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Textiles

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Since the beginning of time, furs have always been portrayed as luxurious. Wearing furs created an image for some and established class distinctions for others. Over the years, the use of furs has been altered. It started off as a resource for survival in harsh climates but has evolved into a garment for fashion purposes. Furs have always been highly favorable, often being referred to as “garments of skin”. In this paper I will be discussing the rise on furs before and after the 1980’s.

Before the 1980’s furs were worn way back in the beginning of mankind, by cavemen who were around before there was any real life civilization. They were also worn by Indians and Eskimos later on in history, around 1000 CE. According to the article *Inuit Tribe*, it states that furs became a source of money after 1530 when European whalers and fur traders came to the arctic. They were also used by Vikings during their era. Later on in history furs were worn by upper class Men and Women before and after the 1980’s. People treated furs as if they were garments dipped in solid gold. Hustlers and drug dealers were famous for wearing fur garments prior to and after the 1980’s.

In an article in the New York Times Post, Frank Lucas; a notorious heroin dealer from Harlem made headlines when he was busted for his flashy fur coat.



The article states that Lucas’s Chinchilla coat was the most expensive and noticeable fur worn to the Muhammad Ali boxing match in 1971. Frank

Lucas was not the only drug dealer there; he just got the most attention that night while other successful drug dealers wore mink furs.

These fur garments include jackets, big coats, hats, pelts, gloves, etc. Many of these garments were traded and sold during the European fur trade which lasted from 1670 to 1870. Before the 1980's icons and celebrities wore furs but it dramatically increased after the 1980's. One memorable icon that was famous for wearing furs was Diana Ross. She was a very talented singer with her own unique style of fashion. Her fashion senses were very vibrant and envied by fashion lovers in society. According to the book *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: the History of the Disk Jockey*, Diana Ross would stroll onto the dance floor at the Paradise Garage wearing a fur coat, drop it to the ground and start dancing, and then leave without the coat.



Diana Ross's actions always kept her radiant style trending and in the lime light. During that period, a lot of styles and garments were literally being born in the streets. Hip hop and art help boost the demand for furs after the 1980's.

I remember seeing rappers with the big gold ropes around their necks with something that looked like a big bear on their back. People like Sean "P-Diddy" Combs and Mariah Carey made furs look real appealing during the 90's. Everybody in the hip hop and R&B videos had to have

on a mink or a chinchilla. And when everyone saw them, they wanted one too. This was a gateway to mass culture loving furs.

Dealing with fur is very controversial, whether it is fake or real. An article in *Fashionista* states that while the fur trade is associated with animal cruelty and bringing rare species to extinction, the faux fur business relies on harmful chemicals and cheap labor to produce the garments at an affordable price. I thought that people who wore faux fur because they could not afford real fur. I never considered the views from the animal lovers or people trying to preserve the environment. This article also states that the term *Faux Fur* was created after Cher Horowitz declared it when the trendy garment hit a new high in the mid 1990's.

According to Ingrams, the first traces of the use of skins and furs as clothing are found in the early Stone Age. Furs were very prominent during the time when Inuits were settled, around 1000 CE. In an article about the *Inuit Tribe*, it states that this Indian tribe lived on the western and northern coasts along the Bering Sea and the Arctic Ocean. They survived the freezing climate in igloos and tents. According to the article, people often referred to them as *Eskimos*, which means "eater of raw flesh". The clothes worn by the tribe mostly consisted of fur and animal skin.

As a result of freezing climates they wore layers of clothes with a thick, heavy fur lined hooded coats called *Parkas*.



The Parkas helped them survive everyday life in the Arctic, it was considered a necessity. The *Inuit Tribe* article states that parkas have been around since 1000

CE, which is when the Inuit first arrived across the Arctic. The garment design reflects the time it is made from because they kept it simple when designing these furs before 1980.

Before the 1980's, fur coats and other fur clothing were designed to keep the individual wearing it warm. They were fancy with the designs but they had alternative styles for women. The parkas worn by Inuit women were distinguished by elongated hoods, and exaggerated, pointed shoulders. An original fur piece just looks like something you would throw on top of whatever you were wearing; it was kind of like a big blanket. The textile choice reflects the times it was made because the Inuit were not very fashionable in such cold climate. They did not have a variety of options to keep themselves protected from the elements and keep themselves fully dressed at the same time. They had to use the resources that surrounded them in the wild.

Fur clothing originates way back to the start of early human race, when dinosaurs roamed the Earth. Cavemen wore fur and woven fabrics made from flax, grasses, and other accessories. In an article in *Answers* magazine, it states that fossils of early humans were located in Europe, West Asia, East Asia, West Africa, and the Middle East. These areas are where cavemen started residing and dressing in fur clothing.

According to Carlos and Lewis, in 1670, the fur trade between North America and Europe took place primarily in Canada and in some regions of the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains. The furs in the fur trade were meant for the luxury clothing market and for felting industries in Europe. I believe that this garment became popular around early Inuit civilization because it was the warmest natural resource that they could use. Besides tents, there was nothing that could have really kept them warm; nothing was big enough to cover their whole body. I also believe that people just genuinely fell in love with the look and texture. This is way before people started getting real luxurious furs. Back when everything was so primitive and plain just imagine how powerful someone looked with the fur of an animal that just probably tried to kill them.

When an animal is taken for its fur, it is usually killed after. What is done with the remaining parts are up to the hunter or farmer. According to the **PETA** organization, rabbits are slaughtered for meat, in areas such as China, Italy, and Spain.

A reason why I believe that furs became so popular before the 1980's is because of the fur trade that took place. In the article about the Inuit Tribe, it states that in 1905 the main source of commerce moves from whaling to fur trading. But by then the biggest and longest running fur trade took place from 1670 to 1870. That is 200 years of just trading furs between Europe and the first nations. That was probably the next best thing next to gold for them. At the time there were not that many resources that amounted to the demand for furs that the Inuit possessed. Furs gave the people a sense of wealth. Although furs were viewed as luxurious to some, a lot of people opposed the garments. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 along with organizations such as **People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals** aided in the anti-fur movement.

Pre 1980's the design of furs changed to a more fashionable garment. An article in *HuffPost* states that furs started to change in the 18th century when European aristocracy began wearing furs to show status and style. Furs appear to be even more luxurious nowadays, looking broader and stylish than before. The textile choice has evolved by making more fur products available for everyone. Whether they can afford a real fur or not, people are now able to buy imitation furs to look elegant. It does reflect a change in attitudes because people who wear real furs are usually a part of the upper class. It just gives you that image of wealth and power. The people who usually wear furs usually look like they belong to the upper class, they rarely look poor.

The textile choice reflects a changing in technology because more imitation pieces are being made. This post 1980's technology gives the less fortunate a chance to look and feel elegant. I believe that this garment endured over time because of its luxurious look and comfort. Although furs are only worn in the winter, the soft fur always catches the hearts of people.

Cavemen, Indians, Vikings, and Eskimos wore furs for warmth and to protect themselves from the elements of the land. Upper-class men and women wore furs for mostly fashion purposes but also for warmth. Upper-class men and women used furs as a status symbol before

and after the 1980's. Furs are supposed to represent money and power, not just warmth and comfort.

The fabric choice does dictate why people would wear this garment. Furs look very luxurious from near or far, and color does not matter. Anyone dressed in a fur garment always looks like they're a part of the upper class or someone of importance. The "who" has inspired me to choose this topic because the "trickle-down theory" has a major role in the history of furs. People in middle class or poor households see their favorite musician or entertainer in a fur coat and they have to have it.

Furs are not made from textiles; they are made from real animals. Mink, rabbit, fox, beaver, raccoon, coyote, chinchilla, sable, lamb, and bear are the main sources of furs or pelts as we know it. Once the fur is removed from the animal it is then cleaned, softened, and goes through a process called *fleshed* (the removal of extra flesh), and stretched. The skin is then tanned by a process called *leathering*. After that fur is either bleached, dyed, or tipped (the process of dyeing the guard hairs only) using synthetic compounds.

Furs are generally composed of two parts, the *guard hairs* and the *under fur*. Guard hairs are the visible top layer of fur consisting of long, straight, and sometimes coarse hair that sticks out through the under fur and protect it from outside elements. Under fur is the bottom layer, consisting of insulating hairs that are shorter, curlier, and thinner than guard hairs. The *pile* of a fur refers to the direction of the hair growth. Guard hairs of more luxurious furs are pulled out by hand to ensure quality; this process is known as *plucking*.

There are other cases where hairs are inserted into furs to enhance their appearance and value. The best qualities of furred areas in a skin or pelt are the sides and the belly. Furs that are *let in* are cut and re-sewn into a broader and shorter pelt. Furs that are *let out* are cut and re-sewn into a longer and narrower pelt. With furs, the process of how it was made affects the way it looks because if the pelt is *let in* it will look wider for people with a fuller body figure but shorter in length. And if the pelt is *let out* it will look longer and slim, as if for a tall man or woman. The

letting out process is more simple and consists of sewing one full skin to another as to where *letting in* consists of two strips being sewn together.

The majority of people in society cannot afford real furs so they often go with the more available garment, which is *synthetic fur*. Synthetic fur is a type of textile fabric that is made into a fashion garment with the intentions of looking like genuine animal fur. Synthetic or *faux* fur was introduced in 1929 and was made from polymeric fibers that were processed, dyed, and cut to match a specific fur texture and color. Around this time, imitation fur was made using hair from the Alpaca, a South American mammal. Manufacturers used Alpaca because of its warmth and affordability. By the 1950's, synthetic fur was high in demand and very affordable.

Synthetic fur fill was trimmed and layered to match the hairs of the real fur. Synthetic fur was inserted into place using acryloid F-10 in acetone. The fill was then applied to a pre-fabricated polyurethane western kob mount, which was (or is) attached from the edges of the fur fill directly to the adjacent sides of the original fur. Faux furs are then toned and colored with magna colors by brush application. The most versatile synthetic fur is an in stock white fur made from eighteen denier nylon with a four way spandex stretch backing.

An article in *Fashionista* states that a woman who buys a pricey coat that is made of real fur will have to pay for its upkeep and eventually alter the style to keep up with the new trends. Or she could buy a new artificial one each year to keep up with styles and not pay as much money. These garments created the theory of fast fashion. Fast fashion is an approach to the design, creation, and marketing of clothing that focuses on making fashion trends quickly and cheaply available to consumers. Stores such as Top Shop, Zara, and H & M are prime examples of retail stores involved with fast fashion.

The person wearing the fur chooses this garment because it is warm and looks very luxurious. Another reason why a person would wear this garment is to portray their image as a "high roller" or someone from the upper-class. Furs were a big trend during the 1980's disco fashion. There were various faux furs worn during the studio 54 disco era. The trendy colors for

faux furs during disco were blue, white, yellow, and pink. They wore these bright furs to match their unique disco influenced color-coordinated outfits.

Studio 54 was a major place for partying during the late 1970's and early 1980's. This was a very influential time of chart topping disco music, trendy styles, bright colors, and big hair. Every night, the crowds of people at the club had the most unique and lavish looks. Amongst the trendy velvet jumpsuits, satin dresses, big bold heels; and furs resting on skinny shoulders were



an ideal look.

Some people believe that furs are only associated with cold regions but its high demand proves otherwise. I believe that the places with the biggest influences on furs are North America, Canada, Europe, and China. An article from *Business of Fashion* states that the sales on furs have doubled since 2011. The main source of this growth is the rising demand from China. Both, synthetic and real furs are very high in demand.

I feel like North America played one of the biggest roles in the exploitation of furs. Our unique Northern styles have helped pave the way of how furs are supposed to be worn, praised, and treated. I feel like we gave people the courage to put these unique outfits together with their furs. I have recently attended a fashion show in Williamsburg where I saw two people wearing fur coats with regular denim jeans and sneakers. I am not one to judge people but I never seen anyone put together an outfit like that. The fur was faux fur, the jeans were skinny and the sneakers looked big like some orthopedic shoes, but it didn't look that bad. I am used to seeing

people in casual clothing when they are wearing furs so it catches my eye every time I see something outside of the norm.

I believe that Canada and Europe are big influencers because the majority of the fur trade took place in Canada and the majority of furs were going to European industries. Real furs are usually found in high end stores, these stores include Barneys, Bloomingdales, Dillards, Lord & Taylor, Macy's, Neiman Marcus, Nordstrom, and Saks Fifth Avenue. Faux furs are found almost everywhere that retail stores are present. According to the *Rabbit Advocacy Network*, the stores that only sell faux fur are: Abercrombie & Fitch, Alloy, American Apparel, American Eagle Outfitters, ASOS, Banana Republic, Benetton, Catherines, Cato, Charlotte Russe, Chico's, Coldwater Creek, Delia's, Dress barn, Express, Forever 21, H& M, and several others. Faux fur can even be found in some high end stores because more luxury designers are implementing them in their designs nowadays. According to *Business of Fashion*, designer Stella McCartney has established "fur-free-fur" for her line of clothes. She is trying to establish her line as a luxury brand without using real leather and fur.

Almost everything that comes out now has a piece of fur, leather, or denim attached to it. Furs went from only coats to nearly all styles of apparel. Faux fur will be on more runways than ever before. A lot of companies are fur free are involved in an anti fur organizations.



An article from *Fur Free Alliance* states that the first countries to ban fur farming were the United Kingdom in 2000 and Austria in 2004.

In 2012, the Netherlands passed a ban on fur farming while it was Europe's second largest mink producer. They plan on completely ending the mink production by 2024. More companies around the world are running with the anti fur movements. These companies want to be a part of the anti fur movement because they want to promote a cruelty free and ethical philosophy.

Pre 1980's, furs were mostly worn during the winter. Post 1980's, more people are wearing furs in warmer weather because of new technological advancements in faux fur. After the 1980's, style conscious women in their late twenties and thirties were known to wear the most fur. The new advancement compared to the process before the 1980's consists of the combination of fur with other textiles. According to *Business of Fashion*, the new process fuses the fur with felted wool or weaves together fur fibers and silk. This is generally a lighter material compared to real animal fur.

Business of Fashion states that the **People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)** organization has influenced many designers to stop producing furs. In 1994, Calvin Klein stopped producing furs after activists vandalized the company's office. That forced Calvin Klein to arrange a meeting with **(PETA)** to put an end to the madness. The article also states that designers such as Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger went fur free between 2006 and 2007. These designers had such a following and heavy influence on the culture that people would purchase anything that they made.

A lot of people just follow fashion, whatever is in or looks like it's about to be trending as the next move. The initial uses of furs were for warmth and to protect the individual wearing it from harmful substances. It was not initially for fashion or to portray a person's status, it was used for survival. Before the 1980's, I believe that furs started becoming status symbols because people would always see celebrities flaunting around their flashy jewelry, exotic cars, and fur coats. Although people could not afford these things, they easily became infatuated with the thought of having them.

All a company had to do was get a well known celebrity to wear a fur product to start the demand for the garment. A lot of people wear faux fur because they are against the cruelty of

animals. Others wear it because it is easier to maintain than real furs. Some people do not know that when you have real fur you are supposed to maintain or alter it. You need to take care of the fur and possibly have to alter the style to keep up with new styles present around that time.

On the other hand a lot of people do not wear faux fur because it is harming the environment. All the chemicals used to produce these garments are a big threat. An article in *Fashionista* states that the production of faux furs relies on cheap labor. Cheap labor is associated with sweatshops, which is technically abuse or some might say indentured servitude. I believe that faux fur will never replace real fur. Even with the high demand for faux/imitation fur, there is nothing like the real thing.

The difference between furs before and after the 1980's is that new coat shapes are big, especially at the top and sleeves. The length over time got shorter; three quarter jackets starts trending, especially for women. Three quarter fur jackets were meant for women in short skirts; the jacket was made to resemble a miniskirt.

In conclusion, furs have been in style way before fashion was even considered fashion. It was a garment created ahead of its time and it will be around way after. Furs are only getting more popular, especially since the advancements in faux fur and the new fur apparel being made every day. Furs are still used as a form of class distinction. Although faux fur is at an all time high, sales on real furs are rising thanks to the new styles trending in today's fashion.

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