

A MILITARIZATION OF THE “AMERICAN LOOK,” 1939-1945

by

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ABSTRACT

A MILITARIZATION OF THE “AMERICAN LOOK,” 1939- 1945

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This thesis examines the changing roles of women in American society during the World Wars and how the military contributed to the evolution of these roles and to American fashion. Through an analysis of Army uniforms and their influence on American fashion designers and their creations such as the female suit of the 1940s, “A Militarization of the ‘American Look,’ 1939-1945” argues that the establishment of the American fashion industry in the 1940s and after was founded on militaristic uniform production and patriotic inspiration.

INTRODUCTION

The World Wars in the twentieth century directly contributed to the evolution of women's roles in American society as well as to what was considered acceptable for women's fashion for current and proceeding decades. By the start of World War II, women assumed new responsibilities in the public sphere to support the war effort, such as enlisting in the military or taking on a job left behind by an enlisted soldier. As a result, the American fashion industry was called upon to meet the needs of servicewomen, factory workers, and other civilian women affected by wartime circumstances. Military references in motifs and silhouettes as well as symbols of American spirit were popular integrations into American fashion as a way for women to align themselves with the war effort.

American sportswear designers of the 1930s and 1940s developed iconic versions of garments, such as the female suit, inspired by the U.S. Army service uniform in design, cut, and production characteristics. Though women wore suits for sport and professional attire earlier in the century, more women entered the workplace and took on more serious roles in society in the 1940s, meaning that more women began to incorporate suits into their wardrobes and the ensemble as a whole became more fashionable. By the end of World War II, the suit became a cornerstone of the "American Look" with its patriotic symbolism and adaptability to fit the evolving social roles and expectations of women in the 1940s. The changing role of American women in society

had a tremendous impact on the fashion industry leading up to and during World War II, as Americans strove to create their own fashion identity that embodied uniquely American ideals. The United States military, notably the Army, directly influenced the American fashion industry, and ultimately the “American Look,” during and after World War II. The silhouette, construction, and functionality of the US Army service uniforms for men and women provided a patriotic model both for mass production and for patriotic fashion desired by designers and female consumers then entering the workforce during wartime and after.

CHAPTER I: FASHION AND SOCIETY BEFORE WORLD WAR II

World War I

Women's integration into the workplace began several decades prior to the Second World War. During World War I, women had to shoulder traditionally male-centric jobs in the civilian and military spheres for the first time. After thousands of men left the home front to fight overseas, various job titles opened to civilian women such as merchant, stenographer, banker, broker, lawyer, writer, physician, surgeon, and civil engineer.¹ Employers had to acclimate to the influx of women entering the workplace and, perhaps more rapidly than ever before, these employers began to better appreciate female competence and abilities outside of the domestic sphere. Even before the United States entered the war in 1917, American women had already begun to include themselves in the workforce and build a public perception of self-support. By 1911 nearly five million women were reported to be employed in nearly three hundred occupations.² Though many of the jobs taken on by women before and during the war may have been menial, the emergence of these job opportunities in the American workforce after the start of World War I inspired more and more women to leave the private sphere of their home and seek employment. As the prejudice against women attending college decreased, more and more women sought an education to be better qualified for the occupations now available to them.³

Women also were encouraged to enlist in the Army and Navy as nurses, ambulance drivers, or technicians in other jobs. A new, educated and independent woman was created during the war and in turn a notion of home front support developed in the United States by 1918 due to women's contributions to the war effort in the workforce. A heightened sense of nationalism was ignited and the notion of aligning oneself with the war effort in whatever way possible became a priority. As a result, the clothing women wore on a daily basis was affected and altered to fit their new, active roles in public, whether civilian or military.

The American fashion industry was called upon to create modern garments that were simple, unrestricted, and comfortable enough to be worn all day. By the start of World War I in Europe, female suits and accompanying shirtwaists had emerged as women began to alter their wardrobes to fit professional daytime needs. From the mid-nineteenth century to the early years of the twentieth century, advocates of dress reform strove toward wider acceptance of what they perceived to be more comfortable, healthful, and beautiful clothing.⁴ This move to rationality in fashion was accentuated during the First World War and after because suits and shirtwaists worked with the body rather than against it while working throughout the day. The suit was a welcomed ensemble that challenged restrictive dresses and foundation garments of years prior and could be easily applied to everyday life. Jackets and shirtwaists were worn with long skirts for modesty, but the skirt itself cleared the ground and allowed the wearer to more easily move about the city (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Suit, 1914. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Costume Institute, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 1951, C.C.51.97.28a,b.

The quantity in which these garments could be made also provided consumers with affordable new additions to their wardrobe. With the reliability of mass manufacturing, shirtwaists were available for as little as \$1.50 and suits for \$10.00 to \$20.00 prior to potential tailoring costs.⁵ Because of their affordability, these garments were available to all classes of women who could, therefore, enter the workplace confidently in an American-established ready-to-wear ensemble.

Changes in styling for American women's casual daywear highlighted a new appreciation for leisurewear by the end of World War I. With women becoming more active in society on a professional level, their involvement in sport and other leisure

activities became more widely accepted in the United States as well. American and European designers began to focus on more easy-to-wear clothing, such as the fashionable and practical sweater-type blouse that could be worn with a dress or suit and mass-produced.⁶ Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel expanded on this trend in her first haute-couture collection in the autumn of 1916 that introduced paired-down, relaxed clothes in soft, comfortable two-piece jersey ensembles.⁷ Jersey, a textile that had previously been used in men’s sporting wear and underclothing, had been transformed during the war years to clothe the female body. Though not a uniquely American concept at first, American women were quick to adopt the leisure attire that was readily available to them. Women looked to their local dressmakers to purchase ensembles that resembled Chanel’s two-piece jersey suits (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Fashion Plate 056, 1915. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Libraries Trade Literature Collections, SILNMAHTL_28800.

The development of leisurewear, quickly adopted by American customers, changed the American fashion industry from World War I on; the comfortable, two-piece ensembles first popularized by wartime circumstances to allow women to dress more casually in public became a facet of what was considered “American” fashion in later decades.

Civilian clothing was also significantly impacted throughout World War I when many clothing workshops and factories were redeployed to make standardized army uniforms.⁸ The need to have local businesses provide uniforms was a new concept for American businesses; never before had manufactories been so involved in the war effort

because the United States had never before been involved in a conflict so internationally sweeping. Seasonal fashion changes became less of a concern for civilians and business alike during the war when military uniform production became a priority, meaning that many businesses could expand their production capacities and utilize new technological developments such as the band knife to achieve high-speed, quality output of standardized patterns for uniforms. Used initially to finish army uniforms, the band knife was used in post-war years for fashion manufacturing.⁹ As the late-nineteenth-century notion of ready-to-wear clothing increased dramatically over the decades after World War I, standardized patterns for civilian fashion designs could be produced to meet consumer demand for designer creations. For the first time, American military and civilian fashion collided; the advantages discovered by mass-manufacturing military uniforms could be applied later to producing civilian clothing.

As they had since the mid-nineteenth century, the American fashion industry depended on French fashion houses for design leadership during the earlier years of World War I. Some American fashion magazines even attempted to establish aid programs to raise money for French fashion houses affected by the conflict in Europe, which only reaffirmed American dependence on French designs. For example, the editor-in-chief of American *Vogue*, Edna Woolman Chase, organized a series of “Fashion Fêtes” to raise money for the French national charity, Secours National.¹⁰ In contrast, works from American designers were showcased at Henri Bendel’s New York department store. This program took the opportunity provided by the war to promote domestic talent.¹¹ For the first time, Americans had the opportunity to distance themselves from French opinion and create their own sense of a fashion identity. Though

the international primacy of Paris fashions remained relatively unchallenged despite wartime setbacks, a seed had been planted in the minds of the American fashion industry that they could, actually, survive without French influence.

For the first time as well, women's uniforms were introduced into the military when women, whether in the Army or Navy, had to be outfitted with the proper uniform according to their service duties. An illustration by Paul Stahr that appeared in *LIFE* Magazine in 1919 (Figure 3) depicted the different uniforms that were worn by nurses, ambulance drivers, and volunteers of the Red Cross and other services.¹²



Figure 3: "Soldierettes," by Paul Stahr, cover of *LIFE* Magazine, 1919. Society of Illustrators, Museum of American Illustration, museum catalog number not available, <http://www.americanillustration.org/collection.html>.

While clothing manufacturers like Louis Sterling and Company were the main producers of uniforms for servicemen and servicewomen, fashion designers like Mainbocher and Abercrombie and Fitch Co. also designed uniforms for American servicewomen that emulated the men's and often abandoned socially acceptable clothing choices for women to accommodate military duty responsibilities. While some uniforms adhered to more socially approved skirt lengths, such as those in the National League for Women's Service uniform (Figure 4), the American Red Cross Motor Corps uniform (Figure 5) included a knee-length skirt that allowed the wearer to move in and out of the truck more easily.



Figure 4: Uniform of a Captain in the National League for Women's Service, from Louis Sterling Co., 1917. Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Thomas C. Hanna, 1962.15.1a-g.



Figure 5: American Red Cross Motor Corps Uniform, 1917. Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Francis John Rumpf, 1972.189.32a-e.

Abercrombie and Fitch Company's uniforms also utilized the shorter length skirt for easy mobility (Figure 6). Bifurcated breeches, were even integrated into uniforms for female ambulance drivers to protect their modesty while doing mechanic work (Figure 7).



Figure 6: Uniform, Abercrombie and Fitch Co., 1917. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Jane Darlington Irwin, 1981.523.4a-d.



Figure 7: Photograph of American Red Cross Motor Corps workers, 1918. “World War I and the American Red Cross,” the American Red Cross, 2014, <http://www.redcross.org/about-us/history/red-cross-american-history/WWI>.

Worn under a matching coat, the pattern for these breeches came directly from the servicemen's uniform: a khaki or olive drab wool pant with two side pockets, two rear pockets, and button closure below the knee.¹³ The flared thigh and tight lower leg construction was based on nineteenth-century British and American equestrian clothing, more commonly known as the "jodhpur" style, for comfort during equestrian battle pursuit. At times women would even wear the same uniform components as men. Abercrombie and Fitch Company, for example, manufactured women's boots in New York directly based on the same model distributed to soldiers (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Woman's boots, Abercrombie & Fitch Co., 1914-1925. Philadelphia Museum of Art, gifts of Beatrice B. Garvan, 1994.109.14ab.

Elements of civilian fashion were incorporated into military uniforms during the First World War as well when the traditional English Norfolk jacket was adopted into the United States Army uniform. The garment, a loose, belted, single-breasted jacket with

box pleats on the back and front, was a successful integration into the Army male soldier's uniform because of its simple construction and flexibility when worn. Later, the Women's Motor Corps of America altered the garment to fit their own needs. The uniform in Figure 9 imitated the U.S. Army's infantry M1912 woolen jacket in color, material, and accessories, this Norfolk jacket, also known as a tunic among servicemen, was a shade of mustard brown known as olive drab that was introduced into the Army after 1903 as a way to distinguish American troops from the enemy.¹⁴



Figure 9: Military Uniform, from Franklin Simon & Co., 1916-18. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Costume Collection, gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009.300.1155a-l.

The typical servicemen's tunic was fastened with five buttons and displayed four fold-closure pockets on the front face of the tunic (Figure 10).



Figure 10: Military uniform, Franklin Simon & Co. and Yale, 1916-18. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Costume Collection, gift of the Brooklyn Museum, 2009.300.6971a-f.

A blouse, or wool button-down shirt, was worn under the tunic with a necktie or cravat.¹⁵ Shoulder straps and a belt helped to close the tunic and support the weight of rifles and other equipment. The female Norfolk jacket, however, had slightly different construction details from the men's. Instead of the typical standing collar, the feminine uniform had a

folded lapel collar and a three-button closure down the center front of the garment. A belt was incorporated into the uniform similarly to the men's, but the accessory instead helped to shape the waist and create a more feminine silhouette.

The adaptation of men's garments for female use caught on quickly in the minds of Americans and eventually shaped the American fashion industry. The tailoring of the servicemen's uniform for the female body, seen in the Norfolk jacket, was quickly translated into civilian women's suits, a kind of uniform in the workplace. For the military, tailoring the existing uniform jacket pattern to accentuate the feminine curves of the body visually separated the servicewomen from the servicemen, and this visual separation and attention to tailoring was a key component of American military-influenced fashion in the professional sphere both during and after World War I. This inspired a wave of garment adaptation to fit the new roles of women in society that developed after the United States entered World War I. Never before had the country been involved in such a large-scale war that called upon all Americans to aid the war effort quickly. As a perhaps unexpected result, women's rights within the nation were bolstered as they kept the home front and military strong. Both civilian and enlisted women had to dress for their new roles in an effort to look the part, and militaristic inspiration came to the forefront of fashion quickly because of its mass production capabilities, durability, and tailoring that could shape a woman's figure.

The 1920s

After the war's end, the emancipation of women in the public sphere continued in the 1920s when simpler and more lavish, experimental fashion began to be integrated into

the global fashion industry. Fashion designers, namely those in France such as Paul Poiret, Madeline Vionnet, and Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel, began to challenge conventional silhouettes and cuts to produce unconventional, culturally- and art-inspired looks to dress the newly empowered, educated, and presumably wealthy woman. Designers of the 1920s began to leave behind the use of extremely restrictive foundation garments such as heavily boned corsets to build the structure and silhouette of the garment itself. This also included the more structured, military uniform-inspired suits produced in the wake of World War I. Instead, clothing was designed to flow over the body. Advertisements for 1920s daytime suits showed a more cylindrical look than ensembles of a decade earlier, often depicting a woman smiling as she strolled in a comfortable walking suit (Figure 11).

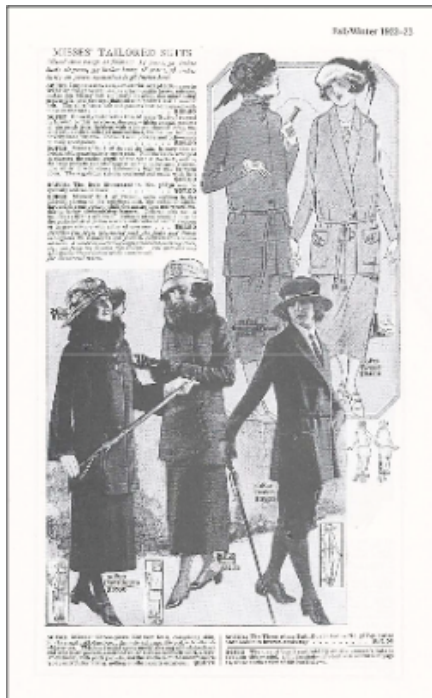


Figure 11: Advertisement for wool suits, B. Altman's department store, 1922- 23. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Libraries Trade Literature Collections, SILNMAHTL_28800.

Though a corset was expected to be worn underneath the suit, a softer, more cylindrically-shaped corset was used in the early part of the decade to emphasize a slender, elongated physique. The shift away from traditional fashion elements, such as a heavily boned corset that created and accentuated a small waist and even those wartime fashions created only a few years before, was innovative and indicative of how rapidly fashion could transform in a short amount of time. Simpler, leisure-driven ensembles that became popular during the war came to the forefront of fashion when wartime priorities

came to a close with the war. The 1920s saw a fashion emancipation from tradition in the same way that women found themselves liberated from the confines of the domestic sphere. Though this decade's fashions were almost the antithesis of that of the preceding decade and of what would come for Americans during the Great Depression and World War II, the break from traditional, waist-emphasizing silhouettes drove fashion of later decades to resurrect the projection of femininity and accentuation of the feminine curve. The decade brought an opportunity for European and American fashion designers alike to stray away from social clothing expectations under booming post-war economies.

During World War I, the integration of women into the military and male soldiers in uniform more present on the home front, a heightened sense of militaristic life enveloped Americans and served, not surprisingly, as a model for economic and personal thrift. By the turn of the new decade, however, frivolity came with winning the war and the American economy boomed. More Americans could afford to buy more clothing without as much focus on the potential longevity of each garment purchased. By the 1920s the American ready-to-wear clothing industry had reached its full maturity and domestic and imported fabrics in a variety of colors, patterns, and textures were available by the millions of yards.¹⁶ The manufacturing that had helped bring affordable, fashionable clothing to women several years before could now be better applied to 1920s innovative fashions and experienced by the majority. The growth of mass-communications in the 1920s also introduced an idea of clothing obsolescence to the American consumer.¹⁷ Changing styles moved at a much faster rate than in previous generations, meaning that production increased and clothing durability decreased. The clothing industry of the twenties stimulated buying by introducing change as quickly as

possible promoting the desire to dress in the very latest styles; to be out of style was to be ridiculous.¹⁸

The 1930s and the Great Depression

After the stock market crash in 1929, this break with tradition ceased and instead American fashion designers needed to return to previous inspirations such as the American military to produce long-lasting, affordable ensembles in the same way they had during World War I. The average American lifestyle in the 1920s was incomparable to those in which people lived even a few years before in World War I. Wartime sacrifices affected everyday life for most Americans, down to their wardrobes. Women continued to have the freedom to work within the professional sphere and had to purchase clothing to wear while working, but the garments themselves were intended to be worn repeatedly and thus needed to be durable, practical, and socially appropriate.

By the 1930s, the foundation for a American version of sportswear fully developed that would come characterize the “American Look” on a global scale in World War II and after. Because the garments could be molded to fit American needs and financial restrictions during the Great Depression, the casual ensembles allowed for an American conception of sportswear to take center stage in the American fashion industry. Various factors influenced the popularity of this new clothing trend despite the financial restrictions on most consumers. Firstly, new ideals of beauty, fitness, and Hollywood glamour impacted the success of American sportswear during the early years of its conception.¹⁹ As a means of escaping the hardships of the Depression, women within

middle-class America embraced sports and other leisure activities, thus requiring clothing that moved with the body and showed off their physiques.

The beginning of the decade brought the abandonment of the linear look of the twenties in favor of softer, more sculptural clothes that accentuated feminine curves and suited an active lifestyle.²⁰ Garments were also designed to be simpler and less fussy than those created in the twenties because excess surface treatments increased the cost of the garment as a whole and weakened the strength of the fabrics used. Key accessories like belts were added to ensembles to update what were otherwise plain, versatile garments and bring focus to the waist. Two of Claire McCardell's wool dresses (Figure 12) exemplify this simplicity: the dresses themselves were designed to be put on over the head quickly and easily, while the belts gave them shape. Overall, the dresses adhered to the ease, comfort, durability, and sensibility in clothing that was so desired by American consumers in the midst of the Depression.



Figure 12: Dress (left) and “After Ski Dress” (right), Claire McCardell for Townley Frocks, 1938. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gifts of Claire McCardell, C.I.49.37.15a,b and C.I.49.37.6.

It should be noted that more financially well-off Americans were interested in European designs and opinions after the stock market crash despite the financial strain and protest from local fashion figures such as Dorothy Shaver, who promoted American designers like Claire McCardell. Shaver, then vice president of Lord & Taylor, noted that women who could afford it “poured into the stores demanding a [copy of] Chanel, or a Patou, or a Lanvin. The great names of Parisian haute couture were on the lips of women from the tip of Cape Code to the Golden Gate.”²¹

An American sense of beauty developed in the thirties and extended into the following decades became closely tied with a physically active, sporting woman created

largely by Hollywood movies and the actors in them who helped market new trends. Especially after the stock market crash of 1929, playing sports suggested leisure, money, and success in the larger sense of living well.²² With a rise in the general popularity of sports and physical culture, diet and hygiene regimens as well as growing cosmetics and beauty product industries developed into an American body culture. American women were brought back to thinking about their figures and wanting to accentuate their bodies through clothing in a way that was lost with the cylindrical, androgynous silhouette from the previous decade. Physical cleanliness expectations accompanied the new modern, active lifestyle. Women were expected to police their bodies more thoroughly once fewer foundation garments were worn. Previously, foundation garments both accommodated the body-hugging fashion trends and protected the garments from sweat.²³ Diet was another important signifier of women's fashionable lifestyle. While it was not considered fashionable to be too thin, a slim body was aimed for through diet plans or detailed charts identifying what, how much, and when to eat in order to achieve the socially accepted and "desirable" form.²⁴

Soon, dieting became a form of American identity. Fashion magazines constructed an image of femininity predicated on the idea of being youthful, healthy, and hygienic, meaning that women were persuaded to follow advertisers' and fashion editors' advice on how to stay fit, how to appear fashionable, and thus how to be acceptably "American."²⁵ The 1930s laid the foundation of this concept of adhering to expectations of "Americanness," which was only elaborated upon in the 1940s when wartime circumstances weaved patriotism back into American social priority. Women called upon

the American fashion industry to provide them garments that adhered to these social expectations and projected them as all-American in every sense.

Other factors influencing the popularity of American sportswear were the durability and focus on separates it provided. As mentioned earlier, the growth of mass-produced textiles and garments strengthened the American economy in the 1920s, but introduced a new concept of clothing obsolescence to the American public that could not be continued after the stock market crash and decades after. In the 1920s, an unlimited capacity in production stimulated buying by introducing changes in styles as frequently as possible. People could justify buying clothes based on style rather than functionality and duration. After the crash, however, women had to be more conscious of their budgets and the quantity and quality of the items they spent money on. Therefore, a more conservative approach to fashion came with the 1930s. Garments with a high volume of fabric or those that served only one purpose or occasion, for example, went out of fashion because they were more expensive and challenged the thriftiness of American consumers. Being out of style was considered less unacceptable and more a fact of life in the Depression.

Though Chanel and other French designers emulated active sportswear in the 1920s and 1930s, designer sportswear was not a European invention and instead was developed in America with other ideals in mind. Its designers were not high-end with ancillary collections.²⁶ The comfort and durability introduced in the 1920s with Chanel's jersey two-piece costumes fit well into the American active lifestyle, but the development of truly American sportswear was based on distinctive traits concerning problem solving and the application of clothing to realistic lifestyles.²⁷ This break from Parisian designs

also helped to drive American fashion into its own identity. American sportswear was durable, was composed of soft construction, and emphasized separates. Small elements such as closures to garments were simple and practical, even before the restrictions on materials that occurred in the war years in the proceeding decade. Essentially, American sportswear emphasized resourcefulness and assumed a nonchalant freedom for the woman who wore the clothing.²⁸

In the 1930s, American fashion developed in part through the inspiration of women designers who were rationalizing the role of clothes in their modern, often suburban, lives in a new, unaffected way, and in part due to the promotion of fashion visionary Dorothy Shaver of Lord & Taylor.²⁹ In 1932, Shaver launched a series of in-store presentations that recognized American designers by name instead of the label they had previously represented. Now considered an American sportswear pioneer, Claire McCardell, for example, was recognized for her individual designs rather than her work for Townley Frocks. Shaver's goal was to demonstrate that these American designers were fully equal to their established European counterparts.³⁰

In tandem with American culture in general during the Great Depression, American fashion returned inexorably to basics that reflected the slight militaristic influence once familiar to Americans during World War I. Simple, durable, and multi-purpose garments were appreciated because they could be mass-produced and were affordable to the average consumer. At the same time, simple and versatile ensembles were considered to be quite modern in comparison to the lavish surface designs of clothing in the 1920s. Some elements of sportswear, however, were the key to its success and slightly countered a militaristic sensibility in clothing. For the women who pioneered

designer sportswear in the thirties, fabric manipulations showcasing the textile's complexity were adopted to ready-to-wear standards. Wrapping and twisting fabric, for example, provided utility as well as a sensuous aspect to clothing that women were looking for while adhering to social expectations on beauty and health. This textile manipulation seen in Claire McCardell's evening dress in Figure 13 added interesting, three-dimensional elements to garments that accommodated a variety of bodies in a flattering way without being restrictive or excessive in the amounts of fabric used.



Figure 13: Evening Dress, Claire McCardell for Hattie Carnegie Inc., 1939. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Ruth Underhill, C.I.58.17.2.

American consumers also favored simplistic, clean designs; the simplicity consumers started to see in American sportswear helped them to recognize that American designers

knew what American women needed in their clothing. The shift away from Paris opinion was slowly beginning to take effect. Clare Potter, for example, used easy-flowing lines and little ornament in her designs, such as the dress pictured in Figure 14, which greatly set her apart from Parisian collections; she understood the wardrobe requirements of the American woman.³¹



Figure 14: Dress, Clare Potter, 1937-38. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Janet Chatfield-Taylor, C.I.62.2.2a,b.

The Great Depression provided Americans with a template of potential strategies to survive through wartime sacrifices in the 1940s. In clothing, the emphasis was put on multi-purpose garments. Women were eager to purchase one ensemble that consisted of several pieces that would be worn for several occasions by local designers who designed

for their financial and fashion needs.³² Claire McCardell's ensemble from 1934, for example, embodied the functionality of a set of garments that American women were looking for at the beginning of her career (Figure 15).



Figure 15: Ensemble, Claire McCardell for Townley Frocks, 1934. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Claire McCardell, C.I.49.37.49a-f.

Suits and dresses were more carefully tailored to save money on fabric and were often belted to accentuate a small waist. Magazines, retailers, and manufacturers, for instance, had experience creating and promoting clothing that embodied ideals of thrift, “good” taste, and patriotism. During World War II, these ideals were amplified to construct a coherent ideal of American fashion.³³ The sense of practicality familiar to the American public after the Depression was carried into the American fashion industry before the country’s entry into World War II and became a kind of uniform of the American Look in civilian fashion in following years. Purposeful, sensible clothing was easily accepted

because most women had the financial responsibility to purchase durable, functional clothes that could be coordinated into other ensembles during the war.

CHAPTER II: MILITARY AND WAR SUPPORT WORK CLOTHING IN WORLD WAR II

When the United States joined the Allied Powers after December 1941, it became clear that the war effort took precedence over every aspect of American life. Everyone had to make sacrifices for the war, even in the most obscure ways. Various materials were rationed over time to contribute to war necessities, including fibers like nylon, silk, wool, cotton, rubber, and leather. Naturally, this affected the American fashion industry; apparel textiles were drastically affected, meaning that designers and consumers had to adopt new forms and fabrics into their daily ensembles to support the war effort. Prior to American entrance into the war, commercial production of man-made materials gained strength as American designers and consumers slowly integrated synthetic materials into their lifestyles. 1939 saw the acceptance of DuPont's nylon, also known as "Fiber 66," as an alternative to silk once the United States could no longer look to Japan for silk imports used in women's hosiery.³⁴ However, in February of 1942 DuPont turned over all nylon to the War Production Board to be used for military field equipment such as parachutes, rope, and bristles for brushes.³⁵

Even on the smallest scale, women had to accommodate for the absence of nylon in their wardrobes. Rayon or cotton stockings were used in addition to wool socks because it was against social convention to go barelegged anywhere other than in the

home or near water (Fig. 16). In an effort to imitate the color of legs in colored stockings, leg paints were created by cosmetics companies like Max Factor and Elizabeth Arden to give the illusion of wearing stockings. Many women took to wearing trousers for work and continued to wear them outside of work for convenience and to preserve their stockings for special wear.³⁶ Servicewomen were supplied stockings, but could only receive a new pair when the old showed a certain number of tears.³⁷ With all of this, it became clear almost immediately after the United States entered the war that women were willing to sacrifice even the smallest comforts to support the war effort.

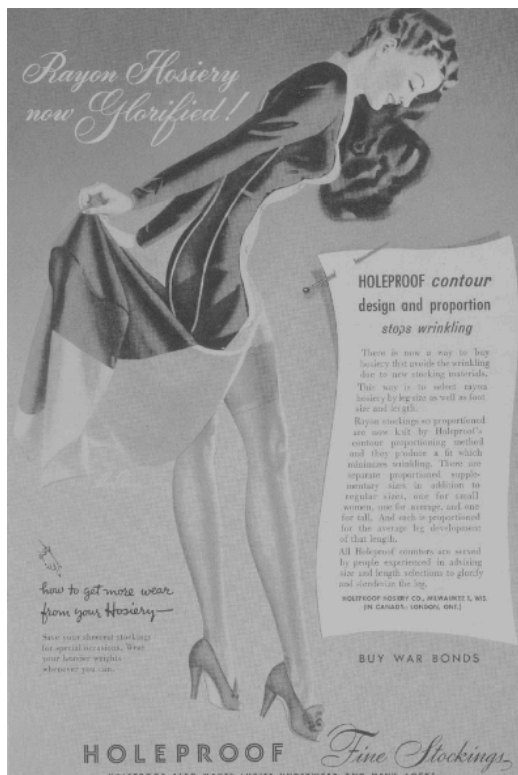


Figure 16: “Holeproof” hosiery advertisement, c. 1940. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, IAP 895200002.

Military Clothing and Regulations

In 1942, the United States War Production Board issued Regulation L-85, which rationed chemicals for dyes, synthetic and some natural fibers, and forbade drastic style changes that might tempt buyers. It limited color choices and restricted the length and fullness of skirts, pants, and jackets; even cuffs were banned (Figure 17).³⁸ The first edition of L-85 restrictions in March of 1942 focused on reducing yardage by fifteen percent in women's and girl's apparel. No more than two articles of clothing could be sold as a unit, which meant that coats that matched suits could no longer be bought as ensembles, but could be purchased separately.³⁹

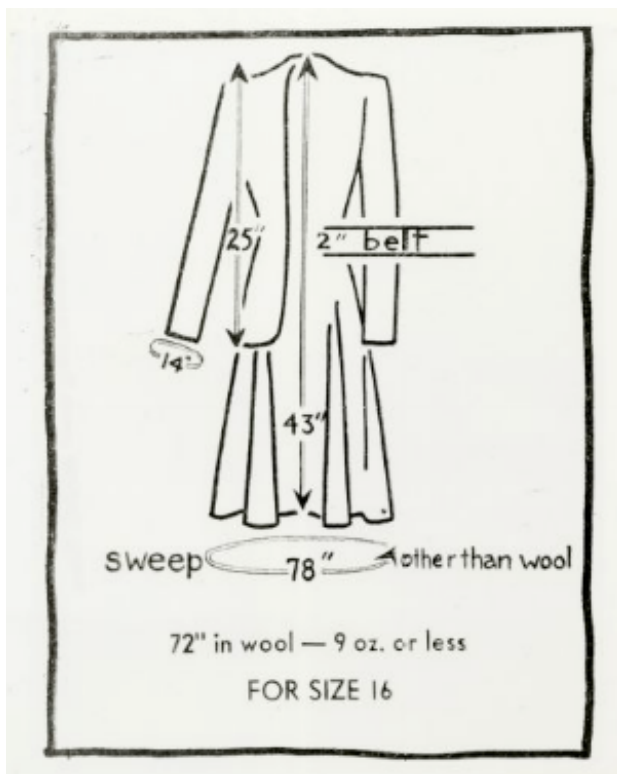


Figure 17: L-85 clothing regulations, 1942. *Women's Wear Daily*, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Libraries Trade Literature Collections, SILNMAHTL_28800.

The regulation was designed to conserve natural resources for the war and to boost the American economy simultaneously. Although American rayon, wool, linen, and cotton supplies were healthy enough to make up for resources lost by military use, limitations on these textiles also had the effect of ensuring maximum profitability once manufacturers could make more garments from their material.⁴⁰ For example, it was more profitable for a clothing manufacturing company to make twenty dresses from one bolt of wool instead of their usual fifteen, especially since wartime prices and wages were frozen.⁴¹ As in the preceding decade, thrift and conservation by companies and consumers were especially emphasized during World War II.

While these regulations were new to the American public, efficient uniformity was the key to outfitting American soldiers to fight overseas. In addition to fabric conservation and shopping for quality goods, remodeling and mending of clothing were encouraged. Much information on remodeling and mending was available. Many designers voluntarily helped to save more fabric, and most manufacturers seem to have obeyed the fabric conservation order issued by the government.⁴² Because having multiple garments for various actions was cumbersome for the soldier and expensive for the government, the Army had one standard combat or service uniform for every enlisted and drafted man to be as economical as possible. They also utilized the advantages of layering durable fabrics like wool and cotton drab to address service and fatigue needs without risking constant reparation. Over time, these standards designed for Army uniforms were applied to American civilian fashion. Government regulations like L-85 drove American fashion in the direction of wartime uniformity and American fashion designers adopted preexisting uniform efficiency methods in new ways.⁴³

The U.S. Army, in particular, acted as a model for the American fashion industry to learn how to outfit large numbers of people quickly and effectively. During the war, this branch of the military incorporated over eleven million men into its ranks within four years, meaning the government had to create a uniform system that could provide each soldier with ready-to-wear and durable clothing. The uniforms used from 1941 to 1945 are a wonderful example of how form followed function in military clothing. Because the government had to provide uniforms to millions of men of various sizes and builds, the basic jackets, pants, and blouses had to be made according to a standard sizing model, and from affordable yet dye-able and durable fabric, such as cotton and wool. This meant that uniforms had to evolve from the World War I single-coat and jodhpur uniform structure and escape the pomp and circumstance of previous military looks from American history. Pageantry rather than practicality in military dress with bold colors and brass buttons was unnecessary as well as expensive and the American government abandoned the previous uniform standards of World War I by the early twentieth century as a result.

Function was more important than image or flashiness in the Army, and this concept was quickly incorporated into the civilian mindset for fashion and volunteer organizations during the war and after. The Army was the first to apply itself to designing a system of military combat and dress clothing that would be comfortable, hard-wearing, and suitable to the needs of the soldier in all of the climactic regions in which he may be called upon to fight (Figure 18).⁴⁴ Uniforms were also organized according to classes A-D that varied in color and depended on the intended setting in which the uniform would be worn.⁴⁵ Uniform classes “A” through “C” were each

essentially simpler versions of the preceding class of uniform. Though there were formal dress clothing standards for servicemen that preceded Class “A” service uniforms, they were not designed to be used on a daily basis. The Class “A” uniform included the service coat, blouse, trousers, and garrison cap, while Class “B” excluded the service jacket and so on.

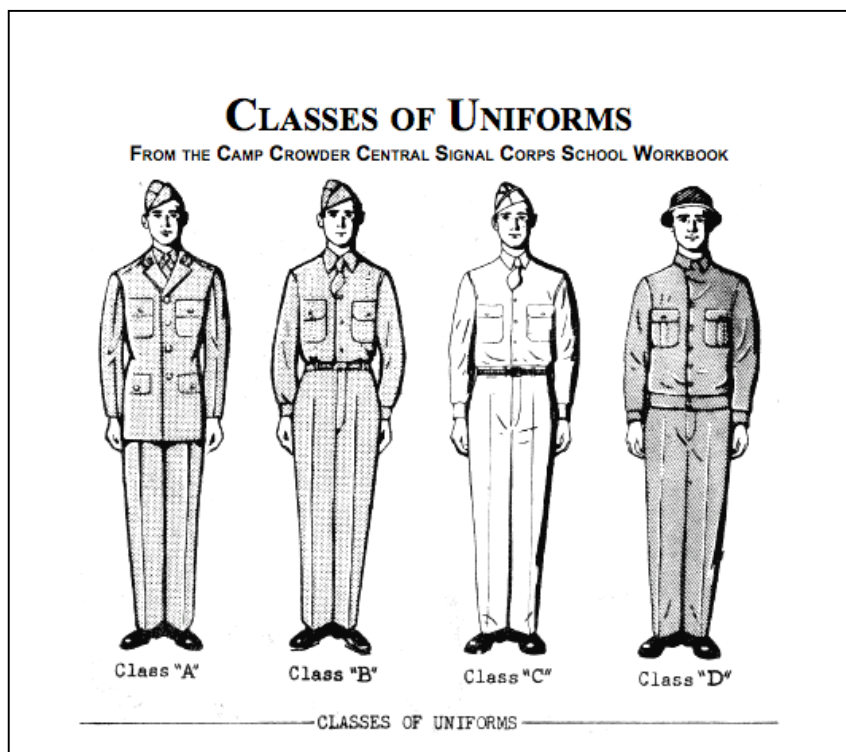


Figure 18: “Classes of Uniforms” order form from the War Department, September 10, 1937. “World War II: Living History and Reenacting Information,” Hardscrabble Farm Living History Center, 2003, <http://www.hardscrabblefarm.com/ww2/>.

Class “D” was reserved for combat only and utilized new garments that were designed specifically to keep a soldier dry and covered while in the field. Most soldiers wore the “Parsons” field jacket, also called an M38, which was the first garment ever

designed especially for combat in an age when other countries' armies still used wool service tunics or blouses for parade and battlefield circumstances alike (Figure 19).



Figure 19: M38 “Parsons” field jacket (reenactment costume), c. 1940. “World War II Field Jackets & Coats,” last modified 2016, <https://www.atthefrontshop.com/ProductDetails.asp?ProductCode=USUJM41>.

The field jacket was named after General Parsons, commander of the U.S. Army 3rd Corps in early 1940. The intention was to replace the four-pocket service coat for field service with a more comfortable, loose fitting jacket similar to a civilian windbreaker. The garment had cotton lining and incorporated two diagonal front pockets fitted with button-down flaps, a rear half-belt and button tightening tabs on each side of the waist for fitting, as well as two collar lapels and a zip front.⁴⁶

The government's "layering" system for "Class D" uniforms was essential in creating functional and durable uniforms. The basic garments of the uniform, a utility blouse and trousers, were worn in moderate climates. With the addition of extra layers however, the basic uniform was transformed to be more suitable in colder temperatures. Uniform pieces also varied from olive green, sage green, or khaki depending on the season or climate expected upon issue. E.T.O.'s, or men serving in the European Theater of Operation, were given a basic sage green uniform and then provided coats in the winter months.⁴⁷ This initiative was very successful during the war and after. The M1943 field jacket, for example, has been the structural base of all combat jackets since 1945 with its four-pocket, and thigh-length construction and its windproof and water resistant capabilities (Figure 20). Men serving in the Pacific received the same basic uniform components in khaki as well as shorts that were originally created for recreation and then adapted for warm weather climates once more men were shipped to the region.⁴⁸



Figure 20: M1943 style field jacket (replica costume), 1944. “U.S. M1943 Field Uniform Archive,” last modified 2010, https://atthefront.com/HR/us/uni_M1943_Field_Uniforms.html.

The conception of the layering system may have derived from the social and economic values of separates and multipurpose garments in the 1930s. Like civilians, the government recognized the cost efficiency in producing uniform basics that could evolve when combined with additional pieces.

A new, more fitted combat jacket colloquially known as the “Ike jacket” rose to popularity by 1944 after General Eisenhower was seen sporting a cinched, hip-length wool jacket with two front flap breast pockets and side slit pockets below them before battle (Figure 21).



Figure 21: Eisenhower-style jacket worn by William Lubar, 1943-44. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Division of Armed Forces, donated by William Lubar, 1994.0388.01.

This European Theater of Operations (ETO) jacket became the standard issue jacket for all soldiers after November 1944, after General Eisenhower promoted his dislike for the M1943 field jacket and directly requested of the Quartermaster Department a jacket that could be worn both in combat and for dress.⁴⁹ Eisenhower felt that the older model fit badly and was restrictive, so he took his uniform to a tailor and modified it according to his specifications: “very short, very comfortable, and very natty looking.”⁵⁰ While Eisenhower was a particularly outspoken individual, the government accepted his adaptation of a uniform garment for the sake of practicality in order to make the soldiers’ clothes more forgiving than previous models. While it was intended for battle, most

soldiers preferred to save the “Ike jacket” for non-combat situations. Upon return to the United States, for example, soldiers were permitted to wear it in place of the wool Class “A” service coat.⁵¹

“Class A” service uniforms, or those worn by men in any non-combat setting, were less centered around the layering system and were intended to fit the body like a well-tailored suit (Fig. 22).



Figure 22: Capt. Clark Gable's uniform coat and cap, 1942-45, made by E. Abington & Sons/ Rushden & Kimbolt. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Division of Armed Forces, 79691M.

The Army recognized and emphasized the importance of their soldiers “looking smart” while interacting with the public because they were physical representations of the military branch as a whole. The structure for this uniform predates World War II and was used for combat and working until the introduction of the combat-specific uniform after 1941.⁵² While officer uniforms and those worn by enlisted men were similar in terms of construction, insignia and color differentiated them subtly. Army clothing in general was deliberately styled alike for soldiers of all ranks to provide a homogenous appearance and battlefield protection for combat leaders.⁵³

The Class “A” service uniform was cut according to the M1939 pattern, which was slightly altered by 1942 but retained its basic construction and elements (Figure 23): a four-pocket wool service coat in olive drab wool for winter or khaki-colored cotton for summer with a four-lapel collar and four to five brass buttons, wool trousers in the coordinating shade, and brown leather service shoes.⁵⁴



Figure 23: Model 1942 Army Office service coat worn by General Matthew Bunker Ridgway, c. 1942. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Division of Armed Forces, gift of Mary A and General Matthew B. Rigway, 1985.0659.01.

As during World War I, a khaki button-down blouse was to be worn under the service coat with a matching mohair necktie that was standardized for all uniforms (excluding Class “D”) from September 1943.⁵⁵ Between November 1929 and July 1942, the coat included a “bi-swing” pleat back that allowed for better movement while participating in social events, such as swing dancing, on leave.⁵⁶ The Class “B” uniform was fairly similar to Class “A” but was intended to be worn on more casual occasions. The soldier would walk “in shirtsleeves” in an olive drab or khaki wool shirt with khaki mohair tie, wool trousers, and service shoes.⁵⁷ This same ensemble was produced in khaki, as the Class “C” uniform, for soldiers on leave during the summer months or those who were stationed in warmer climates.

All winter service uniforms were wool, a fiber that could be dyed with dark colors easily without compromising the textile's strength. While two pairs of trousers were issued for service dress in olive green and khaki brown, winter service khaki differed in color in comparison to the summer service khaki. The iconic shades No. 54 and No. 51, also known as "pinks and greens," were used in service uniforms after 1942.⁵⁸ These dye shades derive from the usual khaki and green seasonal dyes also used in combat uniforms, but the "No. 54" light shade of grey-pink used on winter service uniform khaki pants had a slight pink hue in some lights.⁵⁹ The silhouette of the service jacket was a distinctive masculine style and resembled men's suit jackets of the time with its padded, boxy shoulder and elongated, belted waist. Each jacket was cut from a standard size pattern, such as small, medium, large, or extra-large, and then tailored by taking in or letting out side seams near the back panels of the garment according to the individual's measurements. Usually a soldier bought his uniform from the quartermaster or a department store and then took it to a tailor to be altered.

"Class A" service uniforms were the most visible example of Army uniforms available to the public because they were worn in social settings and in turn could be imitated easily in fashions for women. Men would walk around town in their uniforms, personifying the military and presenting a nationalistic sense of pride that was absorbed by the public during the war. Because over eleven million American men enlisted between 1941 and 1945, it is possible that nearly every American family had a soldier overseas at one point or another. Men would wear their service uniforms while home, thus igniting patriotic sentimentality on the home front and presenting a manifestation of what it looked like to be American during the war. Men's service uniforms were also the

most direct influence on women's service uniforms and later civilian women's suits because of their tailored structure and belted waist. The uniform could be adapted well to fit a woman's body and accentuate her curves in a professional and formal fashion, yet still give her a kind of masculine quality that demanded confidence in her work.

Military Uniforms for Women

Uniform designs for women in the Army had to consider the complex social conditions women faced during the 1940s; similar to earlier in the twentieth century, women wanted to dedicate themselves to the war effort, but remained personally concerned as well as socially expected to maintain their femininity within the masculine atmosphere. Similarly to their eagerness to enlist during World War I, women enlisted into the United States military by the hundreds of thousands between 1942 and 1945. Over 150,000 women served in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) or the Women's Army Corps (WAC) as a way to contribute to the American war effort directly and individually. Both services existed simultaneously until the WAC was officially incorporated into the Army in mid-1943 and members of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps either converted to the WAC or discharged.⁶⁰ Over the course of the war, these servicewomen held jobs as drivers, mechanics, cooks, ordnance specialists, and radio operators as well as in the communications, medical, intelligence, secretarial, clerical, and administrative fields on the home front and abroad (Figure 24).⁶¹

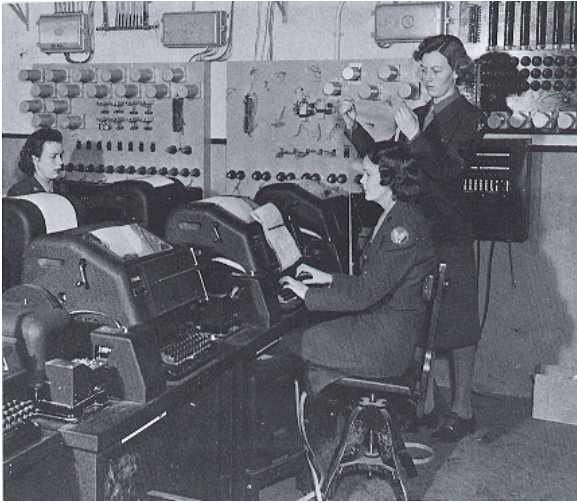


Figure 24: Photo of WACs assigned to the Eighth Air Force in England operating Teletype machines, 1942-45. “The Women’s Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service” by Judith A. Bellafaire, US Army Center for Military History, Department of Defense, last modified February 17, 2005, <http://www.history.army.mil/brochures/wac/wac.htm>.

On June 12, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed into law the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act, permitting women to serve in the regular Army and Organizing Reserve Corps.⁶² From then on, women were allowed to enlist in the Army or Army Reserve, meaning that uniform production for women was on the rise more than ever after 1948 and helped to bridge the gap between men’s military uniforms and women’s fashion as an example of feminine application of the male-centric garment.

Because WAAC and WAC were volunteer forces, membership had to visually appeal to middle-class Americans to recruit skilled women for the jobs needed by the Army. Oveta Culp Hobby, the Director of the WAAC in 1942, had to show a skeptical American public that a woman could be "a lady" and serve as a member of the armed forces at the same time.⁶³ The values and sensibilities of this middle class reflected the

expectations and attitudes of women in 1942. Although they were working in a male-dominated military world, the women in WAAC needed to adopt a new version of the military service uniform that did not include slacks or shorts to keep their image as feminine as possible. Their uniform, as a result, incorporated the Army's standard service uniform coat and a calf-length skirt, both in shades No. 51 and No. 54 (Figures 25 and 26). Like the servicemen, women had to buy their own uniforms from specialty department stores if not directly from the quartermaster and have them tailored to their measurements.⁶⁴



Figure 25: Women's Army Corps olive drab uniform, 1943. University of North Carolina, UNCG University Libraries, Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, WV0110.8.002.



Figure 26: Summer WAC Jacket worn by SSGT. Margaret C. Frank, 1943-45. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Division of Armed Forces, 79105M.

Hobby also advocated that all who enlisted would be trained in a non-combatant military job in order to “free a man for combat” and in turn make an individual and significant contribution to the war effort.⁶⁵ In Hobby’s view, WAACs were to help the Army win the war, just as women had always helped men achieve success.⁶⁶ This mindset was key to most women in the Army as well as at home; women were meant to support the war effort in any way possible to make it easier for soldiers to fight and return home. After 1943 when WAAC was converted into WAC, recruitment maintained a steady pace through early 1945, allowing for the War Department to respond to overseas theaters’ requests with additional WAC companies.⁶⁷

Several nursing corps were developed in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and required those servicewomen to work more closely on the front lines than ever before in previous wars. Civilian newspapers and fashion magazines promoted the new military profession more than ever as a result and offered another means of recruitment for organizations such as the Army Nurse Corps, a branch of the Army Medical Department that attracted more than 59,000 nurses during the war (Figure 27).⁶⁸

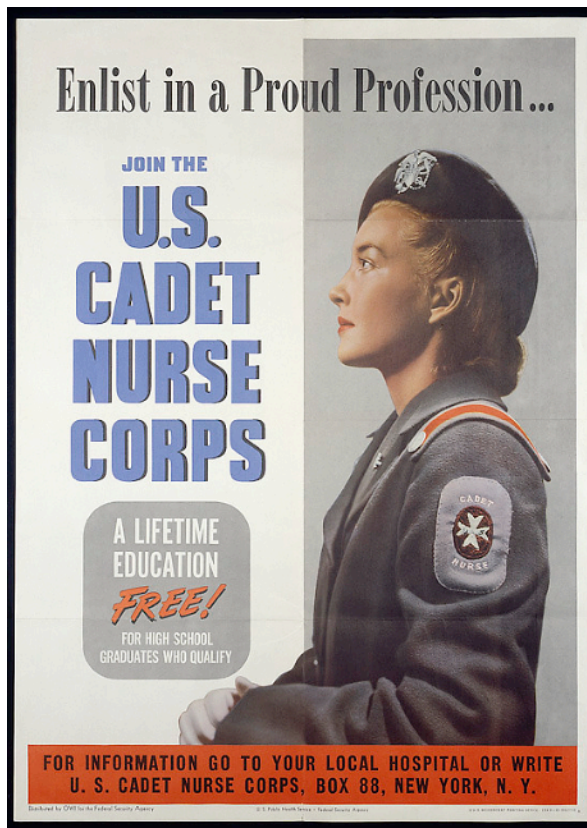


Figure 27: “Enlist in a Proud Profession... U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps” recruitment poster, the United States Office of War Information, 1942. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Division of Armed Forces, 1977.0020.041.

Those who enlisted served under fire in field hospitals and evacuation hospitals, on hospital trains and ships, as well as on medical transport planes.⁶⁹ As more and more women entered the workforce on the home front and abroad during enlistment, the need for nurses within the military raised the status of the nursing profession. The Army reflected this changing attitude in June 1944 when it granted its nurses officers' commissions and full retirement privileges, dependents' allowances, and equal pay. Moreover, the government provided free education to nursing students between 1943 and 1948.⁷⁰ With the promotion of women in the workplace by the American government, civilian support for the military was strengthened and perhaps encouraged the American fashion industry's use of Army uniforms as inspiration.

Fashion magazines and editors like Dorothy Shaver began to promote admiration of the work Army Nurse Corps servicewomen did for the country, often calling them "America's Best-Dressed Women."⁷¹ Shaver, who consulted with the Office of the Quartermaster General to design the typical combat and dress uniform, wrote an article (Figure 28) highlighting the uniform components worn by an Army nurse that "helped her do her job with greater efficiency, and comfort."⁷² By describing the dangerous jobs of the Army Nurse Corps and the clothing they wore on the front lines, Shaver encouraged American civilians to admire servicewomen and replicate what they wore while on duty to better align themselves with the war effort as a whole.



Figure 28: “America’s Best-Dressed Woman,” Dorothy Shaver, the United States Office of War Information, c. 1942. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, Dorothy Shaver Papers, c. 1922-1959, ACNMAH 0631.

The Cadet Nurse Corps, created by Congress in 1943 to help alleviate the nursing shortage at home and abroad during the war, was another volunteer organization developed out of the American female initiative to directly and individually support the American war effort. The program advertised its benefits aggressively, emphasizing the expedited training, full financial support, and free “smart” uniforms that could be found and tailored to the body at J.C. Penny Co., Inc.⁷³ While on duty, Cadet Nurses wore a more typical nursing uniform, but the servicewomen were also issued dress uniforms to

be worn off duty outside of the hospital. Every nurse was issued both summer and winter uniforms, which included a jacket, skirt, hat, winter coat and raincoat, handbag, official epaulets, and pins and buttons decorated with the insignia of the U.S. Public Health Service.⁷⁴ While members of the WAC had to purchase their uniforms out of pocket, the Cadet Nurse Corps regarded their uniforms as an important recruiting device designed in a contest-like setting with leading fashion designers and editors.⁷⁵ The winning design was a figure-flattering, feminine, wool uniform (Figure 29). According to the Public Health Service Publication, “Wear it Proudly, Wear It Right, U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps,” Cadet Nurses were advised:

“Your uniform is a symbol of what the U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps means to you. What it will mean to others will depend in large measure on how you wear it. In military language, you are in uniform if everything you wear is according to the [regulations]. If one article of dress is wrong you are out of uniform. It isn't just a matter of wearing summer suit or winter; reefer coat or raincoat. It is the slant of your beret, the snowy whiteness of your blouse. It is the way you walk, the way you stand. It is the dignity with which you wear the uniform of your proud profession. Your uniform is YOU.”⁷⁶



Figure 29: Military Uniform, made by J.C. Penney Co., Inc., 1944. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Lucille Petry, 2009.300.120a-r.

The Cadet Nurse Corps also used the promise of their uniforms' longevity to recruit women into the service. Lucile Petry, the director of the U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps, wrote in 1946:

“With the rapid demobilization of women in the armed services, the national spotlight is no longer focused on uniforms. Rather than assign your Cadet Nurse uniforms to mothballs—and oblivion—you can make them over into attractive civilian suits with minimum effort and expense. A noted fashion editor suggests removing epaulets, pocket tabs; change the buttons. If you want more complete variation, remove collar and lapels—you will have a good-looking cardigan suit. Remove epaulets from your reefer, add a fur collar; consider dyeing all three pieces an exciting new color.”⁷⁷

It is probable that the Cadet Nurse Corp's emphasis on their uniforms stemmed from competition against the WAAC/WAC and the Navy's Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). While WAAC uniforms were altered men's service uniform coats with calf-length skirts, WAVES uniforms were designed by prominent New York fashion designer Main Rousseau Bocher, more commonly known as Mainbocher, and gave its members the reputation of being the best dressed servicewomen in America (Figure 30).⁷⁸



Figure 30: Uniform for WAVES, Mainbocher, 1942. Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Jacqueline Loewe Fowler Costume Collection, gift of Jacqueline Loewe Fowler, 1983.44.6a-h.

For the first time, an American designer directly worked for the war effort to make servicewomen as feminine and practically dressed as possible without straying too far from the familiar military uniform silhouette and construction. Naturally, women were concerned with their appearance while in uniform and over time, women's service organizations began to use their uniforms as a way to convince the public that women in the military did not lose traditional femininity.⁷⁹ This encouragement of femininity trickled down into factory fashion and street fashion as promotion of working for the war included functional clothing that highlighted the feminine curves of the woman.

Clothing for War Support and Factory Work

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Allied nations asked women to play an active role in the industrial workforce while maintaining morale and keeping up a feminine appearance.⁸⁰ This meant that women had to adjust their wardrobes and their lifestyles to serve the war effort. The Working Ordnance Women (WOW), for example, was established for women when they were expected to fill the jobs left behind by enlisted and drafted men to keep the military supplied and ready. The American government campaigned to attract more women to the industry by featuring women in stylish working garments and using slogans such as "America's Sweetheart is a WOW" (Figure 31).



Figure 31: “BE A “WOW”—Work to Win” recruitment poster, War Production Board, c. 1941. National Archives, 534582.

In their recruitment posters, such as that in Fig. 33, the women are smiling and well dressed. Rosie the Riveter, another icon for WOW, also stood as a symbol of patriotism and encouragement for women to take on wartime jobs (Figure 32).⁸¹



Figure 32: “We Can Do It!” Rosie the Riveter propaganda poster, 1942-45. National Park System, the American Rosie the Riveter Association, Rosie the Riveter Trust, website last modified 2016, <http://www.rosietheriveter.org>.

They became soldiers of production, in a sense, when they began to work in munitions plants and other industrial production factories.⁸²

These factories, however, did not provide suitable and safe conditions for women to wear their normal day attire. As a safety precaution, the government encouraged women to wear smart working slacks that were fitted at the ankle, like servicemen's, to prevent accidents caused by loose skirt fabric catching on machinery while on the job. At the beginning of the war, these suits were most likely either repurposed or manufactured imitations of the Army's one-piece, herringbone twill work suit that was not flattering to the female figure. (Figure 33).



Figure 33: HBT (Herringbone Twill) Women's Coveralls, 1941-1945. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Division of Armed Forces,

Because of the direct correlation between the soldier's work suit and what was worn in the factories, women quite literally looked like soldiers of production.

Although women entered a new professional sphere when they took on factory occupation, they were not immediately drawn to the uniform jumpsuit because of its masculine origins and shapelessness. The Office of Civilian Requirements of the War Production Board confronted factory uniforms in a similar way as they had outfitting soldiers for combat. Low-cost work garments such as slacks and coveralls were sent directly to war factories by government manufactories, offering priority sales to the workers during the time of various material shortages.⁸³ Over time, practical considerations and the concept of "Beauty on Duty" for servicewomen and female

factory workers alike reinforced social ideals of beauty as a feminine responsibility to keep up morale while on the job.⁸⁴

Iconic figures like Rosie the Riveter exemplified how women could work with curled hair and make-up whilst wearing a denim jumpsuit in order to project their beauty under harsh working conditions (Figure 31 above). American fashion designers like Vera Maxwell began to offer their own jumpsuit variations for the WOW that tempted women to begin incorporating fashion into the government-endorsed factory clothing as a way to escape from the unflattering silhouettes. On the home front, it was more important than ever to showcase stylish, attractive work garments to encourage women to work in the factory setting. The concept of “Beauty on Duty” embodied the social expectation of women who worked in the factory setting during World War II as well as the role of American fashion in the 1940s as a whole.

The introduction of American fashion designer-created factory garments transformed how American women viewed their country’s approach to the fashion industry. Newspapers advertised war-worker fashions as “a forward step in the democracy of fashion” and thus assured women that the government was providing them with approved and stylish clothing that allowed designers to assist factory workers in their attempt to support the war effort.⁸⁵ Vera Maxwell, who is known as the first designer to create a jumpsuit for civilian women’s fashion, worked with the Sperry Gyroscope Corporation to produce fashionable and safe factory clothing that followed government accident-prohibiting rules (Figure 34).



Figure 34: Uniform, Vera Maxwell. 1942. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Vera Maxwell, C.I.47.60.1.

The uniform was made from lightweight and durable cotton, fit close to the body with a fabric belt and tapered sleeves and pant legs, and closely mimicked the general construction of Army service uniform coats in the bodice's breast pockets, lapels, and closure.

Maxwell's uniform imitation was likely an intentional statement of the factory worker as a soldier of production. Like servicewomen in the Women's Army Corps, civilian women working on the home front were serving the war effort and remained conscious of their appearance. Soon after, Maxwell and other American fashion designers like Claire McCardell began to integrate the uniform jumpsuit silhouette into their sportswear collections (Figures 35 and 36). Although the factory jumpsuit uniform

derived from the government's need to outfit workers quickly, cheaply, and effectively, designers recognized that these factory clothes translated well into the American interest in sportswear because of their functionality, flexibility, and connection to patriotic efforts. Both Maxwell and McCardell's ensembles were figure flattering, comfortable, of L-85 approved materials, and versatile enough to be worn for a variety of occasions. Each garment also referenced other Army uniform aspects, such as the khaki color or padded shoulders, as a way to suggest that the wearer, though she may not be working in a factory or volunteering for WAC, was supporting her country and serving the war effort in any way possible.



Figure 35: Jumpsuit, Vera Maxwell, 1945. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Vera Maxwell, 2009.300.116.



Figure 36: Ensemble, Claire McCardell, 1941. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, 2009.300.229a,b.

CHAPTER III: MILITARY INFLUENCE ON CIVILIAN FASHION

As a way to bring the “Beauty on Duty” ideal to life through uniforms, American designers translated military ideals and construction into fashion. Fashion designers originally known for setting trends now made military uniforms and uniform-like clothing, thus urging the American public to support and wear the military-inspired looks for a variety of activities such as working in one’s personal victory garden. The U.S. Bureau of Home Economics within the Department of Agriculture offered gardening coverette patterns that looked similar to factory jumpsuits for gardening at home (Figure 37).



Figure 37: Coverette pattern, size 20, c. 1942-45. Distributed by the US Bureau of Home Economics, Department of Agriculture. Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Libraries Trade Literature Collections, IAP 89520002.

It was an expected duty of women to serve the war and look beautiful while doing so.

Soon, pattern advertisements were available for domestic production that showcased belted jumpsuits with other Army-inspired accessories, such as garrison caps (Figure 38).



Figure 38: Pattern for coveralls, size 16, c. 1940. *Pattern Vault* blog, September 2, 2013, <http://blog.pattern-vault.com/?s=siren+suit>.

The creation and promotion of American-made jumpsuits encouraged women to support the economy by purchasing American products and fabric and to go so far as to dress like soldiers as a conspicuous way link themselves with the war effort and exhibit their patriotic support. These jumpsuits also drew military uniform construction processes; not only did they utilize the proper materials and construction restrictions outlined by the government, they were made according to standard sizing as a means to simplify and mass produce patterns to outfit women of all sizes around the country.

European Precursors

Feminizing and creating garments to fit wartime needs was an international affair that eventually influenced ideologies behind the American Look. Like American-designed jumpsuits created to outfit women in a safe and fashionable way, British emergency preparation inspired new garments and silhouettes. In the days leading up to the declaration of war in Europe in September 1939, London prepared its buildings and citizens for potential attack. Although invasion was not an immediate threat, aerial attacks were a definite possibility and citizens had to prepare and organize themselves in whatever way possible to survive. By October, fashion's response to the crisis began to appear in store windows. Siren suits, or zipper-fronted, one-piece jumpsuits intended to be worn over pajamas or nightgowns when attack sirens sounded, began to sell (Figure 39).⁸⁶



Figure 39: Pattern for two-way Siren Suit for 32-36" bust size, Weldon's So-Easy patterns, c.1940. *Pattern Vault* blog, September 2, 2013, <http://blog.pattern-vault.com/?s=siren+suit>.

This garment was designed to be warm, durable, and easy to get in and out of, making them popular for men and women for protection whilst finding shelter in the event of aerial attack. The British government also encouraged women to wear trousers for easier mobility in an emergency, though not all women approved of this revolutionary change in the female wardrobe. Some fashion editors in British *Vogue*, for example, rejected the style in 1939 by chastising women for “[taking] war as an excuse for...parading about in slacks” and instead encouraged them to wear stockings to “raise the national morale by showing her shapely legs once more.”⁸⁷ Nonetheless, some women wore slacks for protection and the overall integration of trousers into the female wardrobe was begun.

Well-known European designers also began to create winter collections that were better adapted to wartime circumstances and restrictions, with practicality being a prime concern.⁸⁸ The coats and long-sleeved elements of crisis fashion could be more easily included to winter collections rather than summer. French designer Elsa Schiaparelli introduced garments with “kangaroo pockets,” or large pouch pockets with a flap closure (Figure 40).



Figure 40: Sketch of a coat with “kangaroo” pockets by Elsa Schiaparelli, autumn 1939. Jonathon Walford, *Forties Fashion: From Siren Suits to the New Look* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 32.

While coats with these pockets were minimal in construction details and embellishments and limited by fabric restrictions in Europe, the construction utilized the fabric allotments in a new way to apply functional elements to a simple garment that would better fit a wartime-affected woman. In her autobiography, Schiaparelli explained her “cash and carry” collection of 1939 was designed so that a “woman who was obliged to leave her home in a hurry or go on duty without a bag could pack all that was necessary to her... to retain the freedom of her hands and yet manage to look feminine.”⁸⁹ Collections also started to incorporate dye colors that were given patriotic or war-themed names like “Aeroplane Grey” or “French Soil Blue” and garment models were similarly named such as the “Leave” evening gown and “Alerte” pajamas.⁹⁰ European clothing was becoming openly inspired by militarism and patriotism by 1940 and soon these kinds of garments and commitment to patriotism through clothing inspired American designers to create their own wartime-themed collections.

The Triumph of the Female Suit

Although the impending threat of attack was not as immediate for Americans, emergency preparation garments were popular in American fashion because of their characteristics and applications to the new social roles of American women. Because circumstances of wartime affected those in every country involved in the war, examples of new garments and silhouettes from Europe were incorporated into American fashion and slowly altered to fit a more American-centric set of ideologies. European military-influenced suits, such as the pantsuit created by Elsa Schiaparelli in Figure. 41, were immediately adopted by American fashion designers because of women’s new role in the

workforce. Those who did not work in factories still took over jobs left behind by enlisted men.



Figure 41: Pantsuit, Elsa Schiaparelli, made in France, winter 1939-40. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 2009.300.1870a,b.

The woman's suit was an appropriate adaptation of the traditional three-piece suit men wore while at work and reflected American clothing priorities from the 1930s and after. The outfit could be tailored to fit a woman's body, consisted of several pieces that could be worn together or individually, was often made from durable and color-fast wool, and ultimately provided a kind of camouflage for a woman in her new professional setting. If she dressed like a man in a tailored suit, she looked like she belonged at the office.

The creation of an American style reached its full development during World War II due to a number of factors. First, fashion design was forced to become self-reliant after the Nazi occupation of Paris in 1939. Despite advances in the promotion of a distinct American style during the 1930s, Americans still looked to Paris for trends. Paris' absence fundamentally shook the American industry's confidence by 1940 and pushed designers to reimagine their creations.⁹¹ After the Nazi Regime took control of the French government in 1939, restrictions on the French fashion industry, censorship of magazines, and the shutting down of fashion houses brought French fashion to a standstill for a short period of time.⁹² Some surviving fashion houses even worked for wives and mistresses of Nazi dignitaries and other Axis leaders. However, the Occupation gave American designers an opportunity to create their own versions of 1940s wardrobe staples, such as the suit, to fit the needs of American customers without the competition and critique of admired European designers. Americans began to rely on their own fashion designers as a way to morally and economically separate themselves from Europe. For American buyers, it would seem unpatriotic to buy garments from designers who dressed and worked under the enemy. Buying American designers and supporting the evolution of an "American Look" was another way to support the war effort.

The war also sparked an American need for practical dress, which for everyone was linked to the dress of men.⁹³ Menswear had been more rational than womenswear in the 1930s. Their clothing sizes were standardized, garments had spacious pockets, a single ensemble was socially acceptable for all of the day's activities, and men wore separates such as pants, shirts, jackets, and sweaters that could be combined or layered for functionality or to suit the formality of the occasion. These characteristics became a

model for womenswear in the 1940s.⁹⁴ In short, menswear became a model for what American womenswear could become in the 1940s. Women had worn menswear-inspired garments before; women's riding and cycling ensembles as well as walking suits from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries directly referenced men's suits in their tailoring and general construction because they could be formed to fit the female body flatteringly. The difference, however, between menswear-inspired sporting ensembles of the early 1900s and women's suits of wartime American in the 1940s is that American sportswear designers integrated symbolically American motifs and silhouettes to align the wearer to the war effort while working in the professional sphere of the home front.

After America's entry into the war in December 1941, a need to reform fashion on the home front was clear and designers began to look to patriotic symbolism as a way to distinguish and assert themselves internationally on the fashion and political scene. It was an opportunity to establish an American fashion industry that, like American democracy, was available to all women and not solely the wealthy. There was also an eagerness to establish an American place in the international fashion industry and to maintain its position after the war.⁹⁵ In terms of construction, the American Look introduced sportswear that emphasized easily adaptable separates and chic practicality. This ideal of function stemmed from the 1930s wardrobe of the sporting, active woman. The notion of being an active woman was transformed in the 1940s when women began working in the industrial and professional spheres. Suits were very popular wardrobe additions because it projected an image of professionalism and overall activeness in the workplace. Advertisements and ground breaking American fashion leaders like Dorothy

Shaver for Lord & Taylor signaled a message was that it was fashionable and patriotic to wear simple clothes, especially easily adaptable suits and separates.⁹⁶

Because of the global nature of the fashion industry before World War II, new garments and silhouettes from Europe were incorporated into American fashion and slowly altered to fit a more American lifestyle. European designers like Elsa Schiaparelli, Jacques Fath, and Jean Lanvin initially introduced masculine-inspired suits to the couture fashion industry. The suit was a success among those who could afford these custom-made, couture garments because they were durable and gave women a visual seriousness and respect that other pieces in their wardrobe did not have. However, the 1930s climate of economic distress in the United States meant people viewed their purchases differently, and the suit was reinterpreted into a simplified and more affordable option for the American customer and her priorities. Two suits in Figures 42 exemplify the differences between European and American style. While both are reactions to wartime fabric shortages, carefully tailored to accentuate the waist, and have the military influence in silhouette, suits by French designer Jeanne Lanvin were flashier in color and had a hand-made constructed trapunto stitching and seaming in the skirt and breast pocket details. American designer Mainbocher's suits, however, were more subtle and basic in construction without the addition of seaming details, thus making it suitable for mass-production and more affordable while adhering to the simplicity attractive to American consumers.

This adaptation of existing garments to fit the needs and ideals of the American public is what drove the development of a new, uniquely American style. The phrase "American Look" was already in circulation during the war years as domestic designers

and promoters strove to find a collective term that would distinguish the country's national style and be representative of the freshness, genuineness, and suitability of the American woman.⁹⁷ This perception echoed the ideal of restraint constructed during the 1930s, which was combined with the pared-down silhouette that the L-85 restrictions necessitated. Today, the American Look can be categorized under sportswear, or versatile and comfortable clothing that was mass-produced and ready to wear for young, active women.⁹⁸ The American Look is also comprised of two sub-categories: resort wear for travel, leisure, and holidays, and town and country wear typically in tweed suiting.⁹⁹

The suit was incredibly popular and is the most iconic garment of the 1940s American female wardrobe because it reflected women's roles in society and referenced the Army service uniform, the most direct form of patriotic symbolism. Military motifs were transposed onto women's bodies through design elements and decoration, which linked their visual identity to the war.¹⁰⁰ The fullness of the shoulder on suit jackets for women, for example, created the illusion of a smaller waist on the wearer that was popular among all women, but it ultimately reflected the padded shoulders on service uniforms (Figure 22 above).¹⁰¹ The simplicity in structure that was applied to soldiers' uniforms could be applied to suits within the American Look because of strict fabric restrictions as well as the perceived notion that embellishment and pageantry challenged American ideals of thrift and functionality like soldier's uniforms. The standard construction of service jackets outlined by government uniform initiatives could be applied to women's suits and allowed for these garments to be mass-produced and affordable to a variety of audiences and budgets. While coordinating with the idea of democratization in the American fashion industry, the incorporation of military

silhouettes, materials, and standard patterning allowed for consumers of the middle class to participate in fashion more frequently than in the past.

Certain dyes and materials were incorporated into the suit to align American fashion with patriotism and femininity as well. Colors were subject to conservation measures; a reduction in the number of fashion colors, especially for wool, was required to conserve chemicals needed for wartime use. The Textile Color Association of the United States released a palette for the fall of 1942 that included a number of shades with patriotic names, such as “Victory Gold,” “Gallant Blue,” “Valor Red,” and “Patriot Green.”¹⁰² Not only did these colors contrast brightly with the earthy tones familiar to soldiers when they returned home on leave, but they also inspired women to incorporate patriotism into every aspect of their clothing. Like in other areas of the American fashion industry, patriotic themes sold well.

Women’s suits were typically made of wool, like Army service uniforms. Because of fabric limitations, maximum efficiency was as much of a concern for American manufacturers in producing garments for civilians as it was for the government in outfitting thousands of soldiers at once. Though perhaps unintentionally, the Army gave the American fashion industry a model for surviving L-85 restrictions. The U.S. Army served as a model for designers and home sewers on how to utilize fabric rations effectively. Designers used similar shapes and silhouettes from service uniforms because the Army had found a successful way to utilize the available materials. Tailoring to emphasize the body not only helped with fabric restrictions, but also worked within social demands for femininity.

To soften fashion's masculine-inspired aesthetic, an emphasis on femininity, sensuality, and the female figure was incorporated into suits and the American Look overall. American designers advertised their intentions to flatter the American woman rather than bring "arty pieces" unsuitable for the practicality so valued by the public during the war.¹⁰³ Garments like the suit which had previously been considered masculine were accepted for feminine clothing during wartime circumstances as socio-economic status and gender roles changed during the war.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, the emphasis the tailored silhouette gave to the female figure in turn emphasized her sensuality and attractiveness to soldiers on leave. This heightened sense of femininity derived from masculine roots; WAC Army uniforms that were adapted to show off feminine characteristics to distinguish the men from the women, for example, certainly influenced the incorporation of the waist-emphasized American silhouette into civilian fashion. Suit jackets that mirrored the service uniform with a more tailored and/or belted waist and exaggerated shoulders, for example, were popular because they incorporated a patriotic reference to Army fashion while highlighting the feminine characteristics of the wearer. Women also wanted to maintain their sex appeal for men despite their taking over masculine jobs during the war. Social belief and advertisements alike assumed that servicemen wanted to get away from the military influence while on leave, and it was a woman's responsibility and the fashion industry's responsibility in turn, to entertain these men with their presumably missed figures.¹⁰⁵

American Designers

Once Americans slowly adjusted to the scarcity of Parisian design during Nazi occupation between June 22, 1940 and August 25, 1944, they began to appreciate

patriotic and military-inspired themes in their wardrobes. American designers came to the forefront of public attention. The creation of an American style reached its full development during World War II when the fashion industry was forced to become self-reliant. Though Parisian couture houses offered useful, easy-fitting clothes with lots of separates for versatility that would have appealed to American buyers, Americans began to rely on their own fashion industry as a way to morally and economically separate themselves from Europe. For American buyers, it was viewed as unpatriotic to buy garments from designers who dressed and worked under the enemy. Buying American designers and supporting the evolution of an “American Look” was another way to support the war effort.

While the Nazi occupation of France caused the shut down of many influential couture designers, officials of the Third Reich demanded the French fashion industry continue producing collections to benefit the state. Mainbocher had left for the United States shortly after the war was declared, Madeline Vionnet closed her salon, and even Chanel, who initially left Paris for the south of France, refused to reopen her salon after her return to Paris.¹⁰⁶ Elsa Schiaparelli, however, kept her fashion house open for the duration of the war, as did Jacques Fath and the House of Worth. However, the fashion houses did not necessarily remain in business because they supported their occupiers. The president of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*, Lucien Lelong, was concerned for couture workers and other industries supplying the couture.¹⁰⁷ Textile mills, embroiderers, seamstresses, milliners, and models all relied upon the survival of couture for their livelihoods. German authorities also realized the economic advantage of the Parisian fashion industry; manufactories serviced military and civil needs, making Paris

an invaluable resource that could not flounder. Furthermore, Germany wanted to world to see a flourishing French capital under occupation, where luxury continued and business thrived under Berlin's oversight.¹⁰⁸

A notion of possible independence from French opinion in the American fashion industry became clearer and clearer as the war continued. As designers created ensembles for public figures of the Third Reich, such as officials' wives and those wealthy customers living within the Axis-controlled countries, American consumers were driven farther away from the European market due to the lack of international dissemination of collections as well as a general distaste for supporting the enemy. A 1943 issue of the magazine *Album de Mode de Figaro*, produced in Monte Carlo, managed to find its way to London and New York.¹⁰⁹ Fashion editors were eager to see what had been happening in Paris since its Occupation, but the overall impression of the collections was unfavorable. The oversized, flamboyant hats and draped full skirts were viewed as vulgar to an American audience who lived under L-85.¹¹⁰ Extravagant Paris fashions and the war turning in favor of the Allies only strengthened American confidence in their fashion industry and designers. Distaste for French collections and the promotion of American designers like Mainbocher, Vera Maxwell, Claire McCardell, and Gilbert Adrian only caused their popularity to rise that much more quickly. Civilians could believe that their American heritage and skill allowed them to create garments to fit the needs of professionally active American women. And, by referencing popular military motifs and silhouettes, such as translating the Army service uniform into their suits, American designers found a way to link their name and garments to the nationalism that drove customers to their products.

As mentioned earlier, Main Rousseau Bocher, “Mainbocher,” was the first American designer to work for the military and then to effectively incorporate military-inspired designs into the civilian fashion scene. After serving in France during World War I, the American-born designer remained abroad and began his career overseas where he worked for French *Vogue* and opened his own maison de couture by 1930.¹¹¹

Mainbocher became known as “the American” in Paris until he relocated to New York City with the rise of the Nazi regime in 1940. His relocation only boosted American trust in his brand; he had gained fame in Paris but left it behind to support his home country and those within it; he was a veteran who left success in Paris to support his home front.

Mainbocher also designed for the American Navy for the WAVES program perhaps in an attempt to reaffirm his American roots to the public and influence other American designers to support military branches and government factory uniform clothing. His connection to the military also attracted women to his brand because of his direct support of the war effort. While his clothing was known to be relatively expensive in comparison to ready-to-wear garments available to middle-class customers, Mainbocher advertised himself as the most “inexpensive dressmaker in the country” because of the quality and promised longevity of his pieces.¹¹² Like with other American designers, the price of Mainbocher’s clothing would have been understandable to husbands funding their wives’ wardrobes. Men often purchased custom-made suits with the intention of wearing them for several years. This notion of longevity drove the American fashion industry during World War II. Not only were Mainbocher’s garments stylish, they were functional and high quality as well.

Mainbocher's collection of suits continued his connection to American military uniforms in structure and referenced general men's tailoring and suit construction of the period, while using construction details to configure the silhouette to the female body. Mainbocher's suit jacket (Figure 42) looks quite masculine in nature.



Figure 42: Suit, Mainbocher, 1946. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 2009.300.6772a,b.

It incorporates the traditional double-breasted center front closure used in men's coats from the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The neckline is high and the shoulders are padded, and the waistline is not emphasized by a belt or tailoring as one would expect for a women's suit. Instead, princess seams in the back panel of the jacket and pleating at the waistline allowed the jacket to flare out from the waist to make it appear smaller. The

same can be said for dinner suit in Figure 43 in which attention is drawn to the waistline with six silver decorative buttons.



Figure 43: Suit, Mainbocher, 1946. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 2009.300.6772a,b.

In other pieces from his 1947 collection, Mainbocher included further militaristic details. While referencing a man's tuxedo jacket and feminizing it pairing it with a black silk skirt, his evening ensemble in Figure 44 also resembles servicewomen's uniforms in structure but with a formal twist: a tailored, single-breasted jacket is paired with a slightly flared, knee-length skirt that could move with the body while accentuating the feminine figure.



Figure 44: Evening Suit, Mainbocher, fall/winter 1947. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 2009.300.170a,b.

His coat (Figure 45) is a wonderful example of how the designer incorporated American military aesthetics in his collections. The coat, made in gray wool, most directly references the Army service uniform with its shaped, padded shoulders, four-collar lapel, and four-pocket configuration on the left and right front sides.



Figure 45: Coat, Mainbocher, 1946. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Arturo and Paul Peralta-Ramos, 2009.300.169.

Ultimately, Mainbocher's designs exemplified a truly American look; his ensembles were composed of simplistic separates that extended the longevity of the wearer's wardrobe and also aligned the wearer with the war effort by mirroring militaristic construction and materials.

Vera Maxwell attracted consumer attention during World War II with her factory uniforms that were designed to bring a feminine, modern quality to the unflattering and unpopular factory jumpsuits that women initially had to wear when they assumed the jobs of enlisted men. She then incorporated other military elements in her fashion collections, which kept existing customers coming back and enticed new clientele to purchase military-inspired garments that aligned them with the war effort. Maxwell was

potentially at her most inventive during the 1940s when she incorporated new fabrics and separates-based suit ensembles into her collection. She was one of a group of women designers promoted by Dorothy Shaver, president of Lord & Taylor. In 1939 Maxwell began contracting with Browns, Jacobson & Linde, a sportswear and tailored clothing manufacturer, to begin her work as an independent American designer.¹¹³ As mentioned earlier, Maxwell was active in designing factory garments for women in a more fashionable silhouette.

By 1942, she began to incorporate garments into her collection that utilized separates that could be altered or recombined as a new outfit. This became a trademark of her designs as well as a trademark of American sportswear. Her bloomer playsuit (Figure 46), for example, could be worn on its own or under a skirt and vest for business attire.¹¹⁴ The textile for the bloomer pants utilized an Allied manufactured fiber in response to material restrictions during the war and likely triggered American interest because of its obvious military connotation. The bloomers were made of “parachute cloth,” a fabric made from a cellulose acetate fiber called Fortisan by its English manufacturer, Celanese Corporation, that was also often used in parachutes for Army Air Corps and Air Force pilots after the 1941 trade embargo on Japanese silk.¹¹⁵



Figure 46: Ensemble, Vera Maxwell, 1942. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Celanese Corporation of America, 2009.300.102a-d.

Maxwell's suit designs also referenced Army uniforms in silhouette, further exemplifying the military's impact on women's suits of the decade. Like those on women's WAC uniforms and men's service uniforms, three designs from her 1945 collections incorporated accentuated, boxy shoulders and common Army dye colors like olive green and khaki (Figures 47 and 48). Her suit jackets also often had large lapels and a central button closure that mimicked those of servicemen's uniform jackets.



Figure 47: Suit, Vera Maxwell, 1945. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, anonymous gift, 2009.300.3484,b.



Figure 48: Ensemble, Vera Maxwell, 1945. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Marian Stephenson, 2009.300.7072a-c.

Maxwell also incorporated these features in her dresses, such as a grey wool dress from 1945 (Figure 49); the features of the dress include a boxy padded shoulder, wide lapel, and four flap pockets similar to those on the Class “A” Army service jacket.



Figure 49: Dress, Vera Maxwell, 1945 (right). Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Vera Maxwell, 2009.300.6541. Officer Service Coat, winter 1943 (reenactment costume) (left). “United States Army: Regulation Uniforms and Equipment, last modified March 2016, <http://www.wwiiimpressions.com/newusarmyuniforms.html>

She, like other designers of the decade, looked to the Army for design influences because its presence was so prevalent in society. Between the number of men and women enlisting to serve at home and abroad as well as war material factory workers, Vera

Maxwell catered to how Americans' military-influenced lifestyle and provided women with uniforms to coordinate with their mindset.

Claire McCardell is not only remembered as a pioneer of American fashion, but also a designer who used simple techniques and construction to create the most effective mass-produced garments in the industry. She was educated and worked in New York City, the center of American fashion, and with the help of fashion editors' promotion of her iconic sportswear her clothing became synonymous with casual dress.¹¹⁶ Though her career began in the 1930s, many of McCardell's most famous designs answered the restrictions of wartime clothing production in inventive and popular ways.¹¹⁷ As discussed earlier, her manipulation of textiles in her dresses achieved three-dimensional interest in garments that utilized minimum amounts of fabric to meet fabric restrictions and keep her collections affordable. As the female suit grew in popularity, McCardell's suits drew upon a military-inspired sense of functionality over flash rather than directly referenced to uniform construction details. McCardell's suits often consisted of simply constructed, fitted jackets and calf-length matching skirts in earth tones and common fabrics.

With the exception of her jumpsuit (Figure 32 above) which mirrored factory jumpsuits of the era and directly referenced wartime civilian uniforms, her silhouettes were slightly less structural than those of other designers. Instead McCardell referenced Army uniform components and wartime-inspired needs in her garments in a subtle way. Her suits often incorporated the large, "kangaroo"-style pockets invented by Schiaparelli earlier in the decade, thus indicating that the woman wearing her suit was on the move and needed her clothing to move with her body (Figures 50 and 51). The simple brown

suit (Figure 50) also incorporates a waistband similar to the “Ike Jacket;” the bottom of the jacket is cut smaller to cinch around the waist and several button closures on the side adjusted fit according to the individual’s body.



Figure 50: Suit, Claire McCardell for Townley Frocks, 1944. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Claire McCardell, C.I. 49.37.36a,b.



Figure 51: Playsuit, Claire McCardell for Townley Frocks, 1943. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Claire McCardell, C.I.44.118a-c.

Another example of subtle militaristic inspiration can be seen in McCardell's coat, made in 1949 (Figure 52) which incorporated similar pocket styles to the Class "A" uniform. In comparison to Mainbocher's and Vera Maxwell's suit silhouettes that emphasized a heavy, padded shoulder and lapel to conspicuously reference soldier's uniforms, McCardell instead aligned her wearer with the military by the use of simple, standard construction and sizing that worked well for mass-production.



Figure 52: Coat, Claire McCardell for Townley Frocks, c. 1949. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Mrs. Robert Lescher, 2009.300.7259a,b.

Like the shoulder seams on the jackets described above, another suit (Figure 53) also exhibits little padding in the shoulder seams and instead uses tailored waist seams to emphasize a feminine figure in a standard size.



Figure 53: Suit, Claire McCardell for Townley Frocks, 1942. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Claire McCardell, C.I.49.37.25a-c.

Gilbert Adrian, known simply as Adrian, epitomized the magic of Hollywood glamour and created a unique American style through showing his fashions first on the silver screen. He began his career on Broadway, but moved to work for MGM in Los Angeles as a costume designer from 1928 to 1941.¹¹⁸ During the darkest years of the Great Depression, Adrian combined an appreciation for the detail of Parisian couture with a distinctive American sensibility, thus popularizing his name amongst the American public before World War II. His connection to Hollywood also promoted his designs as part of the general American desire for escapism during the war. Americans

often went to the movies as a pastime to escape their daily routines, and when they saw his costumes of new fashionable suits and dresses on powerful, confident, and admired American actresses, American customers naturally wanted to emulate the styles they saw on the silver screen. His work on Joan Crawford's broad-shouldered and narrow-waisted power suits in the 1930s in films such as “No More Ladies” and “Mildred Pierce” introduced architectural elements and an overall sense of drama to the masculine, military-style garment for the 1940s (Figure 54).



Figure 54: Joan Crawford, costume by Adrian for “No More Ladies,” 1935 (left). Joan Crawford, costume by Adrian for “Mildred Pierce,” 1945 (right). IMDb.com.

The image of Crawford as a powerful, independent woman in a suit helped pioneer a revolution in the way American women dressed and brought the garment to popularity.

The suit also, once again, resembled military uniforms commonly seen at the time the film debuted and continued to promote militaristic reference in female clothing. Because she wore Adrian's suit, this perhaps allowed him to play with the basic design in a way that other designers of the 1940s could not.

In comparison to other designers of the decade, Adrian tended to incorporate a more playful energy into his suits. He created a variety of garments to fit a variety of tastes and personalities while still adhering to the general tailored silhouette made popular in the 1940s. Some of his suits and dresses were controlled and sober, which was appropriate for the workplace or for the more conservative woman (Figures 55 and 56).



Figure 55: Suit, Gilbert Adrian, 1940s. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, purchase from The New School for Social Research Fund and Irene Lewisohn, 1995.468.2a-c.



Figure 56: Ensemble, Gilbert Adrian, 1942-52. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Patricia Pastor and Barry Friedman, 2012.538.9a,b.

The silhouette remained traditional: the jacket was tailored with princess seams or more simple side seams, and minimal decoration or pockets filled the front of the jacket. Other pieces had a subtle, architectural edge that would have worked for a serious and fashion-forward woman, such as those ensembles with flap details (Figures 57 and 58) or the draping techniques (Figure 59).



Figure 57: Suit, Gilbert Adrian, c. 1944. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Jones Apparel Group, USA, 2002.326.7a,b.



Figure 58: Suit, Gilbert Adrian, fall/winter 1950. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift from Joseph S. Simms, 1979.432.8a,b.



Figure 59: Suit, Gilbert Adrian, 1940s. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, purchase from Irene Lewisohn Trust, 1995.184.2a,b.

For the more flamboyant woman, Adrian made suits that were brightly colored or of patterned fabric (Figures 60 and 61).



Figure 60: Suit, Gilbert Adrian, 1948. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Joseph S. Simms, 1979.432.5a-c.



Figure 61: Suit, Gilbert Adrian, c. 1949. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Jones Apparel Group, USA, 2002.326.29a,b.

His snakeskin-printed silk dinner suit (Figure 62) elevates a basic suit silhouette into a dramatic ensemble that recalls some of the designer's well-known Hollywood costumes.¹¹⁹ Women were beginning to adopt the suit as a multipurpose garment for both professional and social settings.



Figure 62: Dinner Suit, Gilbert Adrian, c. 1942. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum Costume Collection, gift of Janet Gaynor Adrian, 2009.300.1298a,b.

Overall, it is clear that Adrian, like other American designers of the decade, utilized the popular attraction to military silhouettes and patriotic details to bring in his clientele. The small geometric “Victory ‘V’” on the pocket of the patterned suit jacket above (Figure 61 above) and the Army service uniform-inspired silhouette and accessories on one of the architectural suit jackets (Figure 58 above) subtly reference wartime motifs without distracting from the wearer’s beauty. Adrian’s history as a costume designer helped to set his garments apart from other designers’ suits. His creativity and high level of custom-made quality were all the more amazing in the wartime era of fabric restrictions.

The American Fashion Industry and Its Promotion

Economically, the American Look's reference to military ideals, silhouettes, and imagery boosted the United States' defense capabilities during the war. The support for all things American encouraged women to buy locally in whatever way possible, and when their fashion industry promoted patriotism and local materials, the American Look and its designers caught fire publically. The social situation demanded thrift and conservation out of necessity during World War II, meaning that industrial production increased in order to make mass-produced, ready-to-wear garments that were affordable and L-85 approved for the influx of customers. The economic boost in production also stimulated technological advancement on the home front. Manufactured organic rayon fabrics was incorporated into fashion as an alternative to using natural fabrics needed for the war effort, and they inspired a sense of progress, modernism, and the overall success of the country in a time of conflict. Overall, economic and technological progress helped raise home front morale and solidify the American fashion industry on the global scene.

Promotion of the American Look and its designers was key in building the confidence and support of the American people. Even before Paris was occupied, speculation began to spread in the United States as to what might happen to American fashion without direction from French designers.¹²⁰ Twenty years had passed since the establishment of New York City's "Seventh Avenue" as the center for American fashion, but American designers were still viewed by many as followers of Parisian designs rather than innovators.¹²¹ This attitude had begun to shift in the 1930s when department stores, fashion magazines, and fashion editors alike promoted American designers' affordable ready-to-wear lines to keep the American fashion industry alive during the Depression.

However, the industry leaders had their doubts as to how comparable American designers would be to French during the war.¹²²

By the fall of 1940, fashion editors increasingly promoted American fashion after France had fell under German control and French collections were only available to Axis countries. Editors at *Vogue* noted “the fashion spot-light turns on New York and our title changes from ‘Paris Openings’ to ‘American Openings.’”¹²³ The September fashion issue emphasized the word “American” and “America” more than ever before and featured articles on individual local designers to identify them as trend makers.¹²⁴ Many of the best-known names in American fashion of the 1940s, like Hattie Carnegie, Adrian, and Henri Bendel, had already claimed distinction in the previous decade, but new names achieved prominence during the late thirties and early forties. Clare Potter and Claire McCardell were especially showcased. Other designers such as Norman Norell and Nettie Rosenstein came into American focus during the second half of the 1940s and carried the American Look through the proceeding decades.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor at the end of 1941, American mass media shifted from encouraging Americans to support local fashion to alerting consumers of the new lifestyles and purchases they had to make for the war effort.¹²⁵ Memories of wartime conditions from the First World War and the two years Americans had witnessed the conflicts and challenges of the British via newspaper reports, movies, and radio broadcasts had helped prepare them for the sacrifices to be made. When it came to fashion, *Vogue* acknowledged in February 1942 that women would “have to clothe themselves in sackcloth” if that was what was needed to help win the war.¹²⁶ Rather than go to this extreme though, editors increased promotion of American designers and their

collections to urge consumers to support the local industry instead of funding the enemy in France.

Department stores like Macy's, Franklin Simon, Bergdorf Goodman, and Lord & Taylor also began to use American identity and ideals of Americanness to entice women into their stores. Display spaces targeted middle-class women who were able to afford every item on display and the activities for which the clothes were intended (Figure 63).¹²⁷



Figure 63: Lord & Taylor window display, 1945. *The Department Store Museum: Lord & Taylor* Blog, August 2011, <http://www.thedepartmentstoremuseum.org/2010/05/lord-taylor.html>.

These retailers were keen to encourage customers to maintain their lifestyle standards and interest in fashion despite wartime sacrifices.¹²⁸ Their strategy was to cast clothing as

distinctly American, clothes that appealed to patriotism and long-held American ideals in fabric and dress that would entice women to come into their store.¹²⁹ In 1945, Dorothy Shaver took up the American Look as a rallying cry to customers to link the fashion industry with the needs of the American people. Lord & Taylor, for example, promoted the connection between sportswear and Americanness (Figure 64).

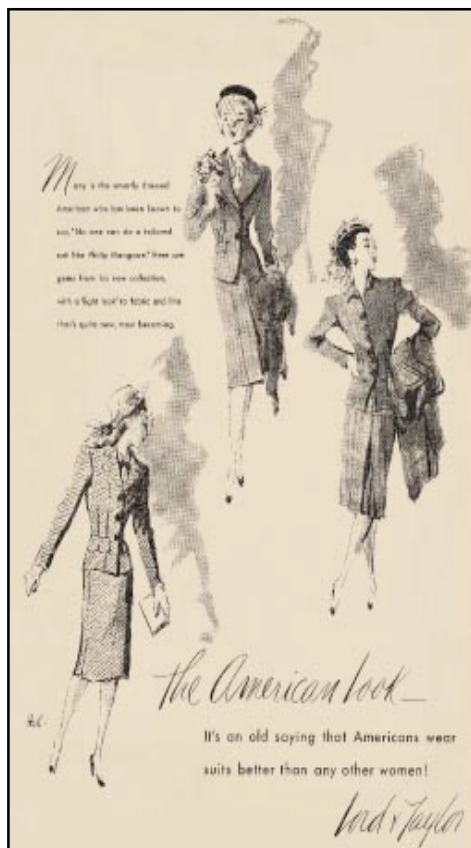


Figure 64: Lord & Taylor window display, 1945. *The Department Store Museum: Lord & Taylor* Blog, August 2011, <http://www.thedepartmentstoremuseum.org/2010/05/lord-taylor.html>.

As mentioned earlier, approval by Dorothy Shaver was essential for the success of the suit. She promoted American designers during the Depression to encourage the public's understanding of the fashion industry's importance in the rejuvenation of the American economy.¹³⁰ American woman designers were showcased as creating clothes for their countrywomen and having a greater understanding of the needs of the American woman than a Parisian couturier.¹³¹

It was important for stores to maintain their identity and existing audiences while simultaneously developing new ideas that might encourage new customers, and after 1941 retailers began to target young women through various publications. Sportswear was a key element in advertising campaigns, which usually coincided with seasonal activities and attracted active young women. Advertisements were placed in the prestigious early pages of publications that led readers into the magazine and established the fashion status of the advertiser.¹³² The growing congruence between sportswear and ideals of American-ness was extended into fashion magazines, which were in turn connected to emergent American designers.

Newspapers also played a lead role in influencing women to buy from American designers and to wear new military-inspired looks. Several articles from the *New York Times* seemed to praise the arrival of L-85 restrictions, claiming that it allowed for the liberation of American designers from the heritage of the past, forcing them to forget tradition to create clothes to fit within the yardage-saving limitations of the order.¹³³ The American public began to understand, as Dorothy Shaver encouraged, that American designers were “completely freed from any foreign influence... and are creating authentic all-American styles, suited to the needs of the emergency.”¹³⁴ It became clear that

American fashion commentators for newspapers approved of American style and thus encouraged the public to do the same. The practical characteristics of clothing within the American Look were promoted as an opportunity to “give women limitless leeway to elaborate them with accessories” that would give the “same costume... a double life.”¹³⁵ The suit in particular was promoted as “an all-important item in every woman’s wardrobe. Her ‘uniform’ will be classic tweed or woolen.”¹³⁶ By 1942, it seemed as though the American public had fully accepted the emergence of an American Look.

Celebrities played a part in promoting the American Look as well as Army-inspired garments. Hollywood icons that supported the war effort and wore American designers drove public opinion in supporting the local fashion industry. As in the 1930s, the influence of Hollywood was the push that the American public, notably women, needed to whole-heartedly buy locally and align themselves to the war effort. Clark Gable, for example, joined the Army in 1941 after explaining to the media that “there is a war to win, and I consider it my right to fight.”¹³⁷ He was a tremendously influential actor in Hollywood as well as the country as a whole; thus his determination to support the war effort by serving in the Army set an example for men and women civilians to serve or work in factories in government-created or approved clothing. Both Ingrid Bergman and Joan Crawford, as mentioned earlier, helped to display military-inspired, American-designed clothing for the public in film roles as well as in off-screen photos and public outings. Those who emulated these stars in turn emulated their clothing styles and looked to American designers to provide them with popular styles of the time.

The appeal of military symbolism not only aligned American women to the war effort in an inherent by American way through the American Look of the 1940s, but also

helped to establish the position of the American fashion industry on an international level. By the end of the war, the American clothing industry was larger and more independent than it had been before the war. American designs and designers were featured in international magazines and the legitimacy of American fashion became obvious on a global scale.

American culture also played a role in influencing Army uniforms during the war, thus making the relationship between the two spheres more mutual than expected. The “bi-swing” pleat was introduced on service coats by 1942 originally to allow for easier movement in drill and field exercises. Soldiers, however, quickly came to regard the detail as a “swing pleat.” In popular soldier opinion, the regulation pleat was inserted into service jackets to prevent them tearing down the back seams during swing dancing events in parties and clubs.¹³⁸ While American fashion designers were adapting service uniforms to fit the social needs of women in American culture, soldiers believed that the government adapted their service uniforms to fit the social needs of soldiers at cultural events.

CHAPTER IV: IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II MILITARY INFLUENCED FASHION IN LATER DECADES

The relationship between the military and American fashion in the 1940s was accentuated to create an American Look and an overall sense of American identity in a number of industries during World War II. The appeal of military symbolism not only aligned American women to the war effort in an inherent American way outlined in the American Look of the 1940s, but it also helped to establish the position of the American fashion industry on an international level for the remainder of the twentieth century through today. Patriotism drove the initial success of the American fashion industry; what would become the iconic female suit of the 1940s in later decades would not have reached the heights of its popularity without reference to soldiers' uniforms and the inherent idea that the wearer was aligned with the war effort. By the end of the war, the American clothing industry was larger and more independent than it had been before the war, in large part because of military-inspired clothing and how it made the American consumer feel.

After the war came to a close in May 1945, American fashion designers continued to include military-inspired suits and other garments in their collections because these patriotic garments became symbols of truly American fashion within the international fashion industry. Suits that referenced Army "Class A" uniform service jackets, for

example, were a unique conception in American fashion that quickly rivaled French fashion after the war. Coats and dresses began to mirror military service uniforms alongside the suit for casual, professional, and formal attire. Indiana-born designer Norman Norell was one of many American designers who continued to reference military uniforms in his collections of the 1950s to the 1970s. Like the suit in Figure 65, Norell designed several suits that referenced the service jacket silhouette, construction, and color.



Figure 65: Suit by Norman Norell, fall/winter 1972-73. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Gustave Tassell, President, Norman Norell, Inc., 1973.205.5a-d.

While he tended to incorporate more vibrant, rich colors into his coats and dresses (Figures 66 and 67), his garments also followed traditional service jacket construction to give the clothes a structured, obviously military inspired look. These coats, created twenty years apart, have similar construction characteristics and also feature large front pockets and heavy lapels in an effort to reference military uniform, thus showing that military-inspired garments were timeless and popular in non-wartime circumstances.



Figure 66: Coat by Norman Norell, 1953. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. Mortimer Soloman, 1973.200.4.



Figure 67: Coat by Norman Norell, 1972-73. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Gustave Tassell, President, Norman Norell, Inc., 1973.105.7a, b.

When the French fashion industry was revived in the 1950s with Christian Dior's "New Look," the division between American and French fashion after the war was very clear. In his memoir, *Dior by Dior*, the designer rationalized how he desires to change design tastes which had shifted in European and the United states during and after the war, explaining that "[France] was coming out of a time of war. Women in uniform looked square-shouldered, like boxers. I drew flower with rounded shoulders [and] full, feminine busts."¹³⁹ The difference between Dior's rounded silhouettes and those created by designers like Norman Norell widened the gap and market appeal to consumers between American and European aesthetics. These differences in collections are

indicative of how the military suit, then, allowed for the American fashion industry to break all ties and dependency on French designs.

In the decades after the war, European designers such as Yves Saint Laurent introduced military-inspired suits (Figures 68 and 69) into his collections after leaving the Dior fashion house, thus reflecting how American designs began to influence French fashion.



Figure 68: Suit jacket by Yves Saint Laurent, c. 1968. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Roz Gersten Jacobs, 1997.244.2a, b.



Figure 69: Suit by Yves Saint Laurent, 1969. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Diana Vreeland, 1984.607.15a,b.

By the 1980s Saint Laurent continued to draw from American military-inspired female suits and coats in his 1984 spring/summer collection (Figures 70 and 71), indicating that the military uniform-inspired suit became a timeless icon of American fashion that spread through the international fashion industry and remained a wardrobe staple for professional women.



Figure 70: Suit by Yves Saint Laurent, spring/summer 1984. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Thomas L. Kempner, 2006.420.44a-j.



Figure 71: Coat, Yves Saint Laurent, spring/summer 1984. Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mireille Levy, 1984.1631.1a-c.

Modern European ready-to-wear fashion also harkens military service uniforms in silhouette and construction. Hennes & Mauritz AB (also known as H&M), a Swedish company known for its fast-fashion for men and women, offered suits and military jackets in their fall 2014 collection (Figure 72).



Figure 72: Suit jacket, fall/winter 2014. Personal collection.

Overall, the existence of the military uniform-inspired garments from World War II to today have established a truly American, iconic look that was, and still is, popular amongst American consumers as well as Europeans. Perhaps unexpectedly, the military and fashion spheres compliment one another; fashion has always been linked to social and political events that are often sparked and developed from wartime circumstances. The fast, mass-production capabilities of Army uniforms, as discussed earlier, were easily translated into civilian fashion during World War II, which only strengthened American consumer's desire to wear garments that referenced the military to align themselves to the war effort and later what was considered an "American Look" once Paris fashions reestablished themselves. The development of the "American Look" during World War II relied on the United States' militaristic strategies in service uniform and factory clothing production for inspiration to generate iconic, originally American designs that continued to inspire American and European fashion designers into the twenty-first century.

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