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Reading Response #1:

### Dressed for the Photographer

1. Choose a portrait photo from among those in the text. Break down what the sitter is wearing, starting with what Severa details, and then with what you can see. Finally, describe the garments you *\*can't\** see. Are they important? If so, how and why?

This is the photo of a mill girl in the power loom. In the 1840s, girls used to work in the weaving mills of New England in order to be able to afford good clothing for themselves and for their families back home. Based on this image it can be seen that this photo was taken in the late 1840s-1850s, because of her costume and hairstyle. In the image, it's shown that the hairstyle is done with wide and smooth hair which was mostly the style of the hair in the early fifties. Similarly, the dress that she's wearing is the mill dress made out of black washable fabrics, like cotton, calino or chirtz which was made and worn for work at the mill. As it is shown in the image, the mill dresses were mostly made with short sleeves to keep arms free and safe from the machinery. The sleeves of this style are seen in the day dresser or younger girls and children. The sleeves of the dress are set higher on the arm than earlier and flare at the elbow, a style arm than

earlier and flare at the elbow. The details of the dress are not really clear in this photo, but based on what I can see, the dress has the infant bodice, the yokes and extreme front fullness of the infant bodice, made with a higher neckline. The garment is a full dress with a floor length full skirt. The garments that I can't see are the different types of underwear, such as, pantalettes: leg covering, chemise: long shirt, falling around the lady's knees, corset and petticoats. All of these underwear garments are important because each of them has a reason to wear. For example, pantalettes are worn from waist to ankle to ensure that her legs are covered. Then chemise is a shirt which is worn to protect her body from the corset. The corset is a very tight fitting belt-like garment designed to pull the waist in and give an "hourglass shape to the lady's body. Lastly petticoats were worn to fill out her dress shape. So all these stages of layers were required to achieve the desired result for the fashion of the day.

2. Based on a comparison of the photographs in the book, how did women's fashions of the 1860s begin to make concessions to movement and physical activity? How? Does this trend become more pronounced by 1890? If so, how?

Due to the movement that was going on during the 1860s, women weren't really paying attention to the fashion as they used to, however there were new fashions and styles that were becoming trendy which made some women still look better even if there were some issues going on. During this decade, women wore long shirts with the expectation of some women who wore pants like garments to perform work or engage in sports while there were some women who championed pants in the 19th century. There were women during this time who wired the garments out for the public eye and were wearing pants if they were engaged in physical exercise

or household works. Some women wanted the option to wear pants in public embracing the concept of rational dress. Others just wore for comfort and to make it easy for the movement. For some other women, the freedom to wear pants was tied to the women's rights movement. Women continued to enjoy wearing pants after the war for sports of leisure, style trends for women remained fixed largely on skirts or dress throughout this decade and the seventies. Because of the effect of *women's right movement*, pants became firmly established as a popular and appropriate clothing option for women at home in public and in more work places.

3. How did the consumption of clothing change across the second half of the 19th century [1840-1899]. Did the amount of clothes people owned, or the way they purchased them, change? What economic and social forces allowed more people to dress more fashionably?

Throughout the 19th century fashion changed in many different ways in decade. In 1840, clothing choices for men, women and children were limited. Style was simple and remained quite static throughout the decade. Most of the styles for women were established through the dictates of a fashion mainline originating in Paris and spread through the use of French fashion plates in English and American journals, along with French and English imports in American shops. Styles of the 1850s differed considerably from 1840 except for the overlap of common older clothing styles at first, there was soon a distinct "fifties" look that marked the period. Photographs reveal it as an exuberant style, one with wider skirts, more surface decoration, and flowing sleeves for women and overlarge, bold shapes and more patterns for men. The ebullience evident in dothing by mid-decade seemingly followed a trend toward prosperity.

Fashion during the 1860s was still the same as 1850s. Because of the Civil war not a lot of people paid attention to fashion and their styles. People in the South, and for many families in all parts of the country whose members were away fighting or were killed or injured in the War between the States. Women's fashion of the 1860s were distinguished from those of the previous decade by the basic changes in the silhouette. Short waisted ness became fashionable in this decade. Skirts went through several changes in the shape, the main different from fifties skirt being a more tapered fullness. In the beginning of the 1870s, the country was still in a post war recession, while becoming a depression in the mid of seventies, the lack of money and jobs affected fashion, people didn't spend that much money on their fashion, but the trend was difficult to trace through photographs. The fashions were still published as usual in the American magazines and people were still photographed in clothing that resembled the styles in the fashion plates. Poor people still wore their good clothing a few more years before being able to purchase a new style during these hard times. The fashion itself did not change enough in the first three years of the decade to actually require new purchases and this situation was due not to the recession overseas. In the 1880s, restrictiveness of fashion contributed to a reform movement more complicated than that. What happened was that work dress followed the fashion to a degree and was that status never attained before. Working dresses were available in a multitude of styles at very little cost, and those styles altered along with fashion, even if only in a modified manner. In this respect, did truly usher in the modern era in women's dress. By 1880 women formed a large percentage of the retail s in the developing department stores. Later on there were tremendously less com easier to wear and simpler to care for. Lastly in the 1890s many circumstances came together to ensure that American people could not only have more clothing

per capita than ever before, and in greater variety, but that there was a universal understanding of style. The dictates of fashion became much more lenient and there was a greater demand for plain, functional dress that was less expensive and easier to make.

4. How do we see status indicated by dress in documentary photographs of the 19th century? Is it through cut, use of textiles, accessories and hairstyles, or something else? In other words, How was fashion expressed in the wardrobes of working and middle class people in the United States who could not afford the luxurious fashion ensembles pictured in magazines? Please be specific in your response and cite at least 3 images from Severa's book [make sure you cite the specific photo information, page number of each image].

Fashion between the working and middle class people wasn't really different in the beginning of the 19th century. Everyone no matter from which social class they are, they wore most up to date costumes and their style was almost the same. Even the slaves dressed well just like others. For example, according to the text, "*Dressed for the Photographer*" in the photograph, Daguerreotype, CA. 1845 *Courtesy of Joseph Cavis* (p 45). It can be seen that a slave woman who served in the home is well dressed. The fabric of her fashionable dress has the dark ground and hold pattern of one of the most popular print types and could be either a cotton calico or wool challis. She's also wearing a delicate and good collar and cuff, together with the silk plaid ribbon and the brooch and earrings which shows that it is very fashionable and doesn't differ from anyone even if she's a slave. Although in the 1840s and 50s everyone wore the most up to date and fashionable costume, later after the 1860s, after the civil war fashion changed and

was slightly different for poor people, because they weren't able to afford luxurious fashion ensembles as rich people were. The civil war didn't really affect some people's fashion and styles. They were still well dressed and it can be seen from their photographs. According to the same text, in the photograph CA, 1870, *Courtesy of Gail Putman* (p 329). Looking at this picture, it's clear that those two young females are from the higher social class family. The way they dress, the dress that they're wearing, the textile of the dress and the accessories that they're wearing tells which social class they are. Fashion for working classes had been always the same throughout the 19th century. They were simply dressed with no jewelry and or hair accessories because they needed to look simple as much as possible at the workplace. This can be seen in the pictures, "1885-90, *Courtesy of the Huntington Library*" (p, 412) and "1893-96, *Courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society (882)* (p, 496). Those two photographs are the pictures of working classes which can be seen based on the way they dressed up. In the first photograph two ladies are at the workplace wearing loose fitting work clothes. Every woman who can be seen wears the same uncomfortable- looking tight sleeves and has the same closely fitted bodice, and the only other ible skirt is close to floor length. As well as in the second photograph, working women wore their simple good shirtwaists at their jobs, despite the rough appearance of the shop and the menial tasks to be done. In both pictures females are dressed simple and with the same hairstyle, with the frizzed longer front hair showing the popular trend but with heavy braids carried low at the nape. Overall the status indicated by dress in documentary photographs of the 19th century can be seen through their styles, textile, accessories and hairstyles as well.

Work Cited

Severa, J. L. (n.d.). *Dressed for the photographer: Ordinary Americans and fashion, 1840-1900*.  
Kent, OH: Kent State Univ. Press.