of International Fashion*. Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2014.
- ⁴¹ 'French Apparel Trade Looks to Expanded Market in U.S.', *Women's Wear Daily* (hereafter cited as *WWD*) (9 February 1951).
- ⁴² 'France: What You Need to Know', *WWD* (28 September 1959).
- ⁴³ 'New York Dress Market Dominant, Survey Shows', *WWD* (8 December 1954).
- ⁴⁴ Deirdre Clemente, 'Made in Miami: The Development of the Sportswear Industry in South Florida', *Journal of Social History* (fall 2007), 127-148; William R. Scott, 'California Casual: Lifestyle Marketing and Men's Leisurewear', in Regina Lee Blaszczyk (ed.), *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 169-186.
- ⁴⁵ Bobbie Brooks, Inc., *Annual Report for the Year Ended April 30, 1961*, 17, 19, and Bobbie Brooks, Inc., *Annual Report 1970, Year Ended April 30, 1970*, 1, both in folder 3, box 1, Ms. 5157, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.
- ⁴⁶ 'U.S. Shipments of Dresses to Britain Set New High', *WWD* (3 November 1937).

⁴⁷ ‘British Plan Sports Coat Suit Showing in NY in August’, *WWD* (5 July 1940); ‘First British Coat Shipment Due This Week’, *WWD* (19 November 1940); Women’s Fashion Export Group, Minute Book, MSS222/APX/1/1, and Membership List, MSS222/APX/2/1, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, United Kingdom.

⁴⁸ ‘Steinberg & Sons (London & South Wales)’, *Financial Times* (hereafter cited as *FT*) (13 September 1956).

⁴⁹ Blaszczyk, *Fashionability*.

⁵⁰ Blaszczyk, *Selling Fashion*.

⁵¹ The history of Steinberg & Sons can be traced in the *FT*.

⁵² Mark Abrams, ‘Spending on Clothes’, *FT* (6 October 1956).

⁵³ The sizing problem, and efforts to resolve it, is well documented in *WWD*. See also Board of Trade, *Women’s Measurements and Sizes: A Study Sponsored by the Joint Clothing Council Limited* (London: HMSO, 1957); Geoffrey Henry, ‘Trade Lines’, *The Maker-Up* 48 (October 1943): 856; Julia Felsenthal, ‘A Size 2 Is a Size 2 Is a Size 8’, *Slate*, 25 January 2012, at www.slate.com (accessed 2 September 2020).

⁵⁴ Jenny Lister (ed.), *Mary Quant* (London: V&A Publishing, 2019).

⁵⁵ Nigel French, interview with Regina Lee Blaszczyk, Philadelphia, PA, 11 April 2018.

⁵⁶ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, ‘Doing Business in Transatlantic Fashion: The Experience of Mary Quant’, in Jenny Lister (ed.), *Mary Quant*, 110-121; Blaszczyk, *Selling Fashion*.

⁵⁷ Regina Lee Blaszczyk, ‘What Do Baby Boomers Want? How the Swinging Sixties Became the Trending Seventies’, in Blaszczyk and Wubs (eds.), *The Fashion Forecasters*, 97-131.

⁵⁸ Associated Industrial Consultants Ltd., *Strategy for the British Clothing Industry* (London: Economic Development Committee for the Clothing Industry, 1969), [n.p.].

⁵⁹ Blaszczyk, *Fashionability*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ ‘The View From Paris: Nelly Rodi and the Early Days of French Trend Forecasting’, in Blaszczyk and Wubs (eds.), *The Fashion Forecasters*, 133.

⁶² Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society*; Blaszczyk, *Selling Fashion*.

⁶³ Blaszczyk, *Fashionability*.

⁶⁴ Blaszczyk, *Selling Fashion*.

⁶⁵ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978); Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark (eds.), *Old Clothes, New Looks* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

⁶⁶ Blaszczyk, *Fashionability*; Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society*.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Blaszczyk (ed.), *Producing Fashion*; Blaszczyk and Pouillard (eds.), *European Fashion*.

⁶⁸ On the transition from keepsake to throwaway consumer culture, see Blaszczyk, *American Consumer Society*.