

CHECKLIST

SUPERFINE: TAILORING BLACK STYLE

INTRODUCTION

A dandy is defined as someone who “studies above everything else to dress elegantly and fashionably.” This impetus can be expressed in a range of ways, from absolute precision in dress and tailoring to flamboyance and fabulousness in self-presentation. *Superfine: Tailoring Black Style* presents a history of Black style through the lens of dandyism, emphasizing the importance of sartorial style to Black identity formation in the Atlantic diaspora and the ways Black designers have interpreted and reimagined this history.

Black dandyism, by and large engaged with by men, sprung from the intersection of African and European traditions of dress and adornment. Its history—from Enlightenment England to the contemporary art and fashion worlds of Paris, London, and New York—reflects the ways in which Black people have used dress and fashion to transform their identities, proposing new ways of embodying political and social possibilities.

The exhibition is organized into twelve conceptual and chronological groupings that build a specific, but not definitive, vocabulary of Black dandyism, exploring its complex history while also centering its playful experimentation and hopeful resistance. It features historical objects in a variety of media as well as garments by contemporary Black designers that tell stories about self and society inflected by race, gender, class, and sexuality. Throughout, dandyism is visualized as a vehicle of productive tension between being fashioned and fashioning the self.

I. OWNERSHIP

Disembodiment. The dragon that compelled boys I knew, way back, into extravagant theater of ownership.
—Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 2015

“Ownership” explores dandyism’s relationship to currency and conspicuous consumption through the material signifiers of gold and silver, and through garments and accessories trimmed with or seemingly made from these precious metals. It highlights how clothing can dehumanize but also grant agency and self-possession.

In the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, a new culture of consumption, fueled by the slave trade, colonialism, and imperialism, enabled access to clothing and other goods that marked wealth, distinction, and refinement. Enslaved Africans were sometimes used as “luxury” servants by royalty, the aristocracy, and upstart merchants. As such, they were dandified, dressed in ornate garments that emphasized their objectification. Dandyism in turn became a mode for Black people to subvert this degradation by claiming and visualizing their own value and worth.

Histories of competing European and African valuation are represented here by the silver coin from sixteenth-century England known as the dandiprat, perhaps the origin of the term dandy, whose small size and value came to be associated with insignificance more generally. The dandiprat is juxtaposed with the “Kalinago Royal Coin #8” pendant by L’Enchanteur, a reimagined Indigenous currency from the Caribbean cast with the profile of an ancestor. By recontextualizing the material expressions of wealth and luxury, Black people today can “own” this history, using gold, silver, and other currencies to express self-esteem.

British

Half groat of Henry VII (dandiprat?), 15th–16th century

Silver

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Joseph H. Durkee, 1898 (99.35.3452)



L’ENCHANTEUR (American, founded 2017)

Soull and Dynasty OGUN (American, b. 1984)

“Kalinago Royal Coin #8” pendant, 2023



Bronze

Courtesy L'ENCHANTEUR

American

Livery coat and waistcoat, ca. 1840

Purple silk velvet trimmed with gold cotton-and-metal galloon

Maryland Center for History and Culture, Baltimore, Gift of Miss Constance Petre



This purple velvet coat and waistcoat trimmed with gold galloon, a type of woven trim incorporating metal threads, was probably worn by an enslaved servant of statesman Charles Carroll at his palatial residence in Baltimore. Deliberately obsolete in style, it is cut to mimic fashionable male attire of nearly a century earlier.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, highly visible male domestic servants such as coachmen, footmen, and waiters often wore elaborate suits of livery, a practice established in Europe and adopted by enslavers in the Americas who aspired to imitate “Old World” customs of gentility. Frequently based on antiquated forms of male fashionable dress, sometimes with added exoticizing elements such as turbans, these garments marked their wearers as ornamental and ostentatious, embodiments of their enslavers’ wealth.

Brooks Brothers (American, founded 1818)

Livery coat, 1856–64

Tan wool broadcloth

Historic New Orleans Collection, La.



Worn by an enslaved child or adolescent boy in Louisiana just before the Civil War, this livery coat is a poignant testament to the sartorial codes of subservience imposed upon Black men in the nineteenth century. Brooks Brothers, the company that likely manufactured it, was (and still is) based in New York, but supplied many such garments to be worn by enslaved domestic servants in the South. The large silver-tone metal

buttons are stamped—like coins—with the falcon emblem of Dr. William Newton Mercer, who enslaved nearly three hundred fifty people on various plantations in Mississippi and Louisiana. The same emblem appeared on Mercer’s household china service, marking all as his property.

Hyacinthe Rigaud (French, 1659–1743)

Portrait of a young Black man, 1710–20

Oil on canvas

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dunkerque, France



At once objectified and individualized, the young man at the center of the adjacent image by French court artist Hyacinthe Rigaud exemplifies the ambiguous power of dandification during the era of enslavement. The exoticized sitter wears pseudo-historical and vaguely “Eastern” dress, topped by a gold-tasseled turban, and a gleaming silver collar to emphasize his apparent status as a luxurious possession. In contrast, the bow he holds may be an allusion to the renowned skill of ancient Nubian archers, an ironic symbol of martial might given the sitter’s subjugation. Attributes such as the collar and turban gained increasing currency throughout the eighteenth century through paintings, prints, and decorative arts, as seen in the objects in the adjacent case. Later liveries borrowed from the same vocabulary of ironic extravagance, such as the purple velvet example to the left.

Meissen Manufactory (German, founded 1710)

Modeled by Johann Joachim Kändler (German, 1706–1775), after compositions by Laurent Cars (French, 1699–1771) and François Boucher (French, 1703–1775)

Lady with attendant, ca. 1740

Hard-paste porcelain; mount of gilt bronze

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964 (64.101.59a, b)



Often depicted wearing a combination of turban, pearl earring, and brightly colored livery trimmed with

metallic galloon, the “blackamoor” became a stock element in eighteenth-century decorative arts. At the same time, actual enslaved individuals were forced to wear similar garb in order to signal their status as ornaments to their white enslavers. The enslaved servant in this typical “crinoline group”—destined for the dinner tables, chimneypieces, and display cabinets of European aristocracy—wears a white livery jacket trimmed with gold that echoes the gold-trimmed porcelain he holds for his mistress, marking him as a similarly decorative object.



Claude Louis Desrais (French, 1746–1816)

Dame de qualité à qui un jeune nègre porte la queue, published in *cabier 19* of *Galerie des Modes*, 1779

Hand-colored engraving on paper

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library

This French fashion plate is perhaps a mocking depiction of Madame Du Barry, mistress to the former king Louis XV. The figure in an elaborate silver-trimmed livery carrying her train may be her enslaved Bengali servant Zamor (christened Louis-Benôit in 1770). The caption details their garments at equal length, making him an extension of her fashionable toilette: Along with his silver-trimmed jacket, waistcoat, and collar stamped with his mistress’s coat of arms, he wears a “Moorish-style bonnet” ornamented with pearls and feathers—not unlike her own towering hairdo, a comparison perhaps meant as ridicule.

Henri II Bonnard (French, 1642–1711)

“Dame,” 1677

Hand-colored engraving on paper

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Purchased with funds provided by The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. H. Tony Oppenheimer, Mr. and Mrs. Reed Oppenheimer, Hal Oppenheimer, Alice and Nahum Lainer, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Oppenheimer, Ricki and Marvin Ring, Mr. and Mrs. David Sydorick, the Costume Council Fund, and member of the Costume Council



Widely sold and collected into albums, French fashion plates of the late seventeenth century sometimes featured enslaved Black men in fanciful livery—and metal collars—who act as fashionable accessories to the women depicted in the latest styles. This example includes a short verse that describes how the skin of the Black servant enhances his mistress’s complexion by means of contrast, reinforcing the objectification of Blackness: “Beauties whose only intention / Is that everywhere you are adored / To raise the radiance of the complexion / Like me, use a Moor.”

Nicolas Bonnart (French, 1637–1717)

“Dame de la Cour,” 1678–93



Hand-colored engraving on paper

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Purchased with funds provided by The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. H. Tony Oppenheimer, Mr. and Mrs. Reed Oppenheimer, Hal Oppenheimer, Alice and Nahum Lainer, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Oppenheimer, Ricki and Marvin Ring, Mr. and Mrs. David Sydorick, the Costume Council Fund, and member of the Costume Council

Widely sold and collected into albums, French fashion plates of the late seventeenth century sometimes featured enslaved Black men in fanciful livery—and metal collars—who act as fashionable accessories to the women depicted in the latest styles. The example shown here showcases a “Woman of the Court” holding a black Carnival mask, reinforcing the concept of Blackness as an almost decorative surface quality to be mockingly adopted or jettisoned at will by the white enslaver.

Louis de Carmontelle (French, 1717–1806)



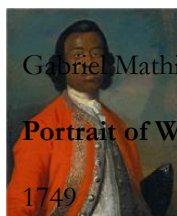
Messieurs de Caumartin de Saint Ange et de Caumartin de Boissy faisant le portrait de leur nègre

Télémaque, ca. 1770

Trois crayons with watercolor on paper

Private collection, Paris

This watercolor, shown here publicly for the first time in almost a hundred years, depicts a Black servant named Télémaque in the process of having his portrait drawn by the Caumartin brothers, scions of a wealthy family of French civil servants. Télémaque's ensemble at first appears similar to those worn by his enslavers, though in style it was ten to twenty years out of date, while the fanciful hat underscores its status as livery. The image allows us to visualize the power dynamics at work in creating nearly all the depictions of Black men in this section.



Gabriel Mathias (British, 1719–1804)

Portrait of William Ansah Sessarakoo, Son of Eno Baisie Kurentsi (John Currantee) of Anomabu, 1749

Oil on canvas

The Menil Collection, Houston

European

Galloon, late 18th–19th century

Silver and white silk-and-metal thread

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of The United Piece Dye Works, 1936 (36.90.1873, .1887)



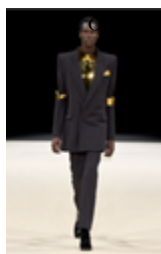
The Royal African: or, Memoirs of the Young Prince of Annamaboe by William Ansah Sessarakoo,



1749

London: Printed for W. Reeve, at Shakespear's Head, Fleet Street; G. Woodfall, and J. Barnes, at Charing Cross; and at the Court of Requests

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations



main (French, founded 1945)

Olivier Rousteing (French, b. 1985)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2024–25 menswear

Jacket and trousers of black wool plain weave; top of gold-colored galvanized brass with sculpted tie and collar reliefs; cuffs and pocket square of gold-colored brass

Courtesy Balmain

Olivier Rousteing's autumn/winter 2024–25 collection for Balmain included molded brass breastplates inspired by the smart and ostentatious styles of his favorite Black musicians from the 1920s to the present. The ensemble displayed above features a breastplate with a trompe l'oeil relief of a shirt and tie worn with a double-breasted black wool jacket and trousers. A second breastplate from the collection depicted a naked torso stacked with gold chain necklaces. The contrast between the two was a statement on luxury, underscoring the varied meanings and expressions of wealth and value across cultures and time.

Marie Victoire Lemoine (French, 1754–1820)

Portrait of a Youth in an Embroidered Vest, ca. 1785

Oil on canvas

Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens, Jacksonville, Fla., Purchased with funds from the Cummer Council



Much about the adjacent beguiling portrait remains uncertain, including the identity of its subject. Rather than livery, the sitter wears a fashionable ensemble comprising a white satin coat and embroidered silk waistcoat, unbuttoned to reveal a ruffle of fine bobbin lace. As a young boy of African descent in France at the end of the eighteenth century, it is unlikely that he commissioned this portrayal or that he chose to wear these garments himself. He is, however, depicted sensitively, with individuality, and without the traditional trappings of enslavement, raising questions about where he fits along the spectrum of fashioned versus self-fashioned, and how to interpret power dynamics in images of Black men from this period.



Wales Bonner (British, founded 2014)

Grace Wales Bonner (British, b. 1990)

“Aime” ensemble, autumn/winter 2015–16

Jacket of silk crushed velvet embroidered with cowrie shells, crystals, and glass pearls; trousers of silk crushed velvet; shirt of cotton poplin; headpiece of gold-plated brass, Swarovski crystals, and cowrie shells; bracelets of gold-plated brass and Swarovski crystals

Courtesy Wales Bonner

The intricate embroidery on Grace Wales Bonner’s “Aime” ensemble recalls the decorative trim applied to fashionable men’s dress in eighteenth-century Europe. The ensemble belongs to a collection titled “Ebonics,” which explored and celebrated the visual language of Blackness in dress. “It was meant to be excessive and abundant; I wanted it to feel very rich,” Wales Bonner said of the collection, which was also informed by her study of exoticized representations of Black figures in European portraiture. The cowrie shell was used as currency in Africa, East Asia, and the West Indies for centuries, and represents a form of wealth and a mode of extravagance unique to those regions.

L’ENCHANTEUR (American, founded 2017)

Soull and Dynasty OGUN (American, b. 1984)

“L’E Goldwill” bullion, 2023

Bronze

Courtesy L’ENCHANTEUR



L’ENCHANTEUR (American, founded 2017)

Soull and Dynasty OGUN (American, b. 1984)

“Name Spell Name Plate” necklace, 2024

Bronze

Courtesy L’ENCHANTEUR



Twin sisters Soull and Dynasty Ogun describe themselves as scholars, artists, and mystics and their work as a

practice of mystic healing. Like talismans, their metal and jewelry designs are intended to transport, protect, or empower the holder or wearer. Here, the “L’E Goldwill” ingots are cast with an image of the sisters’ mother and represent a currency of personal and cultural value. Made in the style of monogrammed jewelry marked with the initials or formed with the name of the owner in calligraphic script, the “Name Spell Name Plate” necklace is a declaration of self-determination and -possession.

Andy Levin (American, b. 1950)

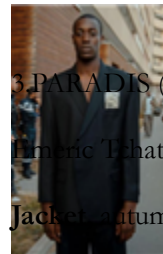
Uncle Lionel’s Birthday, 2007

Giclée print

Courtesy Andy Levin



A tradition in the American South perhaps derived from a West African or Cajun custom, the pinning of dollar bills on a birthday celebrant confers good fortune. “Uncle” Lionel Batiste, shown here in his “birthday suit,” hailed from a well-known musical family and was the bass drummer for the famous Treme Brass Band and an ambassador for the music and culture of New Orleans. Photographed on his seventy-sixth birthday, Uncle Lionel celebrated in a natty suit and tie with his signature accessories: a gold medallion necklace, a wristwatch across his hand, and a metal-capped cane. Treasured for his bold style and attitude, he was “money,” meaning he embodied and displayed his self-worth and value to his community. He was feted for two weeks after he passed away in 2012.



3.PARADIS (French, founded 2013)

Emilie Tchatchoua (French, b. 1988)

Jacket, autumn/winter 2019–20

Navy pinstriped wool twill and black wool plain weave with appliquéd laminated dollar bill; trousers of black wool plain weave

Courtesy 3.PARADIS

In contrast to the opulence conveyed by the nearby Balmain and Wales Bonner ensembles, this jacket made of two types of suiting fabric and a laminated U.S. dollar stitched to the breast pocket suggests the absence of wealth. The mix of fabrics and the substitution of a pocket square with a single dollar bill implies a sense of deprivation or dispossession. The garment is part of a 2019–20 capsule collection by 3.Paradis designer Emeric Tchatchoua titled “Land of the Free”—a comment on social justice movements in the United States during the period and a challenge to the promise of the American Dream.

II. PRESENCE

She must have loved the idea of my presence, the combination of my looks, tall and honey colored; my impeccable manners and grooming; and my blossoming unorthodox style. Plus my master's degree!

—André Leon Talley on Diana Vreeland, *The Chiffon Trenches: A Memoir*, 2020

(In)famous in eighteenth-century London, Julius Soubise challenged society's norms and expectations through his style and behavior. Born enslaved in the Caribbean, he was transported to England and lived with the duchess of Queensbury, where he was educated in the art of being a gentleman. Once emancipated, he became known for his pointed reworking of dandiacal style elements—outré fashion, fine accessories, and conspicuous grooming. His contemporaries recorded his antics in both text and caricature, emphasizing his love of expensive hothouse flowers and perfume.

At a time when Black people individually and collectively were negotiating their status as enslaved and emancipated, dandified men could convert their social invisibility to presence using their (sometimes outrageous) personal style. Soubise's “flowering” as an individual, expressed through his comportment and association with the floral, is reflected in contemporary fashions and accessories that utilize floral motifs as signifiers of unabashed beauty and self-possession.

The bold, colorful, affirmative styling of modern dandies—an undeniable insistence on presence—is visualized by artist and aesthete Iké Udé, who lives and works in the tradition of dandyism. In both his art and life, Udé is an elegant man of fashion, using verbal and visual wit to make and leave a mark.

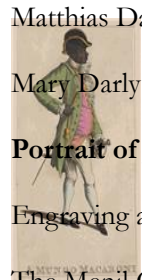
Matthias Darly (British, ca. 1721–1780)

Mary Darly (British, 1736–1791)

Portrait of Julius Soubise (“A Mungo Macaroni”), 1772

Engraving and watercolor on paper

The Menil Collection, Houston



“Macaronis” were men whose tight colorful garments, exaggerated accessories, and affected manners pushed the boundaries of traditional masculinity and made them frequent topics of ridicule in England in the 1770s. Julius Soubise’s rise as a social celebrity coincided with the height of the macaroni’s infamy, and he was subsumed into the type. In this engraving, probably a veiled portrait of Soubise, he is designated “The Mungo Macaroni,” derived from the name of a sassy but foolish enslaved man in Isaac Bickerstaffe’s popular 1768 comic opera *The Padlock*. Adopting an almost balletic pose, he wears the green coat, pink vest, and tricorne hat and carries the tasseled cane often associated with macaronis, as well as a dress smallsword, which he grips suggestively in his left hand.

Lord —, or, The Nosegay Macaroni, published in **The Macaroni and Theatrical Magazine, or Monthly Register, of the Fashions and Diversions of the Time**, February 1773

London: Printed for the authors, and sold by John Williams, next the Mitre Tavern, Fleet Street

The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.



Along with brightly colored (and snugly fitted) suits, oversize wigs, dainty swords, and large walking sticks, macaronis were also known for wearing conspicuously large floral boutonnieres or corsages, known as

“nosegays,” which could cost extravagant sums. In this caricature from the short-lived *Macaroni and Theatrical Magazine*, one of several publications from the height of macaroni mania between 1771 and 1774, a man who may represent the well-known fop Lord Villiers is labeled “the Nosegay Macaroni.” Julius Soubise was also known to spend lavishly on this fragrant accessory, seen discarded in the nearby engraving by William Austin.

William Austin (British, 1721–1820)

The D— of [. . .]—playing at foils with her favorite lap dog Mungo after expending near £10000 to make him a —*, May 1773

Hand-colored etching on laid paper

The Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.



As part of his gentlemanly education, Julius Soubise studied fencing, a genteel sport considered especially stylish in the 1760s and 70s. He attended the fashionable school of Domenico and Henry Angelo in London (the Prince of Wales, future King George IV, was also a pupil there). This print satirizes the familiar relationship between his patroness, the duchess of Queensbury, and Soubise, disparagingly referred to as her “Lap Dog Mungo,” and the supposedly excessive sums she spent on his education. A collection of his bills lies on the ground to the right, while accessories of the macaroni uniform—tricorn hat, cane, and nosegay—lay below his feet. This print, like many later caricatures of Black dandies, satirized the pretensions of Black men to such aristocratic pursuits as ridiculous and wasteful.

Saint James’s Factory (British, ca. 1748/49–1760)

Scent bottles, ca. 1750–55

Soft-paste porcelain

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1971 (1971.75.6a, b; .10a, b; 16a, b)

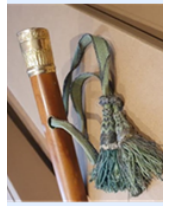


René-Robert Aubert (French, act. 1764–91)

Cane, 1771–72

Gold and malacca wood with cord and tassels of green silk-and-metal thread

Private collection



Italian

Tricorne, mid-18th century

Black wool felt trimmed with gold lace

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1926 (26.56.88)



The objects in this case—a gold-topped cane or walking stick, a tricorne hat trimmed with metallic lace, and three porcelain scent bottles in the shape of flowers (stand-ins for the ephemeral floral nosegay)—represent the characteristic accessories of the eighteenth-century macaroni, which feature in the visual representations of Julius Soubise nearby. Soubise was known for his love of flowers and expensive perfumes. As his fencing instructor Henry Angelo recalled in his 1828 memoir, “His rooms were supplied with roses, geraniums, and other expensive green-house plants, in the spring. He was equally expensive in perfumes, so that even in the lobbies at the theatres, the fops and the frail fair would exclaim, ‘I scent Soubise!’”

House of Balmain (French, founded 1945)

Olivier Rousteing (French, b. 1985)

Belt, autumn/winter 2024–25 menswear

Gold-colored brass and black enamel

Courtesy Balmain



Olivier Rousteing’s autumn/winter 2024–25 menswear collection for Balmain featured a series of designs inspired by the work of Ghanaian photographer Prince Gyasi. This belt, worn in the finale with black trousers

under a camel overcoat, is a brass and enamel version of a bouquet held by an unidentified young man in Gyasi's 2022 photograph *Valeurs* (values). Shaped to encircle the waist with hands intertwined around an arrangement of stemmed roses, it simulates an embrace or an offering that honors Rousteing's cultural and artistic inheritance. His use of roses, a favorite of Pierre Balmain, pays homage to the house founder's legacy and adds a feminine sensibility to the design. Adopted by French parents and raised in Bordeaux, Rousteing first learned of his Ethiopian-Somali background in 2018, a discovery that also informs his work.

3.PARADIS (French, founded 2013)

Emeric Tchatchoua (French, b. 1988)

Suit, 2021

Jacket of navy pinstriped wool gabardine embroidered with bouquet of polychrome dried flowers; trousers of navy pinstriped wool gabardine

Courtesy 3.PARADIS



Emeric Tchatchoua of 3.Paradis collaborated with artist Olga Prinku in 2021 to create a series of suits and shirts incorporating Prinku's delicate dried flower and tulle embroidery. While most garments in the collection were embroidered in silk thread, this jacket is one of two that use real flowers—here, the posy, or boutonniere, is made of daisies, yellow alyssum, pink strawflower, and purple statice tied with a red string. The designs revive the Romantic appreciation for floral decoration in men's dress and honor the tradition of giving, receiving, and wearing flowers.

LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

Virgil Abloh (American, 1980–2021)

Bag, autumn/winter 2022–23 menswear

Brown leather with all-over LV monogram print and appliquéd vines and polychrome flowers of cut leather

Courtesy Collection LOUIS VUITTON



Virgil Abloh published his design vocabulary in the show notes for his collections at Louis Vuitton. In his eighth and final collection for the house, he concentrated on the word *maintainamorphosis*, defined as “the principle that ‘old’ ideas should be invigorated with value and presented alongside the ‘new,’ because both are equal in worth.” The concept is clear in the design of this Keepall bag, which features layers of art historical references, from Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico’s 1950s tulip paintings to seventeenth-century Baroque still lifes. Although Abloh’s abstract, primary-colored flowers are a counterpoint to the nearby naturalistic examples by Tchatchoua and Rousteing, all suggest a renewed interest in dandyism’s decorative impulse.



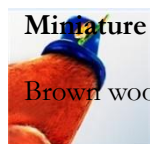
Iké Udé (Nigerian American, b. 1964)

Sartorial Anarchy #5, 2012

Pigment on German satin rag paper

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Purchased with funds provided by Michael and Dianne Bienes, by exchange

Artist, aesthete, and dandy Iké Udé uses his performative (self-)portrait series Sartorial Anarchy to “mess” with what he describes as “the tyranny of men’s traditional dress codes.” Composed of elements of men’s dress from different periods and multiple geographies, the series boldly “engenders a novel mode of expression that reflects a true picture of the 21st century man of the world”—a modern dandy. *Sartorial Anarchy #5* depicts a resolutely cosmopolitan man wearing a eighteenth-century English macaroni wig, a twentieth-century French shirt, 1940s Yoruban (Nigerian) trousers, twentieth-century American loafer shoes, and WWI spats from western Europe and carrying a nineteenth- or twentieth-century Zulu fighting stick. Pushing the boundaries of photography and self-stylization, these images are, for Udé, a sartorial “what if?” and “why not?”



Miniature fedora, 1920s

Brown wool felt

Iké Udé Studio

Iké Udé (Nigerian American, b. 1964)

Boutonniere, 2025

Polychrome fiber cotton felt and tape

Iké Udé Studio



South African

Zulu fighting stick, 20th century

Wood

Iké Udé Studio



Dandies are famously “men of parts,” whose self-presentation relies on the stylish synergy between dress and accessories. The tiny fedora and the Zulu fighting stick in this case are those used by Iké Udé in the adjacent photograph *Sartorial Anarchy #5*; both were modified by the artist for use in the image. The boutonniere, one of Udé’s signature accessories, was made by the artist for this exhibition. *Sartorial Anarchy #5* has a visual precursor in an eighteenth-century caricature that also features a figure with an enormous wig and miniature hat, illustrating the macaroni’s play with gender. Ironically, the wig’s excess feminized the figure while the hat’s masculinizing gesture—due to its association with the emerging world of goods, consumption, and luxury—is undermined by its size.

III. DISTINCTION

War gives numerous opportunities for distinction, and especially to those who in peace have demonstrated that they would be available in war; and soldiers can win distinction in both peace and war if they will but seize their opportunities.

—Henry O. Flipper, *The Colored Cadet at West Point*, 1878

Military dress symbolizes fastidiousness as well as political and cultural authority. Inspired by Enlightenment philosophy and the French Revolution's emphasis on the "rights of man," Toussaint L'Ouverture led a revolt by the formerly enslaved that resulted in the establishment of Haiti in 1804 as the first independent Black republic in the Western Hemisphere. Portraits of L'Ouverture (all imaginative, as none are known to have been made from life) in addition to those of fellow leaders and later Haitian presidents and emperors exude dignity, elegance, and distinction through their display of military dress.

The inheritance of masculine swagger and personal pride in revolutionary times is exemplified by celebrated French novelist and dandy Alexandre Dumas and his father, Thomas-Alexandre, the son of an enslaved Haitian woman and a French general of noble birth. Thomas-Alexandre fought in the French Revolution and was the first person of color to attain the rank of general in the French army. Portraits of father and son depict their stylish confidence, passed down as a proud legacy.

Similarly, Black nationalist movements across the diaspora, including Marcus Garvey's Back to Africa movement, Ethiopian independence, and the Black Power movement in the United States, all had distinct sartorial expressions. These styles have been highlighted, exaggerated, and sometimes deconstructed by contemporary designers who visualize and question the association of power, militarism, and masculine elegance.

Alexandre François Louis de Girardin (French, 1767–1848)

Portrait of Toussaint Louverture, 1804–5

Oil on canvas

La Maison de l'histoire européenne, Brussels



French

Toussaint Louverture on Horseback, 1802

Hand-colored etching

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of William H. Huntington, 1883 (83.2.936)

Recently rediscovered, this posthumous portrait of Toussaint L'Ouverture is the earliest known painted image of the formerly enslaved revolutionary whose efforts eventually led to the overthrow of French colonial rule and the establishment of the Republic of Haiti in 1804. Images of L'Ouverture were in high demand in Europe, leading to prints such as the one here, produced at the height of his rebellion against France. The first Black general in the French army, he wears the embroidered uniform of a French officer in the print and a simpler one in his painted portrait, asserting his allegiance to and reclamation of the uniform's symbolic power as an expression of the egalitarian ideals of the French Revolution.

French

Toussaint Louverture on Horseback, 1802

Etching

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of William H. Huntington, 1883 (83.2.934)



After Agostino Brunias (Italian, ca. 1730–1796)



Buttons, late 18th century

Gouache paint on ivory verre affixed to glass with ivory backing and edged with gilt metal

Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, Gift of R. Keith Kane from the Estate of Mrs. Robert B. Noyes

Once thought to have decorated the coat of Toussaint L'Ouverture, it is more likely that these buttons were created as a novelty for a European consumer. Painted with scenes after Italian artist Agostino Brunias, they depict an idyllic fantasy of humane and happy plantation life in the West Indies, full of dancing and socializing figures of different social classes and racial backgrounds. The refined clothing casts a “civilizing” effect on each tableau, making these buttons a form of fashionable propaganda meant to pacify mounting concerns

about the cruelty of colonization and enslavement.

Robert Mole (British, 1800–1856)

Sword with scabbard of Faustin I (1782–1867), Emperor of Haiti, 1850

Steel, silver, gold, wood, and red silk velvet

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of William S. Delafield Sr., 2012 (2012.204a, b)



This elaborately decorated presentation sword belonged to Faustin-Élie Soulouque, president and later emperor of Haiti. Born enslaved in 1782, Soulouque rose through the ranks to serve at the highest levels of the military for several Haitian presidents before ruling himself. Somewhat ironically, he conveyed the legitimacy of his new—and ultimately ruthless—regime by recalling the visual pageantry of Napoleon’s First French Empire, but also that of Napoleon’s contemporary Jean-Jacques Dessalines, first emperor of Haiti (conveyed in the coronation image below). Manufactured in Birmingham, England, a renowned center for sword making at the time, this extravagant weapon—with its blued-steel blade and red velvet scabbard heavily embellished with gold—is as much a symbol of martial and monarchical power as a sumptuous accessory, not unlike a dandy’s cane in its overwrought embellishment and impracticality.

Leopold Grozelier (American, 1830–1865) and Theodore Lacombe (American, act. mid-19th century), after a daguerreotype by A. H. Hartmann (act. mid-19th century).

Faustin 1er empereur d’Haiti, 1852. Lithograph, 16 5/8 x 11 1/2 in. (42.2 x 29.2 cm). Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Photographs and Prints Division



François de Villain (French, act. 1819–40)

Alexandre Pétion, en son Costume de Président de la République d’Haïti, early 19th century

Engraving

Alfred Nemours Collection, Library System, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus



Langlumé (French, act. 1819–30)

S. Ex Jn. Pierre Boyer, Président de la République d'Haïti, en grand costume, lors de la réception de l'ordonnance du Roi du 17 Avril 1825, 1825

Engraving

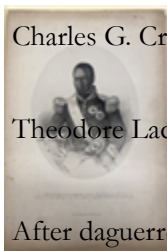
Alfred Nemours Collection, Library System, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus

Barincou (French, act. 19th century)

Chasseur à cheval et Grenadier à cheval de la garde le President d'Haïti, 1821

Engraving adhered to cardboard

Alfred Nemours Collection, Library System, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus



Charles G. Crehen (American, b. Paris, 1829–ca. 1891)

Theodore Lacombe (American, act. mid-19th century)

After daguerreotype by A. H. Hartmann (act. mid-19th century)

S. Ex. J. Paul, duc de Morin, Grand Chambellan et aide-de-camp d'honneur de S.M. L'Empereur. Grand Cordon de la Legion d'honneur et de l'ordre militaire et imperial de St. Faustin et Lieutenant General, plate 7 of L'Album impériale d'Haïti, 1852

Lithograph

Alfred Nemours Collection, Library System, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus

Nestore Corradi (American, b. Urbino, 1811–1891)

Theodore Lacombe (American, act. mid-19th century)

After daguerreotype by A. H. Hartmann (act. mid-19th century)



Vil-de-Lubin, Comte de Pétionville, Général-de-Brigade, Aide-de-camp de S.M., Commandeur de l'ordre impérial et militaire de St. Faustin, officier de la légion d'honneur, Gouverneur de la capitale de l'Empire (Port-au-Prince), plate 12 of L'Album impériale d'Haïti, 1852

Lithograph

Alfred Nemours Collection, Library System, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus

This group of engravings presents a panorama of Haiti's ruling elite in their militaristic self-styling, spanning the country's days as a republic and later a monarchical empire in the first half of the nineteenth century. At the top, the first president of the (southern) Republic of Haiti, Alexandre Pétion, and his successor

Jean-Pierre Boyer wear military uniforms heavily embroidered in gold thread, with their high stiff collars, neck stocks, and mutton-chop sideburns demonstrating the blurred boundaries between military and fashionable dress. Their garments, surroundings, and proud postures derived from portraits of European royalty evoke the grandeur of classical antiquity as well as Napoleon's court in France.

With their towering plumed helmets, tightly fitted coats, and spurred Hessian boots, the pair of Boyer's Imperial Guards depicted on the top right demonstrate both the pageantry and sensuality of these uniforms in their dandiacal poses, with each carrying longsword symbolic of masculine might. Finally, two images of officials from the court of Emperor Faustin I on the bottom testify to the continued use of elaborate martial regalia in legitimizing power.

Dynastic Dandyism: Thomas-Alexandre and Alexandre Dumas

As men of multiracial backgrounds in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, Thomas-Alexandre Dumas and his son, the writer Alexandre Dumas, faced prejudice but were also allowed certain social latitude. Both were known for the impressive figures they cut. The son of a French nobleman and an enslaved Black woman, Thomas-Alexandre became the first general in the French army of African descent. Louis Gauffier's nearby portrait depicts the general in an ensemble that mirrors both contemporary military styles and fashionable civilian attire. The colorful sash at his waist and green foulard around his neck hint at his identity

as a soldier and a Creole.

Alexandre Dumas incorporated his father's military exploits into his celebrated novels of the 1840s, such as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In his memoirs, he recalls the moment at age sixteen when, “seized by the desire to look smart,” he discovered a cache of his late father's clothing. The wardrobe included “pantaloons of leather,” perhaps similar to the skintight pair shown in the portrait of his father and those in the case nearby. Later known for his long legs, as evident in the engraving by Achille Devéria, Alexandre could not help but compare himself to his father's daunting musculature, lamenting, “My poor mother imagined that because I was heir to my father's breeches, I had also inherited his calves.”



Achille Devéria (French, 1800–1857)

Alexandre Dumas, 1829

Lithograph

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1917 (17.3.756-2201)

Louis Granger (French, 1762–1801)



Portrait of Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, 1801

Oil on canvas

Musée Bonnat-Helleu, Musée des Beaux-arts de Bayonne, France

French



Pantaloons, ca. 1805

White leather

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2012

(2012.386)



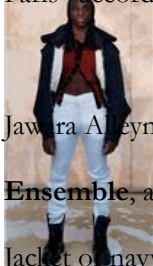
Delaune (French, act. mid-19th–early 20th century)

Boots of Alexandre Dumas père, ca. 1848

Black leather

Musée Alexandre Dumas, a division of the cultural center of the city of Villers-Cotterêts, France

Similar in style to the ones that appear in his adjacent 1829 engraved portrait, this pair of leather boots was worn by Alexandre Dumas in 1848 when standing as a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies in the Yonne region of France. Just before giving a speech, he found his shoes were worse for the wear and exchanged them for a new pair worn by a local man, whose family later donated Dumas's boots to the museum established in the author's honor in his hometown of Villers-Cotterêts. They feature the squared toe fashionable for men from the 1830s to the 40s, and were made by Delaune, "one of the best bootmakers in Paris" according to one 1859 guidebook.



Jawara Alleyne (Jamaican Caymanian, b. 1991)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2021–22

Jacket of navy shirred cotton jacquard; cardigan of orange and black cotton knit; leggings of white shirred cotton plain weave

Courtesy Jawara Alleyne

In an interview about his work for the “Renegade” collection, Jamaican Caymanian designer Jawara Alleyne proposed a broader understanding of masculinity and a new concept of menswear: “It’s about examining the way we work with fabric and figuring out how to tell a new story out of the past. Looking at history, recontextualizing it, and putting new narratives on it.” Alleyne imagined the designs as the handmade uniforms of sailors shipwrecked at sea. This ensemble, made of remnants of fabric sewn together and secured

with safety pins, evokes the swagger of a general in an early nineteenth-century Napoleonic uniform, but subverts the formal traditions of tailoring associated with men's dress.

Homer Lee (American, 1851–1923)

The Colored Cadet at West Point. Autobiography of Lieut. Henry Ossian Flipper, U.S.A., First Graduate of Color from the U.S. Military Academy by Henry Ossian Flipper, 1878

New York: Homer Lee & Co.

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations



As the first Black graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point, Henry Ossian Flipper faced prejudice and discrimination from his fellow cadets and superiors, condemning him to “four years of solitude and silence,” as detailed in his 1878 memoir. In it, he describes his resilience and the ways in which his military garb—as a cadet, shown in the frontispiece to the book above, and later as a decorated graduate, shown in the cabinet card to the right—manifested his hard-won pride. For Flipper, who went on to become the first commissioned Black officer in the U.S. Army, a man in uniform exemplified the masculine ideal, revealing “the symmetry of his form in all its manly beauty.”

Kennedy (American). **Cabinet card of Henry O. Flipper**, ca. 1877. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

House of Dior (French, founded 1946)

John Galliano (British, b. 1960)

Coat worn by André Leon Talley, autumn/winter 2000–2001 haute couture

Navy wool twill with appliquéd braid of gold silk-and-metal thread and red silk piping

Courtesy Alexis Thomas, Estate of André Leon Talley



Fashion editor, stylist, and writer André Leon Talley is remembered for his expert knowledge of fashion, his devotion to the designers he supported, and his acute understanding of the power of dress to shape and communicate identity. Designer John Galiano, a Talley favorite, made him two versions of this military-inspired deconstructed greatcoat. The grandeur of its silhouette, asymmetrical standing collar, red silk satin lining, gold braid, and highly polished buttons mirrors and accentuates the command and theatricality of Talley's self-presentation.

House of Balmain (French, founded 1945)

Olivier Rousteing (French, b. 1985)

Ensemble, pre-fall 2023



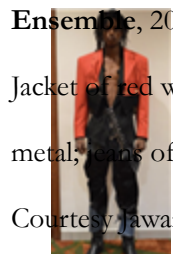
Coat of black cotton velvet with fringed epaulets and Brandenburg closures of gold metallic braid with embroidered pearls and crystals; tracksuit of black, white, and gold polyester satin

Courtesy Balmain

Olivier Rousteing refers admiringly to his legion of wearers and followers as the Balmain Army. His rigidly structured, armorlike, military-inspired fashions are their uniforms, and for the designer, they represent the boldness and revolutionary spirit of contemporary glamour at Balmain. The coat displayed here is Rousteing's interpretation of the Veste Hussard, an early nineteenth-century French cavalry jacket with ceremonial gold braid, that he has paired irreverently with nylon track pants.

Jawara Alleyne (Jamaican Caymanian, b. 1991)

Ensemble, 2024



Jacket of red wool plain weave and black silk satin; shirt of black cotton waffle knit with safety pins of silver metal; jeans of acid-washed blue cotton denim with black silk satin appliquéd with safety pins of silver nickel

Courtesy Jawara Alleyne

Jamaican Caymanian designer Jawara Alleyne finds inspiration in the offhand ways in which islanders customize their clothing, translating these practices in his designs using repurposed fabrics, knots, and safety pins. Elements of naval uniforms appear in this ensemble as if tossed on by the waves—a coat with metal buttons twists sideways on the body. The seemingly haphazard designs bely the artistry of Alleyne’s tailored and draped construction.

Wales Bonner (British, founded 2014)

Grace Wales Bonner (British, b. 1990)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2017

Jacket and trousers of wool-mohair plain weave; shirt of cotton plain weave; vest of silk satin; sash of cotton crochet and silk satin; brooch of gold-plated brass, rutilated quartz crystals, and beads of polychrome hand-painted recycled glass and tiger eye

Courtesy Wales Bonner

Wales Bonner (British, founded 2014)

Grace Wales Bonner (British, b. 1990)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2017

Tailcoat of wool-mohair plain weave; trousers of wool-mohair plain weave embroidered with polychrome cotton crocheted waistband and appliquéd silk satin side stripes; shirt of cotton plain weave embroidered with cotton crocheted collar; brooch of silver-plated brass, freshwater pearls, and beads of lapis lazuli

Courtesy Wales Bonner

Grace Wales Bonner’s “Ezekiel” collection concentrated on Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie as a connection between African and Caribbean cultures. Here, elegant tailoring and ornament reminiscent of Selassie’s ceremonial dress is trimmed with woven cotton bands in the red, green, and black colors of a so-called Rasta

belt (Wales Bonner's Jamaican background is a frequent source of inspiration in her work). The colors further relate to Marcus Garvey's 1920 Pan-African flag, the banner of his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and a symbol of solidarity and self-determination for Americans of African descent. Garvey, pictured adjacent in UNIA uniform, predicted the rule of a Black king promising freedom in Africa. Selassie was crowned in 1930 and made a united Africa his guiding cause.

James Van Der Zee (American, 1886–1983). **Marcus Garvey in a UNIA parade**, 1924. Gelatin silver print, 6 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (16.4 x 24 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Funds from various donors, 2018 (2018.96)

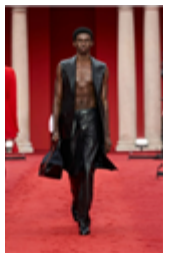
Salvatore Ferragamo (Italian, founded 1927)

Maximilian Davis (English, b. 1995)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2023

Vest and trousers of black lamb leather

Courtesy Salvatore Ferragamo



The uniform of the Black Power movement in the United States typically consisted of a black leather jacket—already a popular garment among Black men and women in the 1960s—and a beret, for its military and revolutionary associations. This rejection of traditional respectable modes stood in contrast to the strict tailoring adopted by other Black nationalist movements. Images of charismatic Black Power leaders in uniform fixed it in fashion history as a sartorial expression of defiance and determination. Maximilian Davis of Salvatore Ferragamo evokes its physical appeal in this sleeveless suit of sumptuous black leather designed to be worn open at the front.

Fear of God (American, founded 2013)

Jerry Lorenzo (American, b. 1977)



Ensemble, autumn/winter

2025–26 menswear

Coat of black calfskin leather; jacket of black cotton denim; turtleneck of black wool knit; trousers of black wool satin

Courtesy Fear of God

Fear of God's "A Civil Collection" for fall/winter 2025–26 drew from the tailoring of the late 1960s. Artistic Director Jerry Lorenzo directly referenced the Black Power uniform—both its elegant simplicity and its ability to communicate a spirit of resistance and resolve. The black turtleneck and leather jacket with high notched lapels in the ensemble here are details of the original uniform significant to Lorenzo for their lasting cool sophistication. His trademark sense of ease is underscored by the addition of a black denim jacket, itself a symbol of rebellion during the period.

Antonio's Manufacturing (American, founded 1971)

Afro rake, 1970s

Injection-molded plastic and silver metal

Private collection



American

Beret, ca. 1970

Brown wool felt edged with black vinyl and embroidered in gold with Black Power fist motif and text

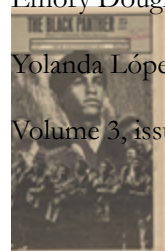
Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C.



Emory Douglas (American, b. 1943)

Yolanda López (American, 1942–2021)

Volume 3, issue 20 of **The Black Panther**, September 6, 1969



Two-color ink on newsprint

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library

Founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in 1967 and edited by Judy Juanita, *The Black Panther* promoted the radical ideology of the party in both words and images. Editorials and articles on Marxist-Leninist and Black nationalist thought, combined with collaged illustrations and “handmade” design elements, have now become iconic, cementing the magazine as not only the voice of an era but also an architect of an enduring form of Black radical “chic.” The Black Panther beret and raised-fist afro rake from the 1970s are also emblematic parts of this bold, subversive Black-centered iconography.

Bstroy (American, founded 2013)

Brick Owens (American, b. 1990)

Dieter Grams (American, b. 1991)

House of Givenchy (French, founded 1952)

Boots, 2022

Black leather and black wool fleece

Courtesy Bstroy Archives c/o Du and Brick

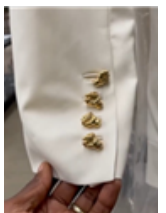


Johnny Nelson Jewelry (American, founded 2017)

“All Power Fist” cuff links, 2025

14 karat gold

Courtesy Johnny Nelson Jewelry



BOTTER (Dutch, founded 2017)

Rushemy Botter (Dutch, b. Curaçao, 1984)

Lisi Herrebrugh (Dutch, b. 1989)



Afro pick and pouch, autumn/winter 2021–22

Pick of black plastic and steel; pouch of black crocodile-embossed calf leather

Courtesy BOTTER

The persistence of the Black Power movement's iconography, particularly the raised fist, is reflected here in the gold cuff links by jeweler Johnny Nelson and the afro pick and custom pouch by Botter—objects also associated with the dandy's grooming and dressing rituals. Bstroy's outsize interpretation of the combat boot—often worn by members of the movement—produced in collaboration with French luxury house Givenchy is further evidence of the Black Power uniform's enduring influence as a symbol of strength and determination in contemporary fashion.

IV. DISGUISE

Just before the time arrived, in the morning, for us to leave, I cut off my wife's hair square at the back of the head, and got her to dress in the disguise and stand out on the floor. I found that she made a most respectable looking gentleman.

—William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*, 1860

Dress can disguise or reveal, especially for those negotiating the fraught line between subjugation and liberation. Dandyism enabled the enslaved and emancipated to convey the ways that identity is dependent on—and manipulated by—sartorial conventions.

As seen in “runaway” advertisements, people escaping enslavement understood that clothes communicate social hierarchies and denote people both as individuals and as members of undifferentiated groups. Some absconding people escaped with wardrobes of clothing that they used to disguise themselves and to fund their journeys to freedom. When enslaved couple Ellen and William Craft ran “a thousand miles for freedom,” Ellen passed as white, male, and upper class, while William pretended to be her loyal Black male servant with the aid of a dandiacal disguise.

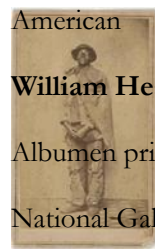
Just as dress can be a form of concealment, it can also reveal a true self. In the early and mid-twentieth century, Ralph Kerwineo and Stormé DeLarverie donned typical male attire as a manifestation of their gender-nonconforming identities and sexualities, a gesture that was as much a means of survival as self-expression. The contemporary garments featured here all convey the transformative role of fashion in dressing across the boundaries of race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Fifty Dollars Reward, *Western Carolinian*, January 31, 1826

\$100 Reward, *The Daily Picayune*, September 30, 1846

\$100 Reward!, *The Federal Union*, June 15, 1856

Enslavers placed classified advertisements for absconding enslaved people in local newspapers from colonial times to the end of the Civil War, sometimes offering generous rewards for their return. Some of these ads are remarkably detailed, including precise descriptions of the clothing, grooming, and comportment of Black self-emancipators. Some runaways were described as “excessively fond of dress”; taking fine clothes with them, they endeavored to pass as white, free, and/or of a higher class. In 1850 the Fugitive Slave Act demanded the return of runaways, even if they had reached a free state, increasing the danger of escape and precariousness of self-liberation.



William Headley, ca. 1864

Albumen print (carte de visite)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Ross J. Kelbaugh Collection, Purchased with support from the Ford Foundation

The man proudly posed on the front of this carte de visite is William Headley, a self-emancipated enslaved man from a plantation in North Carolina. Images such as these were distributed by abolitionists in the North

to demonstrate the realities of enslavement, stressing the pitiful state of the men's bodies and tattered clothing, remnants of so-called "Negro cloth," that bore witness to the trials of their flight. Yet as the inscription adds, Headley fashioned his standard-issue clothing into garments that gave the appearance of confidence and even sartorial flair: "His clothes were of many colors and qualities. His cloak consisted of an old cotton grain bag, slit open on one side and raveled, which gives the appearance of rich fringe."



Who Decides War (American, founded 2015)

Ev Bravado (American, b. 1993)

Téla D'Amore (American, b. 1994)

Suit, autumn/winter 2024–25

Pieced wool twill with exposed black and white polyester interfacing and horsehair

Courtesy Who Decides War

Ev Bravado and Téla D'Amore of Who Decides War presented this suit in their autumn/winter 2024–25 "Garden of Eden" collection. The intricate jumble of suit remnants—some affixed wrong-side-up—looks refined from afar but on close inspection suggests unstudied improvisation or haphazard construction, its patchworked surface and loose fit perhaps a signal of the wearer's attempt and failure to conform. In fact, the suit was expertly made: Bravado learned the craft from his father, Nigel Best, a Long Island–based tailor. The garment serves as a commentary or study on the construction of the self as much as the suit.

Cross-Dressing for Freedom: The Crafts

As recounted in their 1860 memoir shown here, William and Ellen Craft escaped enslavement in Georgia by dressing fair-skinned Ellen as a white, upper-class "gentleman," with her husband William posing as her Black male servant. "I went to different parts of the town, at odd times, and purchased things piece by piece,"

William writes, describing how his wife, a seamstress, also modified garments. Pioneering Black historian and abolitionist William Still included images of the Crafts in "gender appropriate" attire following their final escape to England in his seminal 1872 chronicle *The Underground Rail Road*, also on display.

In addition to gender, dandiacal dress could disguise class and social status, an especially dangerous prospect for enslaved Black men. William's decision to purchase a high-quality (if secondhand) dandyish white beaver top hat—similar to the one here—almost jeopardized the couple's flight by upsetting white observers' sense of racial and sartorial propriety, with one exclaiming, "It always makes me itch all over, from head to toe, to get hold of every d—d nigger I see dressed like a white man."

Samuel O. Aborn (American, 1817–1899)

Hat, ca. 1840

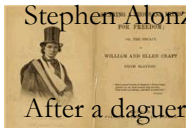
Cream beaver fur with band of cream silk grosgrain

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mrs. James F. Lawrence, 1965 (C.I.65.2.2a)



Joseph Andrews (American, 1806–1873)

Stephen Alonzo Schoff (American, 1818–1904)



After a daguerreotype by Luther Holman Hale (American, 1823–1885)

Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery by

William Craft, 1860

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations



Ellen and William Craft, published in **The Underground Rail Road** by William Still, 1872

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Thirteen Years a Girl-Husband, The Ogden Standard, June 13, 1914

Amazing Double Life of Girl Who Lived for Years as a Man, *The Day Book*, May 13, 1914

Girl Lives Thirteen Years as a Married Man, *The Tacoma Times*, May 12, 1914

Ralph Kerwineo was a transgender man born in Kendallville, Indiana, in 1876 to Black parents who may have also had Cherokee and Neshnabé heritage. In 1906 he changed his name, adopted tailored suits, and transitioned to living a stealth life, passing as a cisgender man for thirteen years. He was described as “natty” and “the perfect gentleman,” and for the first time was able to experience steady, often lucrative employment passing not only as a cisgender man but also as a white South American in segregated and predominantly white Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Kerwineo gained brief but sensational national attention in 1914 when after leaving his partner Marie White to marry a different woman, White outed him to the police, resulting in his arrest for disorderly conduct. Citing the lack of employment opportunities and safety when he presented outwardly as a single woman of color, Kerwineo was able to convince the court to drop the charges, but they commanded him to dispose of his tailored suits and masculine identity. He later testified to the press that returning to his assigned identity signified the end of the most enjoyable time of his life.

Diane Arbus (American, 1923–1971)

Miss Stormé de Larverie, The Lady Who Appears to be a Gentleman, N.Y.C. 1961

Gelatin silver print

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Promised Gift of Doon Arbus and Amy Arbus

(L.2008.62.366)

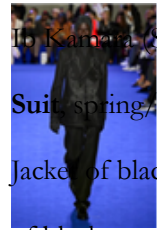


Miss Stormé de Larverie, The Lady Who Appears To Be A Gentleman, really isn't. She has been wearing impeccably tailored suits since 1955 when she was persuaded to appear as singer and sole male impersonator in a female impersonator's revue. Stormé regards the transformation as a delicate art and has conscientiously experimented to perfect the cut, fit, shape and style of her appearance as a man. . . . She doesn't try to explain to strangers what she doesn't need to explain to friends and many people who are uneasy about living in a Man's World or queasy about being in a Woman's, find her curious privilege a source of wisdom. She

is gentle and peaceful and courteous and proud. But maybe what is most curious about Stormé is what she is most curious about: the air of being someone slightly out of context and most at home there.

—Diane Arbus, “The Full Circle,” *Infinity*, February 1962

Off-White (Italian, founded 2013)



Ib Kamara (Sierra Leonean, b. 1990)

Suit, spring/summer 2023

Jacket of black wool plain weave with white thread embroidery of anatomical chest and torso motif; trousers of black wool plain weave with linear white thread embroidery

Courtesy Off-White



Off-White (Italian, founded 2013)

Ib Kamara (Sierra Leonean, b. 1990)

Jacket, spring/summer 2023

Black wool plain weave with white thread embroidery of anatomical chest and torso motif

Courtesy Off-White

After years spent in conversation and collaboration with founder Virgil Abloh, stylist and designer Ib Kamara became the art and image director of Off-White in 2022 following Abloh's death. Kamara presented this “Body Stitch” suit and jacket as part of his first independent collection for the brand. The jackets, made of black wool with white top-stitching that follows the seam lines and illustrates the musculature of a male or female torso at the front, comment on the ability of standardized garments like the suit to conceal the identity and individuality of the wearer. An homage to the wry quotations Abloh applied to Off-White objects, Kamara's embroidery identifies each jacket as male or female irrespective of the wearer's gender, rendering the exterior marker affirming or superficial.

V. FREEDOM

I'll tell you what freedom is to me: no fear. I mean really, no fear . . . like a new way of seeing something.

—Nina Simone, *Nina: A Historical Perspective*, 1970

“Freedom” explores the anxieties about Black social mobility that coalesced around issues of dress and comportment in the decades before the Civil War. From the 1820s, successful Black men, some of whom had been free for generations, adopted bourgeois dress and manners to express their social and political ambitions. They sat for commissioned portraits that communicated their wealth, power, and self-assurance via their stylish, refined clothing and impeccable grooming.

The moment these men gained prominence, they were satirized and stereotyped. A new representational regime, the blackface minstrel show and related caricatures, emerged to mock and vilify this striving for equality and citizenship. Together, they attempted to assert a fundamental incongruity between being Black and being fashionable, with fashion as a stand-in for freedom.

Several works here, however, defy these new forms of white racism. The stylish Black couple in the Philadelphia Fashions portrait, accustomed to societal judgment, turn their critical gaze on those that would denigrate them. The cakewalk, a high-energy dance that was a feature of the minstrel show, seemingly mocked Black pretensions to fashionable society. However, the dance was actually appropriated from a satire of white slaveholders by the enslaved. When Black folks danced the cakewalk, they critiqued the blackface caricature, creating a liberating and joyous celebration of the power of Black expressive culture.

Attributed to George Washington Mark (American, 1795–1879)

Untitled (African-American musicians), 1838

Oil on canvas

Memorial Hall Museum, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield, Mass.



This image was probably created for an abolitionist sympathizer. However, it depicts its subjects in caricatured style, suggesting that its maker or owner believed Black men deserved emancipation, but not necessarily equality. As with later caricatures, the artist implies that while the men depicted aspire to sophistication, they somehow miss the mark. The figure at the center is likely the earliest surviving painted depiction of Long-Tail Blue, a popular blackface minstrel character introduced in 1827, named for his exaggerated and outdated fashionable dress. The other men wear even more outdated garments, as they were copied directly from a 1793 satirical print mocking an “Equality Ball” given by John Hancock in Boston, demonstrating how caricature often relies on repeating and recontextualizing pejorative imagery.

Newton (British)

Tailcoat, ca. 1825

Navy wool broadcloth

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, NAMSB Foundation Inc. Gift, and Judith and Gerson Leiber Fund, 1995 (1995.292a)



This finely tailored coat of “superfine” blue wool displays all the hallmarks of 1820s male fashion that made it ripe for ridicule: a dramatic high collar covering the neck; a padded chest (here one inch thick) enlarging and rounding the chest; and superfluously long tails, flared over the hips and tapering to the hem. Worn by dandies, these coats helped create the dramatic hourglass silhouette then in vogue, a silhouette that was thought to be even more exaggerated by the musculature of the Black male body. A similar coat is worn by the figure at the center of the nearby painting, and the style is the subject of one of the earliest blackface minstrel songs, “Long-Tail Blue” (1827), which ridiculed Black men’s attention to such finery and the excessive personal regard it implied.

Attributed to William Matthew Prior (American, 1806–1873)

William Whipper, ca. 1835



Oil on canvas

Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, N.Y., Gift of Stephen C. Clark

William Whipper was in his early thirties when he sat for this portrait, around the same time he entered into a lucrative lumber business partnership with fellow Black entrepreneur Stephen Smith and married Smith's sister Harriet. The son of an enslaved African woman and her white enslaver, Whipper prospered in Philadelphia, where he operated several businesses from the 1820s onwards, using his fortune to advocate for moral reform, temperance, education, and abolition, personally funding the efforts of several enslaved individuals to self-emancipate. Called "a mulatto of fine personal appearance" by historian William Wells Brown, here Whipper mirrors many contemporary fashion plates with his jaw-length sideburns, high pleated neck stock, and low-cut patterned silk waistcoat, while his jewelry signals his wealth and will to adorn.

Jeremiah Pearson Hardy (American, 1800–1888)

Abraham Hanson, ca. 1828

Oil on canvas

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., Museum purchase



As a barber, Abraham Hanson catered to the personal appearance needs of his clients, and this portrait by Jeremiah Pearson Hardy displays his admirable care for his own self-presentation. In 1825 he arrived in Bangor, Maine, and quickly drew notice for his affability and good nature, perhaps also perceptible in the portrait. In addition to a close shave, he offered shoe polishing and garment cleaning and sold a variety of soaps, perfumes, and shaving accessories "to invigorate your looks," according to one advertisement. The artist painted this remarkably candid image of Hanson not long after his arrival in Maine, as indicated by the puffed "leg-o-mutton" sleeves of his coat, which were the height of fashion (for both men and women) in the late 1820s.

John Blanchard (American, act. early 19th century)

Thomas Howland, 1850–56

Oil on wood

Property of the Rhode Island Historical Society (Museum Collection), Providence



Thomas Howland, the subject of this unusually expressive portrait, was a dock worker in Providence, Rhode Island. In 1857 he became the city's first Black elected official when he was named warden of its Third Ward. However, that same year he decided to emigrate to Liberia with his wife and daughter, perhaps in response to the recent Supreme Court decision in the Dred Scott case that denied African Americans the protections of U.S. citizenship. Because of this decision, Howland's application for a passport was denied, despite his status as a free man with the right to vote in his home state (he did eventually make it to Liberia). Howland's confident posture echoes that of the earlier *Portrait of a Gentleman* shown nearby, the fashionable attire of both sitters serving to reinforce their self-possession.

American

Portrait of a Gentleman, ca. 1830

Oil on panel

Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine, Museum Purchase, Hamlin Fund



Assured of himself and his place in society, the sitter in this portrait (whose identity has been lost) gazes warmly at the viewer, his arm gently resting behind the chair on which he sits. He marks his prominence and sophistication through his fashionable clothing—a fitted coat with a high collar, a black silk cravat—combined with a high hairstyle parted stylishly to one side. Illustrating the ability of fashion to confer identity, the descriptive title by which it has come to be known (*Portrait of a Gentleman*) suggests his ostensibly elite social position, and, by extension, the ability of Black men to occupy such an echelon by the 1830s.

American

Portrait of a man (James Forten?), ca. 1820



Oil on panel

Flint Institute of Arts, Mich., Gift of Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch

American

Portrait of James Forten, ca. 1818

Watercolor on paper

The Leon Gardiner Collection of American Negro Historical Society Records, 1933, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia



The subject of these portraits has been thought to be Philadelphian James Forten, one of the most prominent and well-regarded African American businessmen and abolitionists in early nineteenth-century America. In 1841 the antislavery newspaper *The Liberator* (which Forten helped fund), ascribed his standing to “his gentlemanly qualities, shining virtues, and intellectual and moral characteristics.” Both images display a sense of dignified confidence and ostensible pride in appearance, although the dandyism of the subject in the larger portrait—with his gold buttons, black silk cravat, and romantic hairstyle—stands in contrast to the sobriety of the one below. The images can be dated to roughly the same period, with the smaller and more sober profile portrait seeming a likelier candidate for Forten’s visage, given the sitter’s apparent maturity (he would have been over fifty at the time).

French

Shirt, ca. 1800

White linen plain weave



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, NAMS Foundation Inc. Gift, 2004 (2004.170)

Ch. Clément (French, act. mid-19th century)

Stock, ca. 1840

Black, gray, and blue silk jacquard patterned with scrolling floral motifs

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Isabel Shults Fund, 2025



George Cruikshank (British, 1792–1878)

Neckclothitania or Tietania, being an essay on Starchers, by One of the Cloth, 1818

The New York Public Library, Rare Book Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Jean-Baptiste Sabatier-Blot (French, 1801–1881)



Philippe Aime LeGoaster, ca. 1840

Watercolor on ivory

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Floyd D. and Anne C. Gottwald Fund, John Barton Payne Fund,

Gift of John Stewart Bryan, by exchange and Adolphe D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, by exchange



American

Stock, 1835

White silk satin and crepe with buckle of silver metal

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection at The Metropolitan

Museum of Art, Gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009; Gift of Mrs. Alvah E. Reed, 1966 (2009.300.3848)



The exaggerated neckwear adopted by dandies and other aspiring men of fashion from the 1810s reached new heights by the 1820s. Worn over fine linen shirts with high collars and starched muslin ruffles, cravats (a length of fabric wrapped around the throat and tied) and later stocks (fixed neckcloths that were secured with straps and buckles) became a sign of the dandy's pride, pushing the chin back and causing him to literally look

down his nose at the world.

To the delight of satirists, dandies developed increasingly elaborate ways of tying the cravat, giving them “the air of being puffed up with pride, vanity, and conceit,” according to an 1818 essay. The essay’s engraved frontispiece by George Cruikshank displayed here illustrates how to turn a folded length of cloth into various configurations, all of which pushed the neck up so that the wearer appeared to be “holding his fellow creatures covered with the deep disgrace of disgust.” One such wearer is wealthy entrepreneur and *gen de couleur libre* (“free person of color”) from New Orleans Philippe Aime LeGoaster, pictured in the miniature portrait at center.



Maximilian Davis (English, b. 1995)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2021

Top of white cotton poplin; trousers of white cotton drill

Courtesy Maximilian Davis

This “keyhole” halter ensemble is part of Maximilian Davis’s debut spring/summer 2021 collection, inspired in part by Carnival traditions in the designer’s native Trinidad and Tobago. The halter is made up of two sleeve-like panels of fabric that overlap high at the neck, separate to reveal the bare torso, and overlap again at the waist, creating the illusion of a cravat untied and hanging freely. The top is secured by a clip closure at the neck and an adjustable strap at the center of the back, the absence of a shirt conveying both an error in dressing and a sense of ease in the body underscored by the loosened tie.



Off-White (Italian, founded 2013)

Ibamaara (Sierra Leonean, b. 1990)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2023

Sleeveless jacket and trousers of cream wool twill

Courtesy Off-White

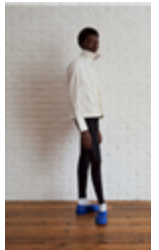
Ib Kamara's first collection for Off-White in 2023, titled "Celebration," was conceived in honor of founding designer Virgil Abloh's design legacy. "Works in progress" was a guiding theme, and it manifested in uncut threads trailing from seams, cutaway garments, and absent elements. This otherwise precisely tailored suit of cream wool is missing sleeves and features an exaggerated collar extending to the floor. The unfinished detail transforms the neckline into a cravat with ties too long to shape elegantly into a bow.

Bianca Saunders (British, founded 2017)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2024–25

Shirt of white cotton plain weave; trousers of black wool-silk twill

Courtesy Bianca Saunders



Bianca Saunders's menswear designs begin with the silhouette at rest and in motion. Saunders described her approach in an interview in 2022: "I'm exploring how to contour shape around the male body; exaggerating certain parts of the body through illusion. My clothes reveal themselves when they move." In her autumn/winter 2024–25 "Nothing's Personal" collection, the designer focused on the collar—rounded, pointed, and detachable. Here, the lines of the wearer's jaw and torso are enhanced by the ∇ shape of the upturned, outsize collar and the diagonal pleats set into the shirt from the shoulders to the hemline. The design creates the illusion of a triangle inside a square, seemingly broadening the shoulders and narrowing the waist.

George Endicott (American, 1802–1848)

"My Long-Tail Blue" sheet music, ca. 1827

Lithograph



The New York Public Library, The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs:

Picture Collection

The blackface minstrel theater traded on stereotypes and mockery of emancipating and free Black people, an attempt at imaginative re-enslavement. This sheet-music cover depicts one of its most popular characters, Long-Tail Blue, so called because of the exaggeration of his tailcoat, a phallic symbol and, by the late 1820s, a fashion faux pas. Long-Tail Blue's song recounts his illicit courtship of a white woman named Sue; his pursuit of her is stopped by a watchman who tears his jacket, an act of emasculation. Unfazed by this, he sings, "I took it to a Tailor's shop / To see what he could do / He took a needle and some thread / And mended my long tail blue." This mending ensures the figure's ambivalence as menacing and resilient.

Hippolyte-Louis-Emile Pauquet (French, 1797–1871)



Le Mulâtre, published in tome 3 of **Les Français peints par eux-mêmes, or, Encyclopédie morale du XIXe siècle**, 1842

Librairie Diktats

S. W. (probably American)



New Orleans Black Dandy, published in volume 2 of **Texas and the Gulf of Mexico, or, Yachting in the New World** by Matilda Charlotte Houstoun, 1844

The New York Public Library, Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

These two images of Black dandies, published within quasi-ethnographic accounts in the 1840s, are derived not from direct observation but rather from earlier blackface caricatures, such as the depiction of Long-Tail Blue shown nearby. Both are accompanied by long descriptions by white authors that together perpetuate the stereotype of the overaccessorized, overconfident free Black man, and of his supposed extravagant spending in pursuit of this fashion.

Mulatto [men] cherish more than anything all the vain pleasures of dressing. They often condemn themselves to the most rigorous privations in order to satisfy them.

—From *Les Français peints par eux-mêmes*

I saw such persecuted negro slaves frequently; they appeared to have no other occupation than that of flourishing about their gold beaded canes, and fixing a [quizzing] glass in their eye. Gloves (which are an unusual sight at New Orleans) they generally indulged in, and with one hand gracefully placed in the coat pocket, looked worthy—behind—of figuring in the Tuilleries [sic], or St. James's Street. No one pays higher for his outfit than the negro in the Slave States.

—From *Texas and the Gulf of Mexico; or, Yachting in the New World*

European

Tailcoat, 1815–25

Green wool broadcloth and green silk velvet

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mr. Lee Simonson, 1939 (C.I.39.13.24)



American

Top hat, 1820–30

Brown fur seal with band of brown silk grosgrain decorated with self-patterned foliate motifs and buckle of silver metal

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1972 (1972.139.1)



Dandiacal fashions reached their most extreme form in the 1820s and early 1830s, when fitted tailcoats with contrasting metal buttons and oversize top hats, like these examples, were most popular. The racist caricatures to the right depict similar items, lambasting the pretensions of free Black people to such high-style clothing and, by implication, elevated social standing. They also lampoon the convergence of male and female fashions at this time, suggesting, for example, that such tailcoats—already being superseded by even-hemmed frock

coats—created an effeminate silhouette. By the time these images were produced in the mid-1830s, the garments portrayed were also out of date, adding an extra layer of ridicule to the social and sexual satire.



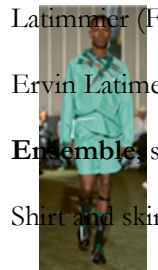
Latimmier (Finnish, founded 2022)

Ervin Latimer (Finnish American, b. 1988)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2024

Suit of blue merino wool twill; shirt of blue-and-white striped cotton plain weave; tank top of white cotton plain weave; necklace of recycled sterling silver

Courtesy Latimmier



Latimmier (Finnish, founded 2022)

Ervin Latimer (Finnish American, b. 1988)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2024

Shirt and skirt of green-and-white striped cotton plain weave; green Bic pens

Courtesy Latimmier

Dress as performance is central to Ervin Latimer’s design practice, originating in his own background in ballroom and drag. Inspired in part by the 2013 film *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Latimer’s spring/summer 2024 collection drew from male archetypes, costume, and “the sartorial choices that [men make] to express status and power, and how none of that’s really real.” The illusion of convention is undone by the comically cropped trousers and exaggerated cuffs of this otherwise standard suit from the collection. Latimer used two green-and-white striped shirts to create the adjacent shorts ensemble, cutting one shirt in half and reworking it as a skirt. Ballpoint pens replace traditional pins at the neckline and cuffs as a whimsical, absurdist ornament.



Bianca Saunders (British, born 1993)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2025

Coat of yellow nylon; shirt and trousers of blue-and-white striped cotton knit; tam of white cotton crochet

Courtesy Bianca Saunders

Charles Hunt (British, 1803–1877)

After William Summers (British, act. 1850–59)

Life in Philadelphia. “Dark Conversation,” ca. 1833

Hand-colored aquatint

Library Company of Philadelphia



The “dark conversation” in this caricature concerns anxiety about the growing public presence of the middle-class Black community in 1830s Philadelphia. A man notices the atmosphere is “particularly Black,” referring to the stormy weather as well as the population. His companion, also employing the double entendre, agrees that it is a “very Black looking day.” All are drawn with grotesquely exaggerated facial and physical features, an exceptionally dark skin tone, and attired in dress extravagant in style and proportion.

Anthony Imbert (American, b. France, act. 1825–ca. 1838)

Life in New York. “Shall I hab the honour of glanting . . . ?,” ca. 1830

Hand-colored lithograph

Library Company of Philadelphia



Life in New York and the nearby *Life in Philadelphia* are from a series of racist print caricatures that mock the pretensions of African Americans to elegant fashion and social graces in the early nineteenth century.

Depicting the courtship of Miss Dinah by competing suitors Sancho and Romeo, this print ridicules by means of exaggerated dress, distorted physiques, and verbal malapropism. Miss Dinah nearly overwhelms her suitors and their exaggerated neckcloths and tight pants, barely managing to balance her overdesigned and enormous

hat.

Charles Hunt (British, 1803–1877)

After William Summers (British, act. 1850–59)

Life in Philadelphia. “How you like de new fashion shirt . . . ?,” ca. 1831

Hand-colored aquatint

Library Company of Philadelphia



This racist caricature depicts an ostentatiously and garishly dressed African American couple in a parlor of the same style, discussing the 1829 fad of striped shirts. The man asks “Miss Florindy” for her opinion on his shirt, which she, in a low-cut, overly embellished dress, finds elegant. Implicit is the idea that viewers should not trust her opinion. Contemporary Black designers on display nearby play with proportion and pattern, seizing the freedom to get fashion “right” or “wrong.”

Edward Williams Clay (American, 1799–1857)

Philadelphia Fashions, 1837, 1837

Lithograph

Library Company of Philadelphia



Probably English

Quizzing glass, 1820–30

Clear glass and gold filigreed metal

Mark Wallis Collection, London



What you look at Mr. Frederick Augustus? / I look at dat white loafer wot looks at me; I guess he from New York.

Depicting a prominent member of Philadelphia’s Black elite, staunch abolitionist and proprietor of the

grooming establishment Gentleman's Dressing Room Frederick Augustus Hinton, this print reorients the racist gaze of the other caricatures. Hinton examines the viewer, centering the Black perspective visually even as it is critiqued verbally in the caption, both acknowledging and mocking his stature.

Charles Hunt (British, 1803–1877)

After William Summers (British, act. 1850–59)

Life in Philadelphia. "An Unfair Reflection," ca. 1833

Hand-colored aquatint

Library Company of Philadelphia



This caricature and *A Dark Conversation* nearby hue closest to the blackface minstrel show's racist depiction of Black men as dandies. Everything is grotesquely exaggerated: the man's features, skin color, body, speech, and dress. Grooming himself, he considers how "unfair" it was for "Miss Carolina" to comment on the "paleness" of his skin, insisting that he has "a good color." Adjacent is a scene of actual and metaphorical redress, with denzilpatrick's contemporary evocation of a dandy's silhouette in front of African American craftsman Thomas Day's chest with dressing mirror.

Martine Rose (British, b. 1980)

Leather Snout Mule, autumn/winter 2023–24

Black leather



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Alfred Z. Solomon-Janet A. Sloane Endowment Fund, (2025.252a, b)

English

Shoes, ca. 1830

Black glazed kid leather edged with black silk grosgrain ribbon



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 2025 (2025.105a, b)

Caricatures like those displayed nearby mocked the parent incongruity between the dainty, flat-soled shoes of thin silk or leather popular for men in the 1830s—such as these—and the large feet of the men wearing them, suggesting an essential dissonance between Blackness and fashionability. The extra-long, curved, and square-toe mules by British designer Martine Rose distort the shape and size of the foot, reflecting her characteristic sense of play and proportion.



Thomas Day (American, 1801–1861)

Chest of drawers, 1840–45

Mirrored glass, Egyptian black marble, and mahogany veneer over yellow pine, poplar, rosewood, and maple wood

North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh

Thomas Day was among the most prolific and sought-after craftsmen of the pre–Civil War South, celebrated for his bold, distinctive furniture and woodwork. By 1850 he boasted the largest furniture business in North Carolina—an exceptional feat for any artisan, but particularly for a Black man. Day was born free in Virginia in 1801 to free parents, an uncommon privilege shared by roughly one percent of the 1,002,037 Black Americans counted in the 1800 census. His relationship to freedom was complex, as he privately maintained connections to Northern abolition networks yet owned Black enslaved workers who fabricated furniture alongside white laborers in his Milton shop. This dressing bureau is emblematic of Day’s fashionable design style, including his penchant for fine mahogany veneer, negative space, and scrolling curvilinear flourishes ordered by a classicizing symmetry.

denzilpatrick (British, founded 2021)

Daniel Gayle (British, b. 1983)



James Bosley (British, b. 1983)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2024–25

Tailed bomber jacket of gray synthetic twill; trousers of ivory cotton tumbled velvet studded with rivets of bronze metal; shirt of gold-and-ivory striped cotton plain weave; tie of green nylon plain weave; spats of ivory cotton tumbled velvet and bronze metal

Courtesy denzilpatrick

Daniel Gayle's autumn/winter 2024–25 "For Your Entertainment and Delight" collection referenced both music halls in early nineteenth-century London and rave culture in the 1990s. His designs, which combine the performative styles and exaggerated silhouettes worn on stages in 1915 and to clubs in 1995, are affectionate caricatures of both fashions. While reminiscent of an Edwardian suit with a historicist cutaway coat of gray figured damask, high-waisted white trousers with spats, and a "banker's" shirt, this ensemble's nylon fabric and acid green tie nod to the techno aesthetic of the Y2K era at the turn of the twenty-first century.

LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2023 menswear

Jacket and trousers of black wool plain weave; belt of black cotton rope beaded with LV monogram charms of polychrome metal and plastic; hat of black leather

Courtesy Collection LOUIS VUITTON



Louis Vuitton's spring/summer 2023 collection was the first since 2018 conceived without the input of creative director Virgil Abloh, who died in November 2021. Ib Kamara, frequent Abloh collaborator and friend, designed the collection in the late designer's honor by maintaining Abloh's interest in the leitmotif of boyhood and signature sense of play. This tuxedo's outsize proportions, colorful charms, and paper-like hat convey a playfulness that is also present in the exaggerated movements and gleeful expressions of the cakewalk dancers in the video to the right.

American Mutoscope and Biograph Company (American, 1895–1916)

Cakewalk, 1903

Running time: 24 seconds

American Mutoscope and Biograph Company (American, 1895–1916)

Comedy Cakewalk, 1903

Running time: 27 seconds

These short films feature African American men and women performing the cakewalk, stepping and strutting in formal dress—the lead dancer in a top hat, tails, and wielding a cane. The cakewalk was a social dance originating on Southern plantations, for which the winning couple enjoyed a cake as a prize (hence the phrase “take the cake”). First performed by enslaved people mocking the airs of their enslavers, it became a feature of the blackface minstrel show in the early nineteenth century, part of the comic denigration of the supposed pretensions of Black people to sartorial and expressive elegance. As seen in the second film, *Comedy Cakewalk*, Black performers in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reclaimed the dance, incorporating it into some of the first Black vaudeville performances and all-Black Broadway musicals.

VI. CHAMPION

Have pride in the way you dress, the way you talk, the way you walk, the way you carry yourself. Discipline is the thing that makes you a champion.

—Walt Frazier, “Walt ‘Clyde’ Frazier Is Still the NBA’s Greatest Style God—and He Knows It,” *GQ*, October 6, 2016

For Black men, athletic success has often been a route to both physical and fashionable distinction. Today, elegant and conspicuously colored, patterned, or accessorized clothing worn by athletes has become an indelible part of the entertainment value of sports. This form of Black dandyism distinguishes athletes as astute and visible tastemakers, often positioned at the nexus of sports and capitalism.

In the field of horse racing, Black jockeys found success until they were forced out of the sport in the early twentieth century. Enslaved Black jockeys often wore uniforms, or “silks,” that matched the livery of their enslavers, and both enslaved and emancipated jockeys frequently celebrated their success sartorially, dressing up in the highest fashions of the day. Boxers such as Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali also lived extraordinary lives that challenged the boundaries of race, affording them avenues to fashionability not readily available to others. Likewise, from the time of legendary New York Knick Walt Frazier’s heyday in the early 1970s to now, basketball players have been sharp dressers and shrewd entrepreneurs, more recently using the NBA tunnel as a fashion runway.

As seen here, contemporary designers have elevated sports and athletic wear through historical references and experiments with form, resulting in garments that cover the body as well as some that reveal and revel in its musculature.

Heavyweight Champions

The fame and notoriety of legendary boxers are often reinforced by their fashionability. Jack Johnson and Muhammad Ali were both known for their physicality and appearance in and out of the ring. In 1910 Johnson, the “Galveston Giant” and first Black Heavyweight Champion of the World, famously knocked out boxer James Jeffries, known as “The Great White Hope,” which led to riots across the country. Johnson broadcast his success through his connoisseurship of clothing, cars, and controversy, living a life of luxury and extravagant style that provoked public ire for, among other things, his marriages to white women. Muhammad Ali, known as “The Greatest,” similarly challenged racial regimes and social hierarchies. His career as a boxer and his efforts as a civil rights activist are unparalleled, and he conducted both with style. In their satiny texture and black-and-white color scheme, Ali’s signature Everlast shorts were a nod to the formalism of a tuxedo, while outside the ring he enjoyed wearing bespoke suits.

Left: **Jack Johnson Driving an Automobile, Chicago, IL** (detail), 1910. Print made from glass negative, 4

× 5 in. (10.2 × 12.7 cm). Chicago Daily News Collection, Chicago History Museum

Right: Thomas Hoepker (German, 1936–2024). **World heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali is fitted for a new suit**, London, 1966. Photograph. Magnum Photos

Gallery Dept. (American, founded 2017)

Josué Thomas (American, b. 1984)



Shorts, 2025

White silk satin

Courtesy Gallery Dept.

Los Angeles–based designer Josué Thomas’s recent designs for his brand Gallery Dept. are inspired by his training as a boxer. These shorts are reminiscent of boxing trunks worn in the ring by fighters like Muhammad Ali (pictured below). However, they are executed in luxurious silk satin and appliquéd with the label’s name, punctuated with the *accent aigu*—a nod to French couture and the designer’s Trinidadian background. The limited-edition “Retouche” boxing gloves displayed nearby are constructed according to sporting standards but have been made fashionable by their surface of patchworked, recycled denim.

Michael Ochs (American, b. 1943). **Muhammad Ali**, ca. 1970. Photograph. Michael Ochs Archives

Saul Nash (British, b. 1992)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2023–24

Hoodie and joggers of black merino wool-PrimaLoft knit; padded scarf of white nylon; gloves of black and white nylon

Courtesy Saul Nash



Saul Nash (British, b. 1992)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2025–26

Hoodie and sweatpants of white recycled polyester scuba knit; padded waist bag of black nylon

Courtesy Saul Nash

A trained dancer, Saul Nash has made it his mission to design garments that “liberate wearers through movement,” explaining, “movement has many connotations, not only bodily but also of the mind and the way that we perceive clothes and the men who wear them.” These ensembles from the designer’s “Juxtaposition” and “Metamorphosis” collections embody movement in the engineering of their fabrics and their construction for fit and release. Nash combines the formal and material features of tailoring and athletic wear—here, the coordinated components, the waist bag as cummerbund, and the white scarf as collar or towel—to emphasize the intersections between traditional and contemporary forms of aspirational dress.

Gallery Dept. (American, founded 2017)

Josué Thomas (American, b. 1984)

“Retouche” boxing gloves, 2024

Recycled patchworked blue cotton denim

Courtesy Gallery Dept.



The Great Black Jockeys

The first truly national sport, horse racing was perhaps the most popular athletic event in nineteenth-century America and one of the first that allowed Black men to distinguish themselves as individuals. Wearing colorful uniforms known as “silks,” Black jockeys represented their enslavers and, later, stable owners, but the fame and fortune they acquired also afforded them the ability to express their success through fashionable dress and “gentlemanly” living.

Superstar Black jockeys like Ed Brown, Oliver Lewis (winner of the first Kentucky Derby), Isaac Burns Murphy (the first to win three Kentucky Derbies), and Jimmy Winkfield parlayed their skill into economic and social liberty. Winkfield, shown below, was the only Black jockey to win the Kentucky Derby in the twentieth

century, in 1901 and 1902, before increasingly virulent Jim Crow laws forced Black jockeys out of the sport. The dashing Winkfield left for Europe shortly thereafter, eventually notching more than 2,500 career victories before opening his own stables outside Paris.

Left: Charles Christian Cook (American, 1873–1957). **Jimmy Winkfield**, ca. 1902. Digitized from glass plate negative, 7 × 5 in. (17.8 × 12.7 cm). Keeneland Library, Lexington, Ky.

Right: Probably Russian. **James Winkfield**, ca. 1915. Photograph. Liliane Casey Collection

Edward Troye (American, b. Switzerland, 1808–1874)

A Stable Jockey (Willis?) Holding Mazeppa for W. R. Johnson, 1835

Oil on canvas

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Paul Mellon Collection



Little is known about the stable jockey depicted in this painting, who, along with the horse he reins in, stares directly at the viewer. He is probably a young man named Willis, enslaved by Virginia politician and horse breeder William Ransom Johnson, nicknamed the “Napoleon of the Turf” for his dominion of the sport in the 1820s and 30s. Willis’s bright red jacket and cap foreshadow the ubiquitous Black “lawn jockey” statue that proliferated in the twentieth century, but his loose trousers and black leather shoes—similar to contemporary fashionable dress—indicate that he was not a competitor but rather in charge of looking after the horses on Johnson’s plantation, where he was still required to represent his enslaver sartorially.

American

Jockey suit, 1830–50

Jacket of red silk satin with stripes of appliquéd green silk satin ribbon; breeches of white buckskin
Charleston Museum, S.C.



Signaling their status as both property and adept horsemen, enslaved Black riders wore vividly hued silks in their enslavers' colors, matching the household's livery. This ensemble, intended for equestrian Colonel William Alston of Clifton and Fairfield Plantations in South Carolina, is possibly the earliest surviving American set, and would have been identical to those worn by Alston's enslaved riders. Apparently never worn, the garments reveal the expertise of the enslaved "plantation tailors" who created them, as the jacket is made not from a striped fabric but rather from green ribbons meticulously sewn to the red satin ground with almost impossibly small, even stitches.

Edward Troye (American, b. Switzerland, 1808–1874)

Ansel Williamson, Edward Brown, and the Undefeated Asteroid, 1864

Oil on canvas

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Paul Mellon Collection



Edward Troye was the leading painter of thoroughbred racehorses in the United States as well as the enslaved men who rode and cared for them. Troye's paintings, while ostensibly sanctioning slavery through their idealized depiction of plantation life, are also a precious record of African American accomplishment. In this canvas, painted in the midst of the Civil War, fourteen-year-old enslaved jockey Edward Brown crouches to adjust the spur of his boot while wearing blue-and-white silks. Following emancipation and the tutelage of master trainer Ansel Williamson (depicted on the right), Brown, seen below as an adult, became a top trainer and stable owner himself, eventually becoming one of the wealthiest Black men in Louisville.

Probably American. **Edward Dudley Brown**, late 19th century. Daguerreotype. Keeneland Library, Lexington, Ky.

Denim Tears (American, founded 2019)

Tremaine Emory (American, b. 1981)

"T.O.B." Ensemble, 2024



Coat and trousers of red, blue, and brown cut lamb leather pieced in all-over diamond pattern; shirt of zebra-patterned viscose satin

Courtesy Denim Tears

Tremaine Emory's designs for Denim Tears concentrate on the stories and figures of the African diaspora. His 2024 "T.G.B.J." ("The Great Black Jockeys") collection adapted both the traditional patterns of racing silks and the popular motifs of equestrian fashions to foster appreciation for the sport's diversity and complex origins. The ensemble above incorporates the diamonds and crossed sashes of traditional silk designs, used to identify jockeys and their associated stables on the racetrack.

3.PARADIS (French, founded 2013)

Emeric Tchatchoua (French, b. 1988)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2025–26



Jacket of black wool plain weave appliquéd with NBA patches of polychrome cotton; trousers of black wool plain weave; beanie of black wool-silk knit appliquéd with NBA patches of polychrome cotton

Courtesy 3.PARADIS

Emeric Tchatchoua's autumn/winter 2025–26 "Snow Day" collection—a reference to a cancelled school day—included this suit appliquéd with layers of the National Basketball Association (NBA) team patches, suggesting both a young man's dream of athletic excellence and fallen snow on the head and shoulders. Visual references to basketball, drawn from Tchatchoua's youth, appear frequently in his work for 3.Paradis. He described his 2025 collaboration with the NBA as "a tribute to the spirit of sportsmanship and the global unity that sports can bring, highlighting the power of individuality within a collective context." For the designer, playing sports instills "the drive to surpass personal boundaries, make a unique mark, and achieve legendary status."

L'ENCHANTEUR (American, founded 2017)

Soull and Dynasty OGUN (American, b. 1984)

New Era Cap Company (American, founded 1920)

L'E Team Spirit Cap

Blue and black cotton twill with appliquéd Knicks patch of polychrome cotton and edged with gold-plated brass

Courtesy L'ENCHANTEUR



This Knicks L'E Team Spirit Cap is one in a series made by twin sisters, artists, designers, and mystics Soull and Dynasty Ogun of L'Enchanteur. The hats are a reinvention of the famed 59Fifty, or Brooklyn Style, cap introduced by the apparel company New Era in 1954. L'Enchanteur customizes each one using a combination of techniques, including cutting and reshaping the bill; gilding the edges and logo with copper, gold, or silver leaf; and adorning the brim with jewels, coins, and nameplates. The ornamental features endow the caps, typically worn to signal team affiliation and loyalty, with a deeper sense of personal and collective value.

American

“When Champions Meet” poster, 1915

Ink on placard stock

The Black Fives Foundation, Greenwich, Conn.



Pioneering basketball team owner and impresario Will Anthony Madden sports his signature carnation boutonniere with a tailored suit and high-starched-collar shirt at the center of this promotional poster for his team the New York Incorporators. Born impoverished in New York's Greenwich Village, Madden was a consummate showman and promoter of early Black basketball teams. He adopted the polished persona of the

dandy as a visual indication of his team's success and the relatively new sport's viability, setting a precedent for later sports owners and managers to express their success sartorially. Referencing the preeminent dandy of Regency England, in 1917 the *Chicago Defender* called Madden the “king of the basket ball world and Beau Brummel [*sic*] of New York City.”

Jet, April 4, 1974

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library



American

Hat worn by Walt Frazier, ca. 2010

Black wool felt, black silk grosgrain, and gold metal

Courtesy Walt Frazier Enterprises



PUMA (German, founded 1948)

Clyde's, 1970s

Red and white suede calf leather and white rubber

Courtesy PUMA



Legendary New York Knicks player Walt Frazier is one of basketball's first style icons and sportswear entrepreneurs. In the 1970s and 80s, his extravagant off-court uniform included tailor-made suits, full-length fur coats, chic headwear, and gold jewelry, as documented on the cover of *Jet* magazine's April 1974 issue. On the court, Frazier wore the “Clyde's” sneakers he developed with Puma in 1973, the same year he won his second NBA championship. Frazier earned the nickname Clyde in his 1967 rookie season due to his penchant for wearing fedoras like those sported by Warren Beatty as notorious bank robber Clyde Barrow in the recently released film *Bonnie and Clyde*. The “Clyde's” remain in production and the championship winner continues to wear fedoras to this day.

VII. RESPECTABILITY

True enough, we think a man is wanting in the upper story, who invites attention to his fine clothes; but a man is wanting, both in the upper and lower story, when he pays no attention to his dress. . . . The respectability and dignity of colored Americans must be upheld.

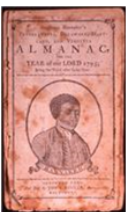
—Frederick Douglass, “There Is Something in Dress,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, May 25, 1855

Black political and cultural leaders have long understood the power of dress to communicate pride and command respect. Wearing a bespoke suit asserts a particular form of arrival and ambition. The freeborn, self-taught scientist Benjamin Banneker defended both his almanac (below) and his reputation in the 1790s through impeccable research and self-presentation. Frederick Douglass exuded dignity with a sartorial elegance that was as impactful as his rhetoric in defense of Black humanity during the Civil War and Reconstruction. One of the best-educated Black men in the early twentieth century, W. E. B. Du Bois wore tailored suits while expounding Black pride and progress.

Tailoring traditions were often passed down within families in the African diaspora. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, students could also learn these techniques at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)—centers of leadership, culture, and fashion. Master tailors such as Andrew Ramroop, designers like Jeffrey Banks, and style icons such as André Leon Talley have continued to demonstrate that the impeccable, well-made suit endures as a form of pride and protection.

Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia almanac, for the year of our Lord 1795 by Benjamin Banneker, 1794

H. Furlong Baldwin Library, Maryland Center for History and Culture, Baltimore



Forced to defend himself against accusations that a man of his race could not produce works of scientific rigor, mathematician, surveyor, and astronomer Benjamin Banneker used his dress to amplify and reinforce the perception of his intellectual gifts. Banneker wears the conservative but respectable dress associated with

his Quaker religion in this frontispiece to the 1794 edition of the almanac, which he issued from 1792 to 1797 based on his own astronomical calculations. Pioneering Black historian William Cooper Nell later remembered that Banneker had “a very venerable and dignified appearance,” an effect enhanced by his suits of “superfine drab broadcloth, made in the old style of a plain coat, with a straight collar and long waist-coat.”

Frederick Douglass: Representing His Race

Abolitionist, writer, and statesman Frederick Douglass—the most photographed man of the nineteenth century—carefully crafted a public persona that exuded dignity. Escaping enslavement in Maryland in 1838, he became a spokesman for abolition and civil rights through his stirring books and speeches, combining forceful arguments with a confident, tasteful appearance, disseminated via photography. His fastidious and elegant self-presentation is evident in the items from his wardrobe on display in this case, such as a sharply tailored black jacket and a white shirt bearing his embroidered monogram D, which he wore with his signature shock of curly hair combed back into a stately mane. In the epigraph that introduces this section, Douglass applies the language of fashion to the typeface of his newspaper’s title. By calling for a more refined font, he demonstrated his understanding of the power of image, style, and sophistication as it pertained to all aspects of representing his race.

American

Frederick Douglass, ca. 1855

Daguerreotype



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Rubel Collection, Gift of William Rubel, 2001 (2001.756)

American

Tailcoat worn by Frederick Douglass, late 19th century

Black brushed wool Melton

Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.



Philip T. Hall (American, 1854–1925)

Shirt worn by Frederick Douglass, late 19th century

White linen plain weave embroidered with *D* monogram in red thread

Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.



American

Vest worn by Frederick Douglass, 1870s

Cream cotton-linen basketweave

Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.



Ellwood and Sons, London (British, 1811–1938)

Top hat worn by Frederick Douglass, 1885–89

Black silk plush with band of black silk grosgrain

Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.



Possibly British

Cane owned by Frederick Douglass, 1890–95

Bamboo wood and silver

Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.



Possibly American

Sunglasses worn by Frederick Douglass, 1890–95



Black wire and glass

Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

Probably American

Comb owned by Frederick Douglass, late 19th century

Ebonite

Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.



Irish

Pocket watch and chain owned by Frederick Douglass, 1846

Silver with gold chain

Howard University, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Washington, D.C.



In 1894 Frederick Douglass wrote an essay describing the significance of purchasing his first pocket watch, on view here. “The possession of a watch in my young days was among the remote possibilities,” he wrote, as “I did not own myself.” A pocket watch, hung from a heavy chain outside a gentleman’s waistcoat, was for Douglass “a sign of wealth and respectability,” and for a formerly enslaved man, the ultimate indication that his time was his own. When he finally acquired one as a free man, he wrote, “no article in my ownership has been more serviceable to me,” as it allowed him to maintain the practice as well as the appearance of sophistication, prosperity, and punctuality.

W. E. B. Du Bois: Traveling in Style

Sociologist, historian, and Pan-Africanist W. E. B. Du Bois was the first Black man to earn a PhD from Harvard University and one of the best-dressed men in turn-of-the-century America. He is pictured here at the 1900 Paris International Exposition in morning dress (top hat, black tailcoat, gray trousers), while the adjacent monitor shows some of the hundreds of portraits of elegant, accomplished, striving people that he

compiled for display in Paris. Called *The Exhibit of American Negroes*, the presentation demonstrated African American pride and progress.

Du Bois's international travel required him to order clothing befitting his status as a representative of Black America to the world. The ephemera shown nearby document his attention to dressing like a refined gentleman throughout his life. In addition to patronizing a London tailor in 1911, he also ordered two suits from Brooks Brothers in March of 1925 as well as two from his own Harlem tailor in 1940. A laundry receipt from 1933 shows Du Bois maintaining his wardrobe by having a number of shirts, collars, and handkerchiefs cleaned.

Probably French

W. E. B. Du Bois at Paris International Exposition, 1900

Gelatin silver print

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries



W. E. B. Du Bois's receipt from Newman and Son Tailors, July 1911

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries



W. E. B. Du Bois's laundry list, February 3, 1933

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries



Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Brooks Brothers, March 12, 1925

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries



Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Lucius Jones, May 8, 1940

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries



Frances Benjamin Johnston (American, 1864–1952)

Tailor boys at work, 1899–1900

Platinum print

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Lincoln Kirstein



Frances Benjamin Johnston was a pioneering Washington, D.C.–based photographer and journalist and one of the first American women to sustain a career and achieve public acclaim in photojournalism. In 1899 she was commissioned by the historically Black college Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia (now Hampton University) to capture photographs of students to be featured in the *Exhibit of American Negroes* at the 1900 Paris International Exhibition. The display, primarily organized by W. E. B. Du Bois, presented a sociological thesis about the upward social mobility of Black Americans after slavery. Quiet and ordered, *Tailor boys at work* is one of Johnston's 159 photographs of Hampton pupils diligently learning their trades as they prepared to secure their spot within the skilled-labor workforce and the burgeoning Black middle class.

Tailor's shears, ca. 1923

Courtesy Maurice Sedwell



Tailor's folding ruler, 20th century

Courtesy Maurice Sedwell

Tracing wheel, ca. 1948

Courtesy Maurice Sedwell

These tools were used by Maurice Sedwell, master tailor on Savile Row in London starting in the 1960s. Andrew Ramroop, whose in-process suit is shown nearby, began as an apprentice to Sedwell in the early

1970s and eventually purchased the business in 1988. He inherited the tools from Sedwell, representing the transfer of the tailor's knowledge and skill; they are treasured items not only for the history of the business but also for both men personally. All are essential to achieving the precision necessary to the tailor's craft. The shears are handcrafted and must be properly balanced to achieve a proper long, clean cut of fabric, while the wheel is used to transfer pattern markings onto paper or fabric as part of the process of making and fitting a garment.

Maurice Sedwell (British, founded 1938)

Andrew M. Ramroop OBE CMTT (British Trinidadian, b. 1952)

In-process jacket, 2024

Midnight blue wool plain weave with brown and gray pinstripes

Courtesy Maurice Sedwell; Individually designed, hand cut, and hand tailored to the highest standard attainable by Andrew M. Ramroop



Andrew Ramroop emigrated to London as a teenager in 1969 from a small village in Trinidad, seeking the highest level of training as a tailor. Facing discrimination and poverty, he nevertheless pursued his dream of “sculpting cloth around a human form.” Now a master tailor and the creative director of Savile Row’s Maurice Sedwell Ltd., a renowned business and educational enterprise, his clients include royalty, celebrities, and captains of industry from all over the world. This in-process jacket with exposed stitching and layers of fabric exemplifies the handiwork of a tailor at the pinnacle of his craft and is a result of what Ramroop has identified as the thirty-nine steps—each requiring one hundred minutes of handwork—needed to make a bespoke jacket, with a full three-piece Maurice Sedwell suit taking one hundred and five hours to complete.

Jeffrey Banks (American, b. 1955)



Ensemble, ca. 1980

Coat of polychrome check wool tweed; jacket and trousers of brown wool tweed; shirt of yellow-and-white striped cotton plain weave; tie of brown ribbed silk faille patterned with gray geometric motifs

Courtesy Jeffrey Banks

Jeffrey Banks emerged in the 1970s—a period of increased recognition for Black designers in America—as an advocate for ease and softness in luxury menswear. Before founding his namesake label in 1976, he designed for both Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein, leaders in men’s suiting and sportswear. This suit and overcoat of wool tweed exemplify Banks’s work from the 1970s and 80s, which he described as “masculine, classic, but classic with a twist—either through color, fabrication, or both.” The traditional double-breasted design in soft browns epitomizes the enduring notion of a well-made suit as an expression of pride for Black men.

Morty Sills (American, act. mid- to late 20th century)



Suit, 1986

Gray, red, and white check wool twill

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Z. Solomon-Janet A. Sloane Endowment Fund, 2023 (2023.784a–c)

By the 1980s New York tailor Morty Sills was known for his elite clientele of lawyers, stockbrokers, and entrepreneurs. André Leon Talley, then fashion news editor at *Vogue* and one of the most powerful Black voices in fashion, conveyed his success by commissioning this graphic Sills suit, with a cut inspired by classic English tailoring of the 1930s and 40s. Through it, Talley also aligned himself with a tradition of Black male elegance: Sills had previously dressed stylish photographer Gordon Parks as well as actor Richard Roundtree for the 1971 film *Shaft*. Talley later recalled an image of himself walking down Fifth Avenue in this suit

(reproduced here) as “my favorite photograph of myself,” adding, “I was a devoted dandy,” his custom ensemble contributing to his confident strut.

Arthur Elgort (American, b. 1940). **André Leon Talley 5th Avenue**, 1986. Gelatin silver print, 20 × 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library

LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

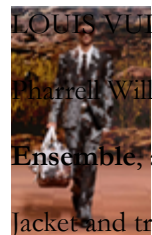
Virgil Abloh (American, 1980–2021)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2020–21 menswear

Jacket, vest, and trousers of gray cotton-wool twill; shirt and tie of gray-and-white striped cotton plain weave; tie clip of silver metal

Courtesy Collection LOUIS VUITTON

Virgil Abloh was known for assigning new standards of value and meaning to the components of everyday dress. According to the glossary he released with each of his Louis Vuitton collections, 3 percent was “the exact ratio needed to twist a normative object into something special.” He made several alterations to the traditional tailored suit, including the addition of a belt-like strap or layer that secured the garment to the body in a practice he called “harnessing” and defined as “a means of safekeeping.” The coat in this ensemble includes the harness feature, signifying the designer’s abiding interest in the suit as a form of both pride and security.



LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

Pharrell Williams (American, b. 1973)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2024–25 menswear

Jacket and trousers of gray, brown, and black wool-silk jacquard with pixel grid camouflage motif; shirt of

white cotton plain weave; tie of brown silk crepe-back satin

Courtesy Collection LOUIS VUITTON

In his early collections as men's creative director for Louis Vuitton, Pharrell Williams has concentrated on reinterpreting the checkerboard Vuitton Damier pattern synonymous with the brand. Williams transferred the pattern, traditionally used for leather goods, onto garments in pixelated spectrums of color, dubbing the treatment "Damouflage," a play on the words *digital* and *camouflage*. In an update of traditional checked patterns (seen in the suits by Morty Sills and Jeffrey Banks below), this suit is woven in the black and brown of Vuitton's traditional Damier as well as gray. The latter suggests the wearer's ability to blend in with his surroundings—a reference to the tailored suit's potential as a symbol of conformity and disguise.

Polo by Ralph Lauren (American, founded 1967)

"Morehouse College" ensemble, 2019

Jacket, vest, trousers, and cap of brown wool tweed; shirt of blue-and-white striped cotton plain weave with contrast collar of white plain weave; tie of blue, maroon, and yellow striped silk knit

Courtesy Ralph Lauren Corporation



Polo by Ralph Lauren (American, founded 1967)

"Morehouse College" ensemble, 2019

Sweater of maroon wool knit with *M* monogram motif and appliquéd elbow patches of leather; scarf of maroon-and-white striped wool knit with appliquéd M/C crest of matching felted wool; brimmed cap of felted maroon wool-viscose with embroidered crown motif and M/C patch of maroon and white wool-viscose felt

Courtesy Ralph Lauren Corporation

James Jeter, creative director of Men's Polo by Ralph Lauren and a proud Morehouse graduate, conceived a



capsule collection for Ralph Lauren in 2019 inspired by the collegiate suits and sportswear worn at the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) from the 1920s through the 1950s. A member of the founding chapter of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity at the college, Jeter proposed the project as an homage to and an extension of the history of HBCUs as centers of Black culture and fashion as well as incubators of a collegiate style that communicates excellence and respectability. These ensembles from the collection reflect the elegant dress of the sportsman and the scholar.

MAINS (British, founded 2017)



Skeptta (British, b. 1982)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2025

Jacket of brown synthetic leather; shirt of white polyester twill; tie of red, pink, and white striped polyester twill; scarf of red polyester plush; sweater of green merino wool knit; sweatpants of gray polyester knit; brimmed cap of gray and blue polyester twill embroidered with MAINS logo

Courtesy Mains

British Nigerian rapper, filmmaker, and deejay Skepta (given name Joseph Adenuga) revived his label Mains in 2024 with a design language inspired by collegiate dress and hip-hop styles of the 1990s and aughts. His spring/summer 2025 collection paired elements of the traditional academic uniform with the casualness of contemporary sportswear. The combination of synthetic leather flight jacket, zip sweater, Oxford shirt, striped tie, and knitted scarf in this ensemble is strikingly similar to the postwar undergraduate's dress in *A Student at Howard* displayed nearby. The gray sweatpants and hiking boots reflect the rapidly changing codes of formality and respectability in contemporary fashion, cleverly signified by the label, akin to those used in tailored garments, affixed to the sweats.

The Bison yearbook, Howard University, 1951



Howard University, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Washington, D.C.

Lois Mailou Jones (American, 1905–1998)

A Student at Howard, 1947



Watercolor over graphite on off-white wove paper

Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine, Gift of Eliot O'Hara

In this 1947 watercolor Howard University professor and artist Lois Mailou Jones portrays one of her students, whose casual garb demonstrates the loosening of the codes of collegiate fashion in the aftermath of World War II, especially when compared with the adjacent portrait of a besuited Harold Jackman. Retaining the red patterned tie and Oxford shirt of the earlier depiction, Jones's student adopts a leather bomber jacket, a precursor to varsity, or letterman, jackets that still define undergraduate style, as seen in Skepta's interpretation for Mains nearby. *Life* magazine highlighted Howard's reputation for harboring fashion-forward freshmen in its November 18, 1946, issue (an image from which is reproduced below), noting that "although Howard students are as clothes-conscious as every other U.S. undergraduate, they generally dress better."

Alfred Eisenstaedt (American, 1898–1995). **Howard University students**, 1946. Photograph. LIFE Picture Collection

Winold Reiss (American, b. Germany, 1886–1953)

A College Lad, 1924

Pastel and Conté crayon on paper

The Wolfsonian–Florida International University, Miami Beach, Fla., The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection



German artist Winold Reiss captured several striking images of Harlem "types" for the magazine *Survey Graphic* in 1924, including this portrait of recent New York University graduate Harold Jackman posed as "A

College Lad.” Earning his title as “the most handsome man in Harlem,” Jackman—who later earned a master’s degree from Columbia and worked as a teacher and model—sports a three-piece gray suit with a patterned red tie and pocket square, essential elements of the urbane pupil’s wardrobe that are echoed in the nearby suit by James Jeter for Polo by Ralph Lauren. A member of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, the well-dressed Jackman was a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance, inspiring characters in important novels by Carl Van Vechten and Wallace Thurman.

VIII. JOOK

All night now the jooks clanged and clamored. Pianos living three lifetimes in one. Blues made and used right on the spot. Dancing, fighting, singing, crying, laughing, winning and losing love every hour. Work all day for money, fight all night for love.
—Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1937

From the time of emancipation to the Harlem Renaissance, jook (or juke) joints, speakeasies, and cabarets were places where exuberance was expressed and embodied sartorially. Entertainers and patrons alike dressed in refined and racy ways, “lookin’ good” for themselves and each other. Avant-garde fashion often aligned with a desire to push the boundaries of race, gender, class, and sexuality through fine and flashy clothing.

The zoot suit required a surplus of fabric to create its sharp-shouldered, oversize shape, which amplified the wearer’s svelte silhouette. Worn by “hepcats” like jazz musician Cab Calloway, the zoot suit was a symbol of transgression, joy, and youth in its rejection of traditional tailoring. It became the symbolic instigator of “riots” in the 1940s when Black, Chicano, and Filipino youth clashed with servicemen critical of their attire. The zoot has more recently been refashioned by Latine designers interested in recontextualizing its provocative, “outsize” power for the twenty-first century.

Like the zoot, the tuxedo is provocative and multifaceted. Worn by both service workers and the well-heeled at formal functions, it is at once a uniform and a garment of distinction. When donned by blues singers and cabaret performers, the tuxedo has been used to communicate an unapologetic sex appeal, a sharp-edged androgyny, and a playful yet assertive queerness.

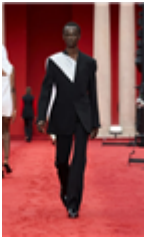
Salvatore Ferragamo (Italian, founded 1927)

Maximilian Davis (English, b. 1995)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2023

Jacket and trousers of black wool crepe; scarf top of white polyester organza

Courtesy Salvatore Ferragamo



Maximilian Davis cited Old Hollywood glamour as an inspiration for his first collection as creative director of the Italian luxury house Salvatore Ferragamo in 2022. Davis's clever use of contrasting color and technique in the suit above evokes the black and white elements of the tuxedo and the palette of early films. The top combines sharp tailoring and soft drapery with its extended panel of sheer white fabric that falls over the shoulder—a cummerbund transformed into a scarf—referencing both masculine and feminine dress and suggesting the tuxedo's ability to blur gender distinctions.

Philip Treacy (Irish, b. 1966)

Hat, autumn/winter 2020–21

Black silk panne velvet and black silk satin ribbon

Courtesy Philip Treacy



Jean Paul Gaultier (French, b. 1952)

Tailcoat worn by Grace Jones, autumn/winter 2011–12 haute couture

Navy wool barathea and black silk satin

Grace Jones Collection



Artist Grace Jones wore this Jean Paul Gaultier couture tailcoat to perform at the annual amfAR Inspiration Gala in Brazil in 2012. Since the 1980s, her distinctive androgyny and taste for tailored power-dressing has found synergy with the French couturier's rebellious yet refined aesthetic. Their creative collaboration was

immortalized in Gaultier's spring 2013 ready-to-wear collection, which opened with five models, styled to resemble Jones, sporting signature tuxedo-like ensembles. Jones has often used clothing, including headwear by Philip Treacy, to accentuate the fluidity of her gender expression. She describes her masculinity as inborn and reflexive yet also akin to armor, equipped to provide protection and agency. As Jones developed her image early in her career, she and her collaborators referenced the tailored androgyny of Marlene Dietrich, and audiences in her adopted France compared her to Joséphine Baker, pictured below.

Pete Woodhead. [Grace Jones, Meltdown Festival], 2022



Balmain (French, founded 1945)

Olivier Rousteing (French, b. 1985)

Suit, autumn/winter 2024–25

Jacket of black wool plain weave embroidered with simulated pearls, clear crystals, and clear bugle beads;

trousers of black wool plain weave; turtleneck of black wool ribbed knit

Courtesy Balmain

The tuxedo is typically a custom garment tailored precisely to the body and worn by men for formal occasions and performances, but it was also adopted by women beginning in the 1920s as an act of gender subversion. Olivier Rousteing creates the illusion of a tuxedo in the suit above through the placement of crystal embroidery, suggesting both delicacy and dynamism. The crystals outline a false lapel and draw an idealized silhouette around the body, accentuating the angularity of the garment and evoking the effects of stage lighting and flash photography.

Stormy Weather (1943)

Running time: 50 seconds

The Nicholas Brothers' dance in *Stormy Weather* (1943) is considered the greatest dance sequence in film history. Hailing from a musical family, Fayard and Harold Nicholas worked with Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington at the Cotton Club and other well-known establishments from an early age. Highlighting their athleticism and expressive artistry, this scene was unrehearsed and required a single take. Calloway's "Jumpin' Jive" number propels the dance, a combination of tap, ballet, and acrobatics known as "flash dancing," which was their signature. Both Calloway and the brothers are dressed in white-tie formal dress, a typical uniform of performers; yet here, the elevated dress might be seen as a recognition and celebration of the sheer excellence of the musical-dance sequence, rather than as an indication of the status of the artists as merely "the talent."

Teddy Piaz (French, 1899–1966)

Joséphine Baker, ca. 1932

Gelatin silver print

Courtesy Cifonelli



A debonair Joséphine Baker models her bespoke white-tie ensemble in this image by Parisian celebrity portrait photographer Teddy Piaz. Meticulously accessorized with a silken top hat and equally reflective brilliantined hair, Baker's full-dress suit—the more formal antecedent of the tailless tuxedo—was made by French Italian tailor Arturo Cifonelli. At once soignée and subversive, this picture of Baker in her sophisticated "cross-dress" was widely circulated on a series of postcards publicizing her hit musical revue of 1932, *La Joie de Paris*. This inscribed reprint that continues to live at the Cifonelli atelier today reads, "à Cifonelli en souvenir du succès de *La Joie de Paris* et de votre 'habit,' Josephine Baker" (to Cifonelli in memory of the success of *La Joie de Paris* and of your "suit," Josephine Baker).

Isaac Julien CBE RA (British, b. 1960)

Looking for Langston (1989)

Running time: 2 minutes, 27 seconds

In his groundbreaking 1989 film *Looking for Langston*, Isaac Julien fantasizes about the sexual politics of the Harlem Renaissance, staging scenes of queer sociality in an underground speakeasy full of tuxedo-clad men and women who dance and sway. In this context, the tuxedo enables anonymity while still providing a means of connection and belonging, critical to a queer or otherwise marginalized individual's ability to survive and thrive. Looking for, but not finding, a definitive answer to the question of poet Langston Hughes's sexuality, the film considers the impact of queer artists through documentary footage and dream sequences of Black gay life across time and space. Culminating in a joyous scene of riotous dancing against the backdrop of the AIDS epidemic, the film celebrates the creativity of Black gay men and memorializes their loss.

American

Studio portrait, 1940s–50s

Gelatin silver print

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Twentieth-Century Photography Fund, 2015 (2015.330)



Self-possessed and easeful, this unidentified sitter in a zoot suit is a case study in meticulous high style and self-expression. The image, captured by an unidentified commercial photographer, was part of an uptick in vernacular photography among working- and middle-class communities across mid-twentieth-century America. Made possible by innovations in rapid camera technology, prints such as this one could be produced in minutes for an accessible low cost. Reflecting the persistent importance of self-representation, Black Americans readily participated on both sides of the lens, opening studios and often dressing up for their sittings. In his autobiography, Malcolm X remembered posing in his first zoot, writing, “I took three of those twenty-five-cent sepia-toned, while-you-wait pictures of myself, posed the way ‘hipsters’ wearing their zoots would ‘cool it.’”

Charles Henry Alston (American, 1907–1977)

Zoot Suit, ca. 1940

Watercolor on paper

Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, Ga., Gift of Walter and Linda Evans



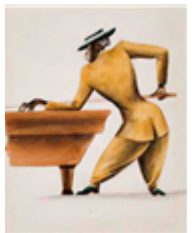
Harlem and its inhabitants were the longtime muse of artist Charles Alston, who moved there at age seven from his native North Carolina before becoming a highly successful commercial artist and the first Black supervisor for the Works Progress Administration. In this watercolor, Alston captures the social aspect of the zoot suiter, a scene he remembered well twenty-five years later: “Of a Sunday you’d stroll along Seventh Avenue in your best clothes and look over the passing parade of beautiful gals, you know. The 135th Street corner was our meeting place. You could stand there and in the span of a Sunday afternoon see anyone who was anybody in Harlem.” The artist summed up his career as documenting the life around him, stating, “all of my subject matter was related to the community.”

Charles Henry Alston (American, 1907–1977)

Pool Hustler, ca. 1938–40

Watercolor on paper

Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, Ga., Gift of Walter and Linda Evans



Harlem and its inhabitants were the longtime muse of artist Charles Alston, who moved there at age seven from his native North Carolina before becoming a highly successful commercial artist and the first Black supervisor for the Works Progress Administration. In this watercolor, Alston focuses attention on the pool shark’s sinuous zoot-suit-clad silhouette as he lines up a shot, the angle of his broad Tando hat emphasizing the parallel tilt of his broad peaked shoulders. The back vent is unusual, as many suit jackets in the 1940s were unvented. The artist summed up his career as documenting the life around him, stating, “all of my subject matter was related to the community.”

“Mr. Beebe” routine in *Carolina Blues* (1944)

Running time: 1 minute, 6 seconds

A song-and-dance sequence in the 1944 film *Carolina Blues*, “Mr. Beebe” features the Four Step Brothers dance group and Harold Nicholas in an exuberant tribute to dandyism and Harlem as a capital of culture and fashion. The song likely references the journalist Lucius Beebe, an inveterate baroque dandy and personal and professional nightlife denizen. Beebe graced the cover of *Life* magazine in 1939 in an outfit that resembles Nicholas’s costume in the movie. The lyrics to his namesake song attest to his influence, which is so great that Harlemites abandon the trendy zoot suit for a more elegant appearance: “Since you came on, every zoot suit’s gone / Now here’s what you can do / Bring the Easter Parade to Lenox Avenue!”

Miguel Covarrubias (Mexican, 1904–1957)



Harlem Dandy (African American man [head & shoulders] wearing a hat with tilted brim), ca. 1930

Litho crayon on paper

Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Nickolas Muray Collection of Mexican Art

Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias’s illustrations of Harlem residents in the 1920s and 30s helped cement a vision of the neighborhood’s denizens as vibrant, dynamic, and pleasure-seeking, ensconced in a network of thriving speakeasies, juke joints, and theaters. His caricatures were frequently featured in *Vanity Fair*, publicizing “the marvels of the black inhabitants of the island of Manhattan,” as fellow artist Diego Rivera put it in 1932. In this drawing, Covarrubias emphasizes the angularity and exaggerated proportions of his subject’s broad-shouldered coat, presaging the appearance of the zoot suit in the next decade. The figure’s boldly cocked fedora underscores his sideways glance and bolsters his blasé swagger, while the background situates him on 135th Street, near the series of historic homes known as Striver’s Row in central Harlem, where dapper inhabitants were known to promenade.

The New Cab Calloway's Hepster's Dictionary by Cab Calloway, 1944

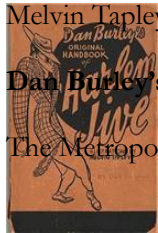
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library



Melvin Tapley (American, 1918/19–2005)

Dan Burley's Original Handbook of Harlem Jive by Dan Burley, 1944

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library



The zoot suit subverted mainstream sartorial codes, allowing maximum freedom of movement with its baggy, stylized proportions. Similarly, its wearers bent and shaped language in new ways, communicating in the coded lingo of “jive,” a jook-related slang spearheaded by African American musicians. Orchestra leader Cab Calloway—known for his flamboyant stage costumes and, later, his adoption of the zoot suit—and musician and journalist Dan Burley issued their own jive lexicons in 1938 and 1944, respectively, capitalizing on the phenomenon and expanding its reach. Calloway’s pocket-size *Hepster’s Dictionary* contains some two hundred phrases of “Harlemese,” including “toggled to the bricks,” meaning dressed to kill. According to Dan Burley, “jive is language in motion,” an idea seemingly echoed by Melvin Tapley’s illustration of a zoot-suited hepcat caught mid-stride on the cover of his handbook.

American

Zoot suit, ca. 1943

Striped navy wool twill

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Alfred Z. Solomon-Janet A. Sloane Endowment Fund, 2024 (2024.2a, b)



In his autobiography, revolutionary and activist Malcolm X described his pride in purchasing his first zoot suit, with its “Sky-blue pants thirty inches in the knee and angle narrowed down to twelve inches at the

bottom, and a long coat that pinched my waist and flared out below my knees.” This example, one of only a handful known to survive, displays the same subversive proportions. Designed to facilitate movement on the dance floor, the excessive fabric made zoots symbols of lawlessness during wartime austerity, an image bolstered by their close association with the young Mexican Americans who clashed with police in Los Angeles in the summer of 1943. Despite the zoot’s outsize legacy—with revivals in the 1970s and 90s—the style was relatively short-lived, peaking from about 1942 to 1944.



Progress Tailoring Co. (American, 1893–1950s)

Ensemble, 1940–45

Zoot suit of green wool check novelty twill; Tando hat of black wool felt and black silk grosgrain

Collection of Benny Reese of Reese’s Vintage Pieces, La Verne, Calif.

Pioneered by Black men in urban centers like New York and Chicago (where this example was made), the zoot suit became an intersectional garment, adopted by a number of other marginalized groups as a sign of their refusal to conform to mainstream ideals. Second-generation immigrants from Japan, the Philippines, and Italy as well as Jewish Americans all found ways to adapt the zoot’s iconoclastic spirit to their urge for rebellion. Women, such as bandleader Genevieve Glover (pictured here) and Mexican Americans known as Pachucas, also wore the suit, using it as a means to contest gender stereotypes and assert their solidarity with their male counterparts. The petite proportions of this rare surviving example indicate that it may have been made for a woman or a slim young man.

Charles “Teenie” Harris (American, 1908–1998). **Genevieve Glover in zoot suit** (detail), July 1939.

Photograph, 4 × 5 in. (10.16 × 12.7 cm). Carnegie Museum of Art/Getty Images



Willy Chavarria (American, b. 1967)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2023

Jacket of black silk faille; trousers of black silk satin; shirt of white cotton Oxford with flower boutonniere of black silk satin

Courtesy Willy Chavarria



Willy Chavarria (American, b. 1967)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2023

Jacket of black wool plain weave; trousers of black cotton denim; shirt of blue striped cotton Oxford

Courtesy Willy Chavarria

These two double-breasted suits share features of the zoot suit updated for the present. The zoot's legacy as a symbol of resistance, selfhood, and hope has been particularly meaningful to Mexican Americans due to its association with the West Coast's Pachuco subculture beginning in the 1930s. Willy Chavarria, who is of Mexican and Irish American descent, explained the zoot's significance in a 2023 personal essay in the *New York Times*: "[The suit's] incredible aesthetic moved me deeply, not only because of its ability to take up space through silhouette and style, but also because of its capacity to make powerful political statements primarily through visual means. Zoot suits somehow managed to articulate who their wearers were or had the potential to be."



Paul Lopez (American, founded 2017)

Paul Lopez (American, b. 1984)

Suit, spring/summer 2023, edition 2025

Jacket and trousers of black pinstriped superfine wool plain weave

Courtesy LUAR

Raul Lopez of Luar—the designer’s first name spelled backwards—is known for his tailoring experiments that play with concepts of luxury, gender, and sexuality. Like Willy Chavarria’s, Lopez’s work is informed by his Latine cultural and artistic community; Lopez is Dominican American and was raised in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The designer’s spring/summer 2023 “La Alta Gama” (“High End”) collection featured an exaggerated shoulder line Lopez dubbed the “boulder shoulder,” reminiscent of the exaggerated zoot silhouette.

Joe Casely-Hayford OBE (British, 1956–2019)

Shirts, ca. 1989

Cream silk plain weave with red and black embroidered and appliquéd playing-card motifs

Maria, Charlie, and Alice Casely-Hayford Collection



These silk shirts were part of a series created by British designer Joe Casely-Hayford embroidered and appliquéd with playing cards and suit symbols. The designer admired the graphic beauty and colors of playing cards and incorporated the club, diamond, heart, and spade symbols, or pips, into the Casely-Hayford label from 1989 to 1994. Employed as an aesthetic device, the suits may also be understood as an allusion to the gamble he took when he launched his career as an independent Black designer in 1980s London.

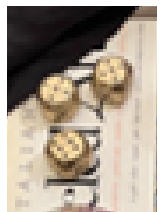
L'ENCHANTEUR (American, founded 2017)

Soull and Dynasty OGUN (American, b. 1984)

Dice, 2025

Brass

Courtesy L'ENCHANTEUR



Miguel Covarrubias (Mexican, 1904–1957)



The Bolito King, published in **Negro Drawings**, 1927

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library

Known as the “Bolito King,” Casper Holstein earned millions in the Harlem Renaissance era as a “policy” man in charge of *bolito* or *bolita* (“small ball” in Spanish), a lottery game in which people bet on a sequence of numbers derived from one hundred small balls. Born in Saint Croix, Danish West Indies, Holstein was an unusual gangster in that he combined his illicit activity with a dedication to activism and philanthropy, financing literary awards, supporting Marcus Garvey’s United Negro Improvement Association, and funding projects and relief funds overseas. This portrait appears in the volume *Negro Drawings* by the Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias (see also Covarrubias’s *Harlem Dandy* displayed nearby); it depicts Holstein’s elegant clothing and accessories as well as his impressive presence and swagger.

IX. HERITAGE

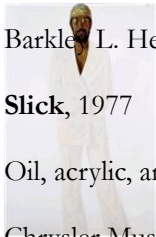
Heritage is so complex that we have to be simple. And we have to consider ourselves global. It takes a lot of courage to do that.

—Maya Angelou, “A Way Out of No Way,” *African American Lives 2*, February 6, 2008

Fashion can bridge gaps in diasporic history, as clothes are able to relay personal stories and explore familial histories essential to building self-confidence and a sense of belonging. On the African continent and in the diaspora, Black dandyism has a long history of hybridizing regional and national forms of African dress with Western tailoring traditions.

Cultural exchange and negotiations of political and social hierarchies during the time of enslavement, colonialism, and imperialism could be seen in outfits that remixed dress conventions in creative and unpredictable ways. Decolonization also encouraged people of the African diaspora to sartorially signal their political support of and cultural resonance with Black and African liberation movements. Since the 1960s, people in the African diaspora have worn clothing with African motifs and themes as a point of pride and connection.

Designers of African descent often reference their diverse heritages and personal journeys in their work, frequently taking inspiration from and amplifying forgotten or overlooked histories of Black people in the process. Virgil Abloh incorporated the draped forms of traditional Ghanaian garments in both suiting and streetwear, while Emeric Tchatchoua, Samuel Boakye, and Jacques Agboby use color and pattern derived from African textiles to enliven their designs.



Barkley L. Hendricks (American, 1945–2017)

Slick, 1977

Oil, acrylic, and Magna (acrylic resin paint) on canvas

Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Va., Gift of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, New York

Probably American



Skullcap, ca. 1968

Polychrome crocheted cotton

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Barbara and Gregory Reynolds, 1984 (1984.598.57a, b)

Barkley Hendricks's self-portrait *Slick* is an iconic image of a stylish Black man in the 1970s who expresses his self- and cultural confidence with aplomb. Looking straight at the viewer in an impeccably tailored, white double-breasted suit, Hendricks wears a kufi, a woven skullcap of African design often donned by Muslim religious figures and elders within the African diaspora, similar to the example shown here. According to the artist, the kufi was included to “enhance the composition,” the colorful fabric amplifying the contrast. These elements plus the lightly tinted glasses, gold necklace, small gold hoop earring, and toothpick communicate Hendricks's dedication to beauty, cool, and heritage.

Probably American

W. E. B. Du Bois and Du Bois Williams, July 1959

Dye diffusion transfer print

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries



In his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois declared that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” For Du Bois, this color line was global, created by enslavement, colonialism, and imperialism. A resolute Pan-Africanist, Du Bois always connected the fight for rights in the United States to decolonization in Africa; rights that, in the later part of his life, he felt increasingly wary about the United States’ ability to secure and guarantee. This photograph shows him in 1959 with his granddaughter Yolande in New York, wearing a combination of a Western suit and expertly wrapped Ghanaian kente cloth. Du Bois renounced his American citizenship and moved to the newly independent Ghana in 1961.

LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

Virgil Abloh (American, 1980–2021)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2019–20 menswear

Coat, jacket, and trousers of black and white wool jacquard with allover motif of the African continent in a houndstooth-style pattern

Courtesy Collection LOUIS VUITTON



LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

Virgil Abloh (American, 1980–2021)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2021–22 menswear

Jacket and trousers of cream polyester-wool barathea; shirt and tie of white cotton poplin; blanket of black and white polyester-cotton-wool jacquard with allover kente-style LV monogram and geometric motif; airplane



brooch of silver metal

Courtesy Collection LOUIS VUITTON

This ensemble from Virgil Abloh's autumn/winter 2021–22 "Tourist vs. Purist" collection for Louis Vuitton comprises a tailored white suit with an *LV*-branded "kente" blanket draped over the shoulder. Abloh was inspired by his heritage, basing the garment on a photograph of his Ghanaian grandmother and simultaneously honoring his Ghanaian American parents Eunice and Nee Abloh. The ensemble announces to the world the multiplicity of his identity and influences as the first Black American of African descent appointed artistic director of a French luxury design house. In a 2021 interview with *Vogue*, he considered the possibilities of his role, asking, "I'm Ghanaian—how do you make an African suit?" The answer is evident in the hybrid qualities of this suit and the adjacent one.

Patience Torlowei (Nigerian, b. 1964)

Caftan, ca. 2020

Black, orange, and yellow printed cotton plain weave trimmed with brown silk velvet

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Friends of The Costume Institute Gifts, 2023 (2023.100)

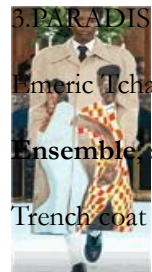


André Leon Talley's passion for the exquisite propelled not only his pioneering high-fashion career but also his ritualistic practice of self-adornment. His lasting preference for bespoke English suits was eventually supplanted by his devotion to caftans—a regal uniform Talley adopted due to his growing size and appreciation for their grand historicizing effect. Talley frequently used his platform to broaden Black representation in fashion and champion new talent, including his friend Patience Torlowei, whom he met in 2019 while speaking at Arise Fashion Week in Lagos. Impressed by the Ijaw designer's fine handwork and synthesis of West African and European design traditions, he commissioned and proudly wore several bespoke caftans from her atelier, including this intricately tucked creation of polychrome printed cotton and

others inspired by Yoruba agbadas.

Reed Evins (American, b. 1954). **André Leon Talley**, 1975. Polaroid print, 4 1/4 × 3 1/2 in. (10.8 × 8.9 cm).

Reed Evins Art



3.PARADIS (French, founded 2013)

Émeric Tchatchoua (French, b. 1988)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2025

Trench coat of beige wool twill with hand-painted figurative motifs

Courtesy 3.PARADIS

Born in Paris to Cameroonian parents, designer Émeric Tchatchoua of 3.Paradis describes his collections as “highly personal, emotive, and affective journey[s].” His spring/summer 2025 collection featured a collaboration with artist Johanna Tordjman, who grew up with him in the Paris suburbs. Inspired by photographs Tchatchoua took on a recent trip to Cameroon, Tordjman painted this trench coat with two figures, one wearing a graphic orange and yellow checked garment, reimagining the visual culture and people of the designer’s ancestral village in the Bamileke region. Tchatchoua said of the collection, “It honors my roots and highlights the rich cultural tapestry influencing my designs.”

Kwasi Paul (American, founded 2020)

Samuel Boakye (American, b. 1991)

Ensemble, 2023

Coat of yellow and orange handwoven cotton Fugu; trousers of orange handwoven cotton Fugu

Courtesy Kwasi Paul



Like Virgil Abloh's designs for Louis Vuitton displayed nearby, Samuel Boakye's creations for his label Kwasi Paul—a combination of his parents' names—are cross-cultural, drawn from his Ghanaian background as well as his upbringing in the diverse communities of the Bronx and Queens. This sharply tailored suit jacket from Boakye's 2023 "Market Symphonies" collection is made in the striped pattern and colors of traditional handwoven Fugu cloth. He referred poetically to the influence of cultural heritage in a collection statement: "Market symphonies echo globally, a reminder that despite geographic distances, the harmony between heart and soul transcends borders, creating a universal melody that resonates wherever you are in the world."

Agbobbly (American, founded 2020)



Jacques Agbobbly (American, b. Togo, 1998)

Ensemble, 2024

Coat with self-fabric belts and trousers of green, yellow, red, and blue printed plaid cotton twill; shirt of green, yellow, red, and blue printed plaid cotton poplin

Courtesy Agbobbly

Jacques Agbobbly's Togolese heritage and nonbinary identity inspire, as their website notes, the "vibrant colors, artisanal materiality, and visionary silhouettes" of their fashions. This ensemble blends West African inspirations and Togolese dress practices with a Western perspective. The double-breasted trench coat, button-down shirt, and trousers feature a digitally printed pattern inspired by the nylon "Ghana Must Go" bag carried by refugees expelled from Nigeria in the 1980s. Agbobbly created the print from a painting made in collaboration with artist Harlan Hue. They described the final pattern as "reminiscent of the cracked paint walls back in Togo, where my aunts and cousins used to pose for pictures," continuing, "It's all about embracing a blend of influences and taking up space in the world."

Agbobly (American, founded 2020)

Jacques Agbobly (American, b. Togo, 1998)



Ensemble, 2023

Jacket and trousers of green cotton-Lycra denim with grid motif of topstitched pink, blue, yellow, and green threads and embroidered polychrome Swarovski crystal beads; shirt of white cotton plain weave with topstitched pink, blue, yellow, and green thread

Courtesy Agbobly

Jacques Agbobly's designs reflect their coming of age in Lomé, Togo, and Chicago, Illinois. This bead-embroidered denim ensemble from the designer's "Togo Vivi Na" collection is the manifestation of a memory and an ode to his grandmother's beaded earrings and his mother, Afi Rose, who moved to the United States ahead of her children in pursuit of the American Dream. When Agbobly eventually joined her after she found work braiding hair, they explained how they "would spend time with her in these hair shops and watch her put beads in the little girls' hair." Dedicating this ensemble to her, they said, "I honor her through this creation. A story of craftsmanship and resilience."

Denim Tears (American, founded 2019)



UGG (American, founded 1978)

Tremaine Emory (American, b. 1981)

"Tasman Onia" slippers, spring/summer 2022

Brown suede embroidered with floral motif of green, yellow, and white seed beads

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Millia Davenport and Zipporah Fleisher Fund, 2023

(2023.247a, b)

Tremaine Emory's designs for Denim Tears are inspired by both his personal history and the diverse histories and experiences of the African diaspora. His 2022 collaboration with UGG, titled "Onia," drew from his great-grandmother's Black Seminole heritage in an attempt to demonstrate "that Indigenous and African American communities are actually way closer than we thought." The project culminated in two shoe designs based on the brand's "Classic" and "Tasman" styles, with embroidery techniques and motifs associated with the southeastern Seminole culture. The "Tasman Onia" design here is made from two wing-shaped panels embroidered with green, yellow, and white seed beads in a floral motif reminiscent of cotton blossoms, whipstitched to the suede uppers.

X. BEAUTY

Beauty is not a luxury; rather it is a way of creating possibility in the space of enclosure, a radical art of subsistence, an embrace of our terribleness, a transfiguration of the given. It is a will to adorn, a proclivity to the baroque, and the love of too much.

—Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*, 2020

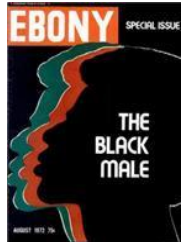
In 1968 Nikki Giovanni wrote a poem in praise of Black male beauty that begins loudly and proudly with the lines "i wanta say just gotta say something / bout those beautiful beautiful / beautiful outasight / black men." These men were defined by the chic spectacularity of their fashion and grooming, and their "fire red, lime green, / burnt orange / royal blue" clothing intensified their desirability. Touting the "brand new pleasure" that she and others took in their appearance, she praised the confidence they exuded and the fabulousness of their style and stances.

During and after the civil rights and Black Power movements as well as the sexual revolution and gay and lesbian rights movements of the late 1960s, Black men gained social visibility with a form of radiance that relied on pride and panache. This cultural confidence and interest in self-regard allowed for an experimentation with unconventional modes of masculine dress.

“Beauty” transitions from historical and contemporary fashions that radiate light to those that are saturated with color. Featuring drapery, lace, ruffles, and sequins, the garments also emphasize Black dandyism as a mode of dress that approaches and appropriates femininity as part of its transgressive power.

EBONY, August 1972

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library



Concerned for the millions of young Black men and boys growing up during a confusing time in post–civil rights America, Black legacy media such as *Ebony* magazine took up issues of critical importance to the community, including rampant unemployment, stereotypes about sexuality, and changing gender roles. This 1972 special issue of *Ebony* contains a reprint of Nikki Giovanni’s poem “Beautiful Black Men” (also issued earlier as a poster, right) as well as articles and photo essays on “The Ten Greats of Black History,” the accomplishments of Black artists and athletes, and “today’s ‘fly’ fashions.” Together, they functioned as essential knowledge to becoming a “liberated Black man,” with dress as a form of self-knowledge and expression.

Beautiful Black Men by Nikki Giovanni, 1969. Poster, 22 x 16 7/8 in. (56 x 43 cm). Pennsylvania State University, Special Collections Library

Louis & Vaughn (American, founded 1981)

Louis Wells (American, 1957–2018)

Vaughn Terry Jelks (American, b. 1950)

Shirt worn by Prince, ca. 1984

White dotted polyester jacquard

Vaughn Terry Jelks Collection



Straddling divisions of race, gender, and sexuality, legendary musician Prince used dress to disrupt expectations and push the boundaries of identity and artistry. Influenced by the sartorial theatrics of musicians like Little Richard and James Brown, he incorporated traditionally “feminine” touches such as lace, ruffles, sequins, and bold color and pattern into his stage costumes throughout his career. During the period of his 1984 album and film *Purple Rain*, ruffled Regency-style shirts and closely cut tailcoats became his signature—a New Romantic echo of early nineteenth-century dandyism and the peacock styles of 1960s London. This top, designed by Louis Wells and Vaughn Terry Jelks and worn by Prince during the Purple Rain tour, features pearl buttons and bejeweled “cuff links,” touches that enhance the garment’s exuberant dandyism.

Phil Sandlin (American, b. 1938). **Prince, “Purple Rain Tour.”** Photograph. AP Photos/Phil Sandlin

Pat Campano (American, 1932–1989)

Jacket worn by Sylvester, ca. 1980

Black and white silk twill embroidered with allover clear plastic sequins

GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, Calif.



“Disco Queen” Sylvester James Jr., known simply as Sylvester, was a singer and entertainer celebrated for his signature falsetto, unique blending of gospel and popular music, and androgynous style. His unapologetic femininity and gay identity garnered opposition from music industry executives, who pressured him to adopt a more marketable and conventionally masculine presentation. Defiant, he chose to embrace his queer visibility and accentuate his signature gender nonconformity with elaborate wigs and elements of sartorial brilliance that made him shine, such as beading, sequins, studs, and lamé fabric. Pavéd with clear sequins over a graphic black-and-white ground, this jacket by San Francisco designer Pat Campano, who found success costuming performers like the Supremes, exemplifies Sylvester’s striking and incandescent style.

Cover of **Sylvester and The Hot Band (Scratch My Flower)** by Sylvester and the Hot Band, 1973. Blue
Thumb

LaQuan Smith (American, b. 1988)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2025

Jacket, trousers, shirt, and cummerbund of white silk satin

Courtesy LaQuan Smith



LaQuan Smith’s menswear designs exude unapologetic glamour and sex appeal. Inspired by the hedonism of 1970s nightlife, this suit of white double-faced satin—a style Smith says he has worn a thousand times—evokes the period’s body-conscious aesthetic with a shirt cut to reveal the chest and flared trousers fitted tightly at the hips. In a recent interview, Smith expressed the transportive power of wearing one of his designs: “[It] means [being] the center of attention; it means [being] desired; it means exclusivity; it means sensuality; it means all aspects of feeling luxurious.”

Brandon Murphy Collection (American, founded 2012)

Brandon Murphy (American, b. 1991)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2020–21

Jacket, shirt, and trousers of white silk satin

Courtesy BMC Studio



Kenneth Nicholson (American, b. 1982)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2019

Shirt of white cotton lace; trousers of cream cotton canvas

Courtesy Kenneth Nicholson



Designer Kenneth Nicholson drew from both the 1970s and the 1700s for his spring/summer 2019 “*Lover from the Bath*” collection, which combined the strictness of uniforms with decorative flourishes, including gold jewelry and white lace, reminiscent of men’s dress in the Baroque period. The lace shirt of this ensemble features a pleated panel that falls in soft folds from the hip to the ankle, floating over trousers resembling naval dress whites, reflecting Nicholson’s interest in subverting gender norms and complicating masculine archetypes.



Marvin Desroc (French, b. Martinique, 1996)

Ensemble, 2019

Mesh top of white synthetic knit and crochet; trousers and bow of white synthetic leather

Courtesy Marvin Desroc

Like that of the other designers in this section, Marvin Desroc’s work advocates for an expansion of the formal and conceptual limits of menswear. The hosiery-inspired, lacy anatomical top and outsize white leather bow of this ensemble reflect the designer’s experimental approach to the expression of Black masculinity in fashion. In a 2020 interview with *GQ*, Desroc emphasized his inclusive and liberated point of view: “I want to appeal to anyone who likes to dress up and feel sexy, whether they’re gay or not, men, women, and everyone in between!”

Pyer Moss (American, founded 2013)

Kerby Jean-Raymond (American, b. 1986)



Ensemble, spring/summer 2020, edition 2025

Top and trousers of red silk-wool twill with guitar-shaped piping of blue silk charmeuse

Courtesy Pyer Moss

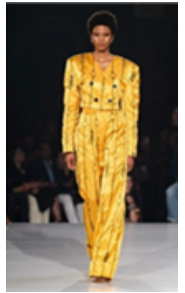
Pyer Moss (American, founded 2013)

Kerby Jean-Raymond (American, b. 1986)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2020, edition 2025

Jacket and trousers of yellow silk-wool satin printed with allover musical instrument motifs

Courtesy Pyer Moss



“Sister,” the third and final collection in Kerby Jean-Raymond’s “American Also” series for Pyer Moss, focused on mid-century singer-songwriter Sister Rosetta Tharpe and her significance in the history of rock and roll. The collection, presented at the Kings Theater in Flatbush, Brooklyn, included these two ensembles as well as the pink “You See” cummerbund below, using saturated colors to underscore the collection’s theme of visibility and redress. Jean-Raymond used the silhouette of Tharpe’s guitar and printed instrument motifs to evoke Tharpe’s musicality. The designer explained his intentions to *Vogue*: “I think relatively few people know that the sound of rock and roll was invented by a queer black woman in a church. I wanted to explore what that aesthetic might have looked like if her story would have been told.”

Theophilio (American, founded 2016)



Adrian J. Thompson (Jamaican, b. 1993)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2025

Trousers of green polyester plain weave embroidered with green plastic sequins; cap of black lambskin leather with silver metal grommets

Courtesy Theophilio

Theophilio (American, founded 2016)

Edvin Thompson (Jamaican, b. 1993)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2025

Coat, vest, and culottes of blue linen plain weave embroidered with navy plastic sequins

Courtesy Theophilio



Edvin Thompson of Theophilio is inspired by the visual culture of the vibrant dance-hall scene in his native Jamaica. Named the 2021 American Emerging Designer of the Year by the Council of Fashion Designers of America, Thompson described his designs in *W* magazine in 2023 as “sexy and sophisticated at the same time,” asserting that with them he “wanted to help build a bridge from my country to the world.” These ensembles, entirely embroidered in shades of blue and green glistening sequins, channel dance-hall rhythms and the music’s celebration of bodily pleasure.

Pyer Moss (American, founded 2013)

Kerby Jean-Raymond (American, b. 1986)



Cummerbund, spring/summer 2019, edition 2025

White silk satin embroidered with black thread

Courtesy Pyer Moss

Pyer Moss (American, founded 2013)



Kerby Jean-Raymond (American, b. 1986)

Cummerbund, spring/summer 2020, edition 2025

Pink silk satin embroidered with white thread

Courtesy Pyer Moss

XI. COOL

Being rebellious and black, a nonconformist, being cool and hip and angry and sophisticated and ultra clean, whatever else you want to call it—I was all those things and more.

—Miles Davis, *Miles: The Autobiography*, 1989

In the latter half of the twentieth century, Black designers and style leaders were at the center of redefining how men dressed and showed up to work and play. This turn to exquisitely styled casual dress revolutionized menswear. Featuring khaki, denim, tracksuits, and knitted cardigans, this relaxed and easeful form of Black dandyism sartorially communicated “cool”—an undefinable concept produced when fashion and accessories, posture and movement come together, attracting notice and producing desire.

“Cool” takes its inspiration from the Kariba suit, which became popular with politicians in the formerly colonized islands of the Caribbean in the early 1970s as a symbol of their adaptation of and freedom from European traditions. The self-styling of jazz musicians and hip-hop artists—depicted, respectively, in Art Kane’s 1958 photograph *Harlem* and Gordon Parks’s 1998 remix, *A Great Day in Hip Hop*—bookend this moment. Jazz musicians adopted styles of casual collegiate elegance, while in the 1980s the luxury-label-inspired and branded apparel of celebrated designer and stylist Dapper Dan came to define hip-hop style. Contemporary designers pay homage to these now-canonical modes with fine materials and couture-like construction techniques.

Art Kane (American, 1925–1995)

Harlem, 1958

Digital C-print

Art Kane Archive



Gordon Parks (American, 1912–2006)

A Great Day in Hip Hop, Harlem, New York, 1998

Gelatin silver print

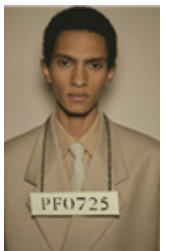
The Gordon Parks Foundation



Identify the people in **A Great Day in Hip Hop, Harlem, New York**

Fear of God (American, founded 2013)

Jerry Lorenzo (American, b. 1977)



Ensemble, autumn/winter 2025–26 menswear

Jacket and trousers of tan wool gabardine; shirt of tan Tencel-cotton Oxford; tie of gray wool plain weave

Courtesy Fear of God

This tan suit from Fear of God’s autumn/winter 2025–26 “A Civil Collection” recalls the turn to crisp, casual tailoring in the 1950s and 60s, popularized by men who epitomized mid-century cool, such as charismatic jazz musicians John Coltrane and Miles Davis. Drawing specifically from Black men’s dress during periods of social unrest in the 1960s, the collection infused the label’s trademark ease and sophistication with a sense of purpose and intention characteristic of its inspiration. As Lorenzo explained to *GQ* in 2024, “dressing at that time was not about self-promotion, but about self-preservation.”

Bianca Saunders (British, b. 1993)

“Pull Over” ensemble, autumn/winter 2022–23

Jacket, shirt, and trousers of beige wool plain weave

Courtesy Bianca Saunders

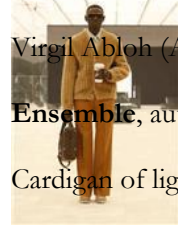


These tan suits from Bianca Saunders’s spring/summer 2021 and autumn/winter 2022–23 collections exemplify her desire to make “tailoring relevant to men in a casualized world,” as Sarah Mower noted in a review for *Vogue*. The garments feature Saunders’s experiments with set-in wrinkle-like creasing and a jacket design cleverly structured as a pullover with snaps hidden at the front to create the illusion of a standard single-breasted suit jacket when closed. The designs demonstrate her interest in introducing comfort to tailoring, supported by her study of the ways fabric and garments reflect and adjust to the body’s movements.

LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

Virgil Abloh (American, 1980–2021)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2021–22 menswear



Cardigan of light brown shearling; shirt and tie of polychrome striped cotton plain weave; trousers of orange wool plain weave

Courtesy Collection LOUIS VUITTON

Miles Davis’s outfits comprised of Brooks Brothers blazers, khaki pants, and Oxford button-down shirts with Bass Weejuns loafers and Ray-Ban sunglasses modeled a newfound ease and leisure for Black men in the 1950s, amplified by Davis’s status as a groundbreaking artist and musician. Davis described the complexity of his style in his 1989 autobiography, reproduced in the introduction to this section: “Being rebellious and black, a nonconformist, being cool and hip and angry and sophisticated and ultra clean . . . I was all those things and more.” The musician’s aesthetic—popularized through documentary photography—endures in this ensemble by Virgil Abloh for Louis Vuitton as a vestige of convention during a period of change.

Nicholas Daley (British, b. 1989)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2022

Shirt of brown plain woven cotton check with contrast collar, appliquéd patch pockets, and yoke of brown cotton twill with white cotton piping; t-shirt of orange cotton jersey; trousers of brown cotton twill; beret of orange wool knit



Courtesy Nicholas Daley

Dapper Dan of Harlem (American, founded 1982)

Daniel Day (American, b. 1944)

Jacket, 1987

Jacket of brown and tan leather with allover *LV* monogram print and collar of brown mink fur

Sid Sankaran, owner, and Prime Minister Pete Nice, curator of The Hip Hop Museum, Bronx, N.Y.



Dapper Dan of Harlem (American, founded 1982)

Daniel Day (American, b. 1944)

Pants, 1987

Brown and tan leather with allover *LV* monogram print

Courtesy Pete Nice and Paradise Gray, curators of The Hip Hop Museum, Bronx, N.Y., and DJ Hurricane



The photographs of jazz and hip-hop musicians in Harlem taken by Art Kane and Gordon Parks, respectively, on display nearby celebrate the spectrum of cool defined by Black musicians from the mid- to the late twentieth century. This rare Dapper Dan ensemble, the jacket custom-made for Jam Master Jay of Run-D.M.C. and the pants for DJ Hurricane, demonstrates defining elements of hip-hop style, including the appropriation and recontextualization of cultural symbols, specifically luxury-brand logos. Worn proudly by hustlers—Dapper Dan's first loyal clients—then musicians, this type of garment conveyed an assertive

attitude and swagger.



Bstroy (American, founded 2013)

Brick Owens (American, b. 1990)

Dieter Grams (American, b. 1991)

Ensembles, 2017

Blue and black cotton denim

Courtesy Bstroy Archive c/o Du and Brick

Called the “Father of Hip-Hop,” DJ Kool Herc typically sported a full denim ensemble, a signature of early hip-hop fashion and a challenge to conventional standards of formal dress. The look is echoed here in ensembles by Bstroy designers Brick Owens and Dieter Grams. The trousers are made of two pairs of jeans joined at the hem that can be worn doubled or with the outer layer sagging below the waist or even to the ankle. Sagging as a style originated as an effect of wearing oversize pants, gaining popularity and complexity through hip-hop culture. Designers continue to explore it as a concept and a technique that reimagines garment forms and reshapes the silhouette.

American. **DJ Kool Herc**, ca. 1985. Polaroid print, 4 1/4 × 3 1/2 in. (10.8 × 8.9 cm). Private collection



Wales Bonner (British, founded 2014)

Grace Wales Bonner (British, b. 1990)

Adidas Originals ensemble, spring/summer 2021

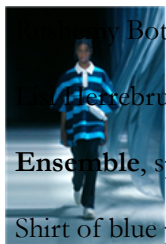
Jacket and joggers of blue polyester knit with cuffs of yellow polyester ribbed knit; shirt of blue-and-white striped cotton plain weave; hat of yellow wool plain weave

Courtesy Wales Bonner

In addition to the denim suit, the tracksuit was a replacement for the tailored suit as “casual formal wear” for young Black men in the 1980s and 90s. Grace Wales Bonner found inspiration for a recent series of tracksuits designed in collaboration with Adidas in portraits of 1980s youth culture in Burkina Faso by photographer Sanlé Sory at Volta Photo. Wales Bonner explains her design philosophy in an essay for this exhibition’s catalogue: “Everything’s for real. . . . It is real because it means something; it is real because it comes from history; and it is for real because it is rooted in true style created by originators.”

Sanlé Sory (Burkinabe, b. 1943). **La Relève**, 1984. Photograph. © Sanlé Sory, Courtesy Yossi Milo, New York.

BOTTER (Dutch, founded 2017)



Rushemy Botter (Dutch, b. 1984)

Lisi Herrebrugh (Dutch, b. 1989)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2022

Shirt of blue polyester plain weave with appliquéd stripes of distressed navy polyester plain weave and contrast collar of white synthetic twill; trousers of black synthetic twill

Courtesy BOTTER

The rugby shirt, transformed into a fashionable garment of aspirational ease by Ralph Lauren in the 1970s, was adopted into the lexicon of hip-hop style in the following decade as an analog to the Oxford cloth button-down shirt of the 1950s. Rushemy Botter and Lisi Herrebrugh’s “Sculptured Polo” here—designed with buoyant volume and raw-edged, hand-appliquéd stripes—is a “couture” update of the streetwear staple, first presented by the design duo in 2019 and since becoming a Botter signature.

House of Ivy (Jamaican, founded 1960s)

Ivy Ralph OD (Jamaican, 1928–2018)

Kariba shirt, 1970s

Brown cotton plain weave decorated with white cotton topstitching and openwork embroidery

Ivy Coco Maurice Collection



Jamaican designer Ivy Ralph founded her brand House of Ivy in the 1960s, and her prescient Kariba (or Kareeba) suit of the early 1970s would become her most enduring creation. The suit—which shares its name with the world’s largest human-made lake, located between Zambia and Zimbabwe—offered its wearers an alternative kind of formality that, counter to colonialist and imperialist logic, was defined by ease rather than stricture. Consisting solely of a tailored shirt worn untucked over matching trousers, the Kariba was embraced by many in newly independent Jamaica for its practicality in hot weather and for its political significance as a sartorial gesture of decolonization and national pride. Its most visible and ardent wearer was Prime Minister Michael Manley of the leftist People’s National Party, who made it his official uniform.

Michael Manley, Prime Minister of Jamaica, 1972–1980 and 1989–1992. Photograph. Library of the London School of Economics and Political Science

XII. COSMOPOLITANISM

In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1952

In their clothing and manners, those practicing dandyism visualize membership in an interconnected, sophisticated, cosmopolitan world. Migration and movement, whether forced or chosen, imagined or actual, has transformational power. “Cosmopolitanism” focuses on travel and the crossing of geographic and symbolic boundaries between and within Africa and its diaspora.

Travelers carry dreams in their luggage. With a bag and pilot-uniform-inspired ensemble, the artists' collective Air Afrique, collaborating with Pharrell Williams of Louis Vuitton, pays homage to the airline of the same name that connected African nations. André Leon Talley's Louis Vuitton luggage reflects his success journeying from the American South to the fashion capitals of Paris, Milan, and London. Liberian American Telfar Clemens's branded Carry Bags are a more portable and pliable alternative, made in the spirit of accessibility.

Savile Row tailor and fashion designer Ozwald Boateng regularly crosses between cultures and continents as he brings British tailoring to a global audience, emphasizing garments precise in fit and silhouette and rendered in his signature bright colors. Foday Dumbuya of Labrum London follows in Boateng's footsteps, with his "designed by an immigrant" ensembles embodying the transcendent possibilities of movement across the globalized world.



Passport of W. E. B. Du Bois, July 22, 1921

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries



Passport of W. E. B. Du Bois, August 30, 1944

Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

This 1921 passport permitted W. E. B. Du Bois to travel to the British Isles, France, Italy, Switzerland, and Belgium for the second Pan-African Congress. These meetings were essential to the creation of a diasporic consciousness that manifested in both Du Bois's political philosophy and personal style throughout the twentieth century. As he became more politically radical later in life, Du Bois embraced Marxism. His 1944 passport was issued for travel to Haiti to give a lecture titled "Colonialism, Democracy, and Peace after the War," in which he cited the importance of the Haitian revolution to Black radical thought. Due to his politics, the U.S. government would not issue Du Bois a passport from 1945 to 1958, after which he left the United States permanently for Ghana.



LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

Pharrell Williams (American, b. 1973)

Ensemble, spring/summer 2025 menswear

Jacket and trousers of blue, green, and black wool check jacquard; shirt of black cotton-silk plain weave; tie of brown silk crepe-backed satin; beret of black felted wool

Courtesy Collection LOUIS VUITTON

A series of suits and accessories in Pharrell Williams's spring/summer 2025 collection for Louis Vuitton drew inspiration from Air Afrique, the airline established in 1961 by eleven decolonized African countries and dedicated to intra-African travel and cultural development, which was in operation until 2002. Williams collaborated with the Paris-based Air Afrique collective, founded by Lamine Diaoune, drawing from its archive of objects and ephemera to create textiles reminiscent of the airline's visual identity. This suit from the collection is made of a blue, green, and black wool jacquard—a near match to the exterior fabric of the original Air Afrique travel bag in the adjacent case.

Air Afrique (Pan-African, 1961–2002)

Bag, 1970



Green and blue tartan polyester basketweave with white stamped AIR AFRIQUE logo, black vinyl trim, handles of black plastic, and hardware of gold metal

Air Afrique Club Collection

Air Afrique stamps, 1960s

Private collection



This promotional travel bag issued by Air Afrique appeared as a prop in images by Burkinabe photographer Sanlé Sory in the 1970s. Sory's studio Volta Photo provided a way for people to imagine travel when it was beyond their means. As he told the *Guardian* in 2017, "The aeroplane backdrop was particularly popular with young people who couldn't afford to travel. It gave them a chance to experiment, to escape their ordinary lives and play with elements of the modern world."

Sanlé Sory (Burkinabe, b. 1943). **Air Afrique, Nous Voilà!**, 1979. Digital print, 27 1/2 × 27 1/2 in. (70 × 70 cm). David Hill Gallery, London

LABRUM London (British, founded 2014)

Foday Dumbuya (Sierra Leonean)



"Maya Angelou Passport" ensemble, autumn/winter 2023–24

Coat and shirt of polychrome wool-synthetic jacquard with allover passport motif; trousers of black cotton twill

Courtesy LABRUM London

Foday Dumbuya designed his autumn/winter 2023–24 Labrum collection titled "Designed by an Immigrant: Journey of Colours" as "a reminder of our shared humanity and the beauty that unfolds when cultures intertwine," explaining, "more than a story of movement, it's a celebration of innovation, strength, and the boundless potential of diversity." These two ensembles from the collection incorporate references to the Dumbuya family's emigration from Sierra Leone to London. The coat of bronze and black jacquard is patterned with immigration documents and visa stickers documenting their travel. The ensemble above is composed of strips of fabric printed with airline boarding passes in bright colors; the bag, bound with rope, refers to the practical and creative ways immigrants pack and transport their belongings.

LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

Pair of trunks owned by André Leon Talley, ca. 1990

Hard-sided suitcases of brown lacquered *LV* monogram canvas finished with golden brass hardware, trimmed with tan lozine leather, and affixed with cowhide leather handles and hand-painted with orange, brown, and cream *ALT* monogram

Quin Lewis Collection



LOUIS VUITTON (French, founded 1854)

Trunk owned by André Leon Talley, ca. 1990

Brown lacquered *LV* monogram canvas finished with golden brass hardware, trimmed with tan lozine leather, and affixed with cowhide leather handles and hand-painted with orange, brown, and cream *ALT* monogram and black and orange double-stripe motif

Courtesy Collection LOUIS VUITTON

TELFAR (American, founded 2005)

Wilsons Leather (American, founded 1899)

Telfar Clemens (American, b. 1985)

TELFAR × Wilsons Leather Carry Bags, 2024

Brown full-grain pebble leather embossed with TELFAR logo

Courtesy TELFAR



Telfar, named for founder Telfar Clemens, is best known for its faux leather Shopping Bag embossed with the brand's TC signature and inspired by the shape of Bloomingdale's familiar brown paper bags. Designed and priced for accessibility, the bag became a symbol of the brand's inclusive motto, "It's not for you, it's for everyone." Introduced in 2014, it earned the nickname "The Bushwick Birkin"—a playful contrast between

the brand's universal spirit and the exclusivity of the Hermès Birkin bag. Telfar expanded the design's reach in 2024 with the release of this version, named the Carry Bag, made of soft leather in collaboration with Wilsons.

Ozwald Boateng: Breaking New Ground

British tailor and designer Ozwald Boateng produced the short film *Road to Paris* in 1994 to announce his first runway presentation in the fashion capital. The montage shows the transport of Boateng's collection from London to Paris, signifying the trajectory of his boundary-breaking career, which began in earnest with a tailoring apprenticeship on London's Savile Row at age eighteen. In Paris, Boateng brought a mode of British tailoring—modernized by the precision of his characteristic slim cut and use of bold, saturated color inspired by Congolese Sapeurs—to a global fashion audience. The suit of mint-green gabardine above represents the designer's tenure as creative director of menswear at Givenchy, an appointment which made him the first Black person to lead a French luxury fashion house.

Boateng has in recent years incorporated aspects of his Ghanaian heritage in his work. The jewel-toned suits above are from his 2019 "A.I." ("Authentic Identity") collection, presented at Harlem's Apollo Theater, which featured elements of African dress combined with references to the Harlem Renaissance. By showing in New York, Boateng sought to build bridges between Black Americans, British people, and Africans, defining an aesthetic of cosmopolitanism for diasporic communities.

Road to Paris (1994)

Running time: 2 minutes, 7 seconds

House of Givenchy (French, founded 1957)

Ozward Boateng OBE (British, b. 1967)



Ensemble, spring/summer 2006 menswear

Jacket, vest, and trousers of green cotton gabardine and black wool gabardine; shirt of white cotton piqué;

bow tie of black silk satin

Courtesy Ozward Boateng; Courtesy House of Givenchy

Ozward Boateng OBE (British, b. 1967)



Ensemble, 2019

Jacket and trousers of blue and black wool jacquard; half-skirt of purple printed silk satin; shirt of iridescent

silk shantung; tie of purple and black silk jacquard

Courtesy Ozward Boateng



Ozward Boateng OBE (British, b. 1967)

Ensemble, 2019

Jacket, trousers, and vest of orange and black wool check jacquard; shirt of yellow silk patterned twill; tie of

green and black silk jacquard

Courtesy Ozward Boateng



LABRUM London (British, founded 2014)

Today Dumbuya (Sierra Leonean)

Ensemble, autumn/winter 2024–25

Jacket and trousers of ivory polyester twill with appliquéd strips of polychrome polyester twill with printed

boarding pass motifs; bag of white polypropylene

Courtesy LABRUM London

Daniel Orme (British, 1766–1837)

After a composition by William Denton (British, act. 1792–95)



The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself

by Olaudah Equiano, 1793

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

This exhibition takes its inspiration and title from Olaudah Equiano’s 1789 *Interesting Narrative*, which tells the story of his remarkable life as a captured and enslaved West African man. Eventually able to purchase his freedom, he wrote proudly, “I laid out above eight pounds of my money for a suit of superfine clothes to dance with at my freedom.” Superfine is a grade of tightly woven wool, then (as now) a luxury item, and important to Equiano as a manifestation and celebration of his emancipation. As he recounted, “at the dances I gave, my Georgia superfine blue clothes made no indifferent appearance.” Wearing superfine and being superfine are the subjects of the exhibition, well illustrated by the portrait of an elegant, dignified, and free Equiano on this frontispiece.