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### **70's Bell Bottom Pants**

The Bell Bottom Pants were the highlight of 1970's fashion. In this picture, you see three girls wearing bell bottom jeans. They were a part of a singing group called The Three Degrees who were very popular during this time period. Bell Bottom pants originated in the U.S. Navy for soldiers to be able to wear the required boots with no issue. The younger generation began wearing these pants to rebel against their parents which became the 70's fashion statement. The purpose of wearing these jeans during this time period were to go against society and the war effort that many citizens believed wasn't the U.S. issue to be involved in.

In 1963, the disco singing group, The Three Degrees, was formed by a woman named Fayette Regina Pickney and two other women named Shirley Porter and Linda Turner. According to Black Past, "the latter two singers left within months of the group's establishment and were replaced by Helen Scott and Janet Jones. And by 1966, Sheila Ferguson replaced Scott." They were a popular singing group during the 1970's and made their mark as fashion influencers since everywhere they went, they always made sure their outfits were up to par. "In 1974, The Three Degrees added their voices to the mainly instrumental 'TSOP (The Sound of Philadelphia) with the Philadelphia International session band MFSB. It became the theme song of the television show *Soul Train*. Later that year they release "When Will I See You Again," composed by Kenny Gamble and Leon Huff. It peaked at no. 1 on the Billboard R&B chart and no. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100. It also topped the United Kingdom chart for two weeks and sold more than two million copies internationally making it the group's biggest hit." (Black Past,

2022) Their talent was getting recognized around the world, especially in Europe because their talents were being requested for big events. This explains the picture being used because this picture was taken during an event/performance in France which they chose to wear bell bottoms for the picture. They performed for both, Prince Charles for his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday and Princess Diana for her pre-wedding party. This group was a hot commodity during the peak of their career. According to Black Past, “Over the years the following singers performed as members of Three Degrees: Janet Harmon, Sheila Ferguson, Sundray Tucker, Sonia Goring, Miquel Brown, Vera Brown, Rhea Harris, Victoria Wallace, Cynthia Garrison, Helen Scott, Valerie Holiday, and Freddi Poole.” The singing group is still active to the present day and just switches out the singers when it’s needed but it will always consist of three women.

Bell Bottoms, also known as flare pants, started gaining popularity in the mid 1960’s when celebrities, Cher and Sonny, started wearing them. This was a fashion statement for the anti-war movement and society norms that the youth wanted to break away from. “In the 1920s, Coco Chanel brought flares to mainstream fashion wear, creating “Yacht Pants” and “Beach Pajamas” for women, inspired by sailor’s style. However, these did not become a wardrobe staple for the fashion-conscious until the 1960s, when they began popping up on forward-thinking celebrities like Mick Jagger, James Brown and Jimi Hendrix. Soon, all the style rebels were rejecting the classic slim-fit tailored trouser in favour of something bigger and wilder. The most daring sported “Elephant bells”, super wide leg flares not for the faint-hearted.” (Phix Clothing, 2021) Even though Coco Chanel was a woman of her time and created multiple different fashion statements, the flare pants wasn’t one of them and she was one of the first to bring it into the spotlight. However, when popular musicians and celebrities started wearing them in the 60’s and 70’s it became an iconic garment. Chanel was ahead of her time when it came to trying to

implement the flare pants back in the 1920's since that era of rebellion using fashion was still freshly new. "By the 1970s, flares had become the it-trouser for everyone, from musicians to football hooligans, the working class through to the rich and famous, trendy youths and their trendy dads. The style was co-opted for inclusion in collections by designers such as Mary Quant." (Phix Clothing, 2021) Mary Quant was one designer that started to include flare pants in her collections which helped fuel the rise of its popularity. It became an affordable style for everyone in different class and social groups to wear which boosts its popularity even more during this time. They were created in multiple different fabrics and styles because of how popular they were. They were made from denim to be worn as a casual outfit. A synthetic blend fabric would also be used to create the dress pants version of the flare pants so that it gives a professional aesthetic to the outfit. The flare pants were in!

Many celebrities used the flare pants to make a fashion statement within the ever-changing society. For example, "The Three Degrees singing duo, Sheila Ferguson, Valerie Holiday and Fayette Pinkney embraced belly-bearing silhouettes and easy flares." (Harper's Bazaar, 2022) In 1970, The Three Degrees took a picture with this outfit in France while on tour. Celebrities are the forebringing of new styles and they made sure to hop on the trend. Another example, "While on vacation on the Cote d'Azur in the French Riviera, Jane Birkin looks casual in a pair of bell-bottom jeans, platform heels, and a white sleeveless top." (Harper's Bazaar, 2022) Birkin in 1973 helped contribute to the rise of the bell bottoms and the disco era by wearing the flare pants on vacation. She wanted to show how one can style the pants for a casual occasion. "The '70s was about the woman wearing the clothes and not the other way around. From flares and bell sleeves to shearling coats and miniskirts, the era birthed an eclectic mix of style influences that evolved over a ten-year span. Style icons like Jane Birkin and Bianca Jagger

helped with the rise of disco and an unabashed embrace of glamour.” The 70’s was a time to be daring and try new fashion ideas which eventually made it’s imprint in that society. The statements that were made during this era are still being seen in society today, especially the flare pants.

The 1970’s was considered the disco era because of its vibrant energy and the rise of disco music along with the fashion to match the time. Disco was considered the pop culture of the 70’s which was shown in its music, shows, and movies. A famous movie during this time was ‘Saturday Night Fever’ starring John Travolta who played a man who spent his free time in the Discotheque. “The success of the film, with a soundtrack including notable disco artists such as The Bee Gees and Kool & The Gang, helped spread disco fever around the world.” (Elle, 2019) Even in the movie, Travolta’s character sported bell bottoms every time he went to the Discotheque which further pushed the pants onto society and caused its popularity to rise. Another famous girl group called Sister Sledge were famous for their disco music as well. According to Elle, one of their most popular songs is ‘He’s Greatest Dancer’ was performed on stage and the women in this group decided to wear matching flare pants for their performance. This further shows how important flare pants were during this era because every celebrity had a pair in their closet. It was something you just had to have during the 70’s which continue to prove how the flare pants were the essence of the 1970’s era.

All in all, the bell bottoms or the flare pants were something that everyone needed during the 1970’s. It was a hot commodity and brought the youth together. This rebellious fashion statement made its mark on the world and is something that is still worn and styled today. You can’t talk or write about the fashion era of the 1970’s without talking the infamous flare pants since everyone who anyone had a pair or two in their closet. The intended audience of the flare

pants were the youth of that time because they were the real fashion influencers besides the celebrities. They implemented each new fashion style and made sure to give it its own spotlight. Designers wanted to target this audience because they knew that this social group was the one to keep their collections alive and it give it the platform it needed. The flare pants will and always will be the it-pants.



### Work Cited

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