

Zoot Suit: Midterm Essay SUMMER 2020

Arielle A. Gustave

Dr. Nazanin Munroe

20<sup>th</sup> Century Dress and Culture

ARTH 1204 – OL068

The times of social injustice and protesting keeps on reoccurring over the years. The basics of a protest has not changed; fighting for a cause, wearing particular clothing to associate yourself with the cause, and leaving an impact on the world whether things change or not. Also, riots and protests have depicted that the significance of style associated was more than just fashion; it was a statement and a way to identify people for the cause. Particular symbols used on clothing or accessories is also a way to identify supporters. There are two causes that support these claims and are almost 80 years apart. The Zoot Suit and the Women's March depicts how they are different in the significance of style but are still comparable even with their time difference.

The introduction of the Zoot Suit stemmed from the Harlem dancers; whom would wear loose fitting clothes which would emphasize their movements. This entailed baggy pants with carefully tapered cuffs too avoid tripping, long heavily padded jacket shoulders, and wide lapels shown in Figure 1. Also, they would possibly wear the suit with a range of hats from fedoras to porkpies to sombreros and glittering jewelry. This style became significant because it took the Zoot Suit name that was worn by many minority youths and turned it more into racial tensions than a fashion style. This significant style invoked riots during WW II in America due to white servicemen viewing the people whom wore the Zoot Suit as WW II draft dodgers. Many of them were too young to serve in the military. Also, the beating of a US sailor was the result of a debacle between uniformed servicemen and Mexican American youths. The popular culture references that was identified were swing dancers and a performer by the name of Cab Calloway. The social demographic with whom this was popular for was African American, Mexican American, and other minority communities of young men. The Zoot Suit time frame of

popularity would have been between the dates of May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1943 and June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1943. The location of origin was Los Angeles California.

A sociopolitical issue that is active today in the world is the Women's March. The original date of the march was January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017; however, the second Women's March that took place was in 2018 which was within the last two years. The march is a protest for women wanting equal rights as men such as equal pay, wanting to make their own healthcare decisions, and showing their support for women all around the world. The demographics and psychographics of supporters varied from age to ethnicities. As shown in Figure 2, the feminist sign was used heavily throughout the protesting of the march. It could be located on articles of clothing, accessories, and/or signs. Also, the utilization of the color pink as statement pieces depicted the support of the cause. In comparison to the Zoot Suit, supporters were fighting to stand up for themselves and were wearing the significant style associated with the cause to show their support. Also, for both sociopolitical issues, anyone automatically became associated with supporting the case by wearing the significant style of attire for that cause. The Women's March style may have sent a clearer message because it was millions of people wearing the feminist logo and/or pink symbolic garments. Also, the message was clearer of the purpose of the cause rather than the Zoot Suit, which was just a cool fashion statement for dancers at first.

Throughout the years, clothing that has been worn by individuals can speak for who they are without being aware of it. The wrong symbol on garments and/or accessories can portray as if you are in support with the meaning behind it; but you can also just simply wear that design because you like it. The Zoot Suit played a huge role in this aspect because you were guilty once you had that suit on. Also, the Women's March significant style made an impact and had unconscious supporters. Be conscious of what you wear and whom you wear it around!



Figure 1. *Mexican American teens wearing Zoot Suits during the time period.*  
Yesmagazine.org



Figure 2. The Feminist Sign at the 2018 Women's March with pink hats on other supporters.  
Padua360.com

## **Bibliography**

History.com Editors. (2020, June 02). Zoot Suit Riots. Retrieved June 10, 2020, from [https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/zoot-suit-riots#section\\_5](https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/zoot-suit-riots#section_5)

Gregory, A. (2016, April 01). A Brief History of the Zoot Suit. Retrieved June 10, 2020, from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/brief-history-zoot-suit-180958507/>

O'Shaughnessy, A. (2017, June 09). Zoot Suits: A Fashion Movement that Sparked Mexican American Resistance. Retrieved June 11, 2020, from <https://www.yesmagazine.org/democracy/2017/06/09/zoot-suits-a-fashion-movement-that-sparked-mexican-american-resistance/>

W., S. (2018, January 19). Philadelphia Women's March 2018: What To Expect. Retrieved June 10, 2020, from <https://padua360.com/top-stories/2018/01/19/philadelphia-womens-march-2018-what-to-expect/>

The New York Times. (2018, January 20). Women's March 2018: Protesters Take to the Streets for the Second Straight Year. Retrieved June 10, 2020, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/20/us/womens-march.html>