

AS SEEN  
IN VOGUE

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A Century of American Fashion  
in Advertising

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TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY PRESS

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# Preface

In the late nineteenth century, a symbiotic, tripartite relationship between clothing mass production, fashion journalism, and mass-media advertising became firmly established. Each fueled the success of the other as the three intertwined industries evolved and grew during the second industrial revolution of the 1880s and 1890s. New manufacturing technologies and distribution channels broadened the categories of apparel that could be mass produced. Timely fashion reports in the mass media spread the gospel of trends and generated a widespread awareness of style. Advertising served a triple role by inculcating consumers with a desire for fashion and modernity, by promoting product availability to audiences coast to coast, by serving as supporting style guides for what to wear and how. Fashion catalogs, for instance, were mailed to mansions in New York and San Francisco and to the most isolated prairie farmstead and the most remote cabin in the Appalachian Mountains. The wide array of fashion options produced by ready-to-wear makers season after season, coupled with the seductive images and compelling copywriting in fashion journalism and advertising, manipulated an ever-widening socioeconomic segment of consumers into aspira-

tional behavior. Increasingly, people wanted more than just basic clothing, they wanted fashion.

The significant availability and broad assortment of inexpensive ready-to-wear in the late nineteenth century are evident to anyone who flips through the mammoth “wishbooks” of the period, particularly those from Sears, Roebuck, and Company or Montgomery Ward. By the close of the nineteenth century, most every imaginable category of apparel was mass produced in affordable price ranges, and could be shipped easily and quickly to virtually every home in America. As fashion styles changed more frequently—from the biennial shows of the 1880s to the quarterly seasonal collections of the 1890s—ready-to-wear manufacturers developed ever more efficient turnaround cycles and mass produced the latest styles in short order. Editorials in mass-circulation periodicals eagerly reported on these latest styles. Retailers in turn kept the American consumer desiring the new fashion looks with illustrated catalog supplements and a barrage of magazine and newspaper advertising.

The arrangement of the categories in this study is segmented somewhat like a ready-to-wear catalog or a depart-

ment store in which key fashions are on the main floor and related categories such as accessories, intimate apparel, and swimwear are in other departments. As with a catalog or store floorset, space is limited, so not every type of fashion can be featured. Some forms of clothing are too specialized for a general study, like riding habits or athletic wear. Moreover, not all categories have spanned a century. Some accessories, for example, that were once crucial to the correctly accoutered ensemble became obsolete as fashion accents: fans, parasols, and walking sticks in the 1920s, and gloves in the 1960s.

Among the themes that are explored in this study is how American fashion advertising reflected or changed society. This duality of advertising has intrigued scholars across many disciplines. On the one hand, our archives of advertising materials are documentaries of American history: what we wore and ate, how we worked and played, what kinds of houses and cars we owned, and how we viewed our social values and hierarchies. On the other hand, advertisements also show how and when marketing successfully changed consumers' behavior. For example, the massive advertising campaigns by cosmetics manufacturers within just a few years following World War I successfully overturned what previously had been a long-standing social stigma: the "painted lady" of ill repute had become the self-reliant "New Woman." Similarly, mass advertising was instrumental in launching new products or expanding style awareness for everything from new perfumes to the latest fashion trends. In 1938, *Vogue* noted:

Drummed into all of us, young and old, is the unrelenting urge to look attractive—drummed in by that fine American invention, "fashion promotion," [which includes] blasting and gargantuan campaigns to put over ideas, our regiment of glossy fashion magazines, banners of printed words, miles of costly films, endless publicity stunts, armies of stylists, and the millions invested to induce us to wear cottons or velvets or cajole us into believing that unless we rub a specific color on our lips all chances for love will be lost.<sup>1</sup>

And it all worked superbly. Advertising helped the American ready-to-wear industry to become the fashion stylist for the world. Advertising also paid for the fashion writers, editors, and photographers whose work influenced and guided ready-to-wear makers, who in turn bought more advertising.

This pervasive power of advertising in American culture accounts for the selection of fashion ads as the primary sources of illustrations for this study. These vignettes of history are the true mirrors of American style across the decades. Whereas fashion journalism most often featured reports on couture, which was the the domain of an elite, affluent segment of society, fashion advertising targeted a broad spectrum

of the masses. Wrote fashion historian Caroline Milbank, "The average American woman found the most realistic and affordable clothes, other than those featured in the occasional 'Bargains' or 'Finds' article, in the advertisements of *Vogue* or *Bazaar*."<sup>2</sup> For example, few women could afford the hand-beaded gowns of Paul Poiret in 1910, but most every American woman could afford the mass-produced adaptations of Poiret hobble skirts. Nor could most American women afford the superbly cut garments from the House of Dior in the 1950s, but all American women enjoyed some form of the Dior New Look as interpreted and applied to production lines by American ready-to-wear makers.

Even beyond the influences of fashion silhouettes from innovators such as Poiret or Dior, in a great many instances, American women did not realistically want to wear most of the couture styles that featured prominently in the reports of fashion magazines. Women enjoyed looking at the high-style clothing, often with amusement, but could not imagine themselves in Mary Nowitzky's zouave trousers in 1935, or a topless swimsuit from Rudi Gernreich in 1964, or a red molded-plastic bustier from Issey Miyake in 1980. Yet these, and innumerable other high-drama costumes, have been many times the focus of fashion editorials, even to the present day.

Granted, even the most unwearable collection of Paris or Italian fashions is still, nonetheless, news. When well written, well photographed or illustrated, and well-presented in a quality format, fashion reporting will always have an audience. Few can argue that, given such high standards—and longevity—*Vogue* is the preeminent fashion publication in America.

A second point of methodology in this research is the use of advertisements from the American edition of *Vogue* as the primary source of illustrations. The foremost reason is that the periodical spans the entire twentieth century, twenty-five years longer than the British or French editions. Second, the quality of paper and printing has been exceptional from the beginning of its publication, so that reproductions of the illustrations are crisp and clear. Third, the success of the magazine has been a magnet for fashion advertisers, whose target audience is the subscription mailing list of *Vogue*. Some recent editions have approached eight hundred pages—most of which were ads.

One important distinction between this study of fashion based on *Vogue* and other similar works is that the focus here is on fashion as interpreted and worn by American women. Dior, Schiaparelli, and Saint Laurent may have been world leaders in fashion, but Macy's, Bloomingdale's, and Penney's showed in their advertising how American women adapted contemporary modes to their lifestyles. Examples of the American mass market influencing Parisian designers include

— P R E F A C E —

the demand for shorter dress hemlines of the early 1920s, the rejection of the midi and maxi styles of the late 1960s, the resistance to the punk and Japanese Big Look of the 1980s, and the disregard of the grunge (“groonge”) phenomenon of the 1990s.

In addition, the important works on fashion in *Vogue* by Jane Mulvagh (*Vogue: History of Twentieth Century Fashion*), Georgina Howell (*In Vogue: Seventy-five Years of Style*), and Linda Watson (*Vogue: Twentieth Century Fashion*) are based on British *Vogue*. Differences between the British and American editions of *Vogue* are significant. Most people might think that the British edition, and indeed, any of the other worldwide editions (Italian, Spanish, German, Australian) are simply translations of American versions. Instead, content, editorial direction, and of course advertising are unique to each edition. From a historical perspective, the trends of fashions many times were different from those in America. For example, Britain had to endure the austerity styles of the Second World War well beyond the launch of Dior’s New Look in 1947. “British women had to ‘make do’

with their Utility fashions,” noted Jane Mulvagh. “The New Look was considered a political outrage, a calculated defiance against austerity controls.”<sup>3</sup> But American *Vogue* raved about Dior’s revolution from the start, and American ready-to-wear makers and retailers almost instantaneously presented their versions of the New Look in volumes of ads. Another example is the emergence of the mod look of the 1960s, which Americans did not accept as quickly as the British. Moreover, even with the common language of English, the fashion terminology differed in the British editions where “suspenders” meant garters, “tights” meant pantyhose, and “macs” meant trench coats.

Hence, this study provides a uniquely American perspective of fashion in the twentieth century. Not only is the evolution of fashion reviewed and illustrated, but so too are the businesses of fashion journalism, fashion advertising, and ready-to-wear manufacturing. The influence of this symbiotic tripartite has been enormous in American culture, reflecting, changing, and defining the style of each era and its generation.



1965

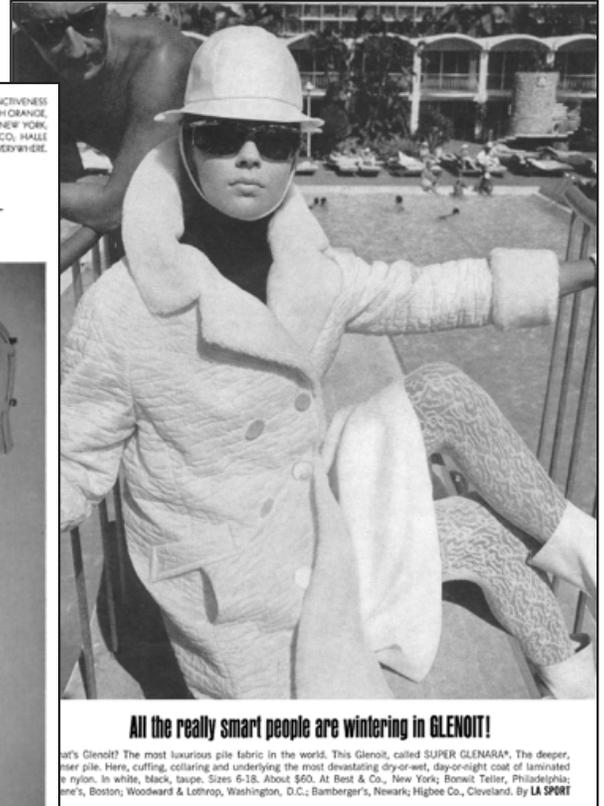
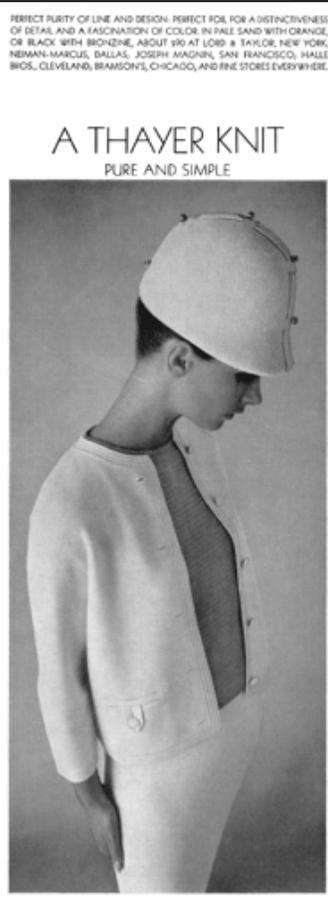


Figure 5-6. The futuristic look of American fashions in the midsixties was inspired by the 1964 space-age collection from Courrèges.

After being largely ignored for almost twenty years, Hollywood once again began to influence American fashions and style. (Figure 5-9.) Sensuous, luxurious interpretations of Renaissance dresses for eveningwear were derived from *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965). *Dr. Zhivago* (1965) boosted sales of fur coats, capes, hats, gloves, and muffs. The makeup worn by Elizabeth Taylor in *Cleopatra* (1963) revolutionized the cosmetic industry and opened the door for the painted face of the midsixties. In addition, the exoticism of ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern costumes from *Cleopatra* and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) inspired the “Sheherazaderie” and “desertique” styles of caftans, turbans, and balloon-legged chalwar trousers. (Figure 5-10.) Although *Vogue* asserted that this “exoticism and eroticism” was “deliciously translated in the modern idiom of at-home clothes, clothes for la vie privée,”<sup>15</sup> many elements of the look would be appropriated for the streetwear of counterculture groups. Ankle bracelets,

toe rings, and slave bracelets (finger rings attached by tiny chains to metal bracelets) became antiestablishment accessories.

### Counterculture and the Late Sixties

Throughout the midsixties, President Lyndon Johnson worked tirelessly to build his Great Society programs for America. His ideas included a war on poverty to educate and provide job skills for every American. He maneuvered Medicare and the most sweeping civil rights legislation since Reconstruction through a reluctant Congress. At the same time, he also committed more and more American soldiers to the quagmire of Vietnam.

Student protests against the war began as early as 1965 and quickly spread to campuses all across the country. The American people began to listen to their youngsters, and the





**Figure 5-8.** American ready-to-wear makers responded to the revealing cutaway, cutout, and sheer styles created by London and Paris designers with tamer cropped tops or minimal insets of mesh. Ads 1965.

tide of public opinion turned against military involvement in Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War was a key hot-button issue in the election of 1968. A protest at the Democratic convention in Chicago turned violent, and Americans watched network broadcasts in shock as their teenage children were beaten by police in riot gear. As a consequence of the war and negative public opinion against the Johnson administration, the Republicans recaptured the White House. No single figure of the 1960s brought the idea of the “Establishment” into focus like Richard Nixon. For law-and-order conservatives, it was about time; for most of America’s youth, almost nothing could have been more polarizing.

The youthquake especially took center stage in America during the second half of the decade. The sociopolitical movements and activities of subcultures kept parents, teachers, politicians, and fashion designers constantly guessing.

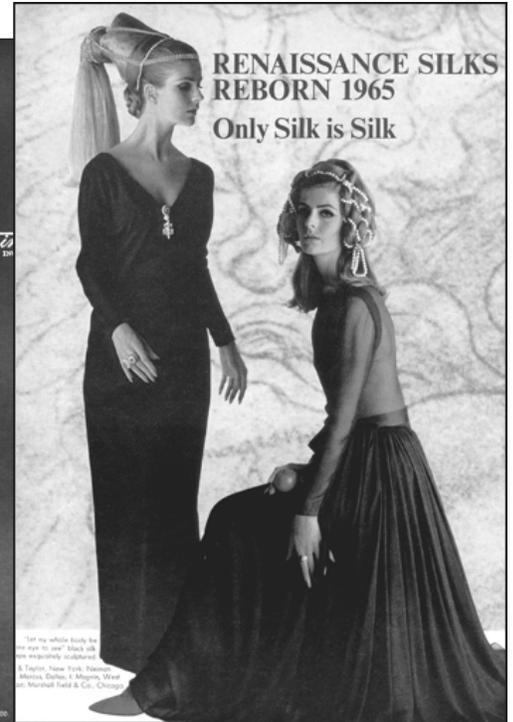
Young people were asked in a song by Scott McKenzie, “Are you going to San Francisco?” and told that, if so, to be

sure to wear some flowers in their hair. When the flower children arrived there, they migrated to the Haight-Ashbury area to “turn on, tune in, drop out,” as Timothy Leary had recommended. They became hippies—a label derived from the word “hip,” meaning “aware.” *Vogue* explored some of the contrasts of the hippies’ ideals with those of the Establishment and concluded:

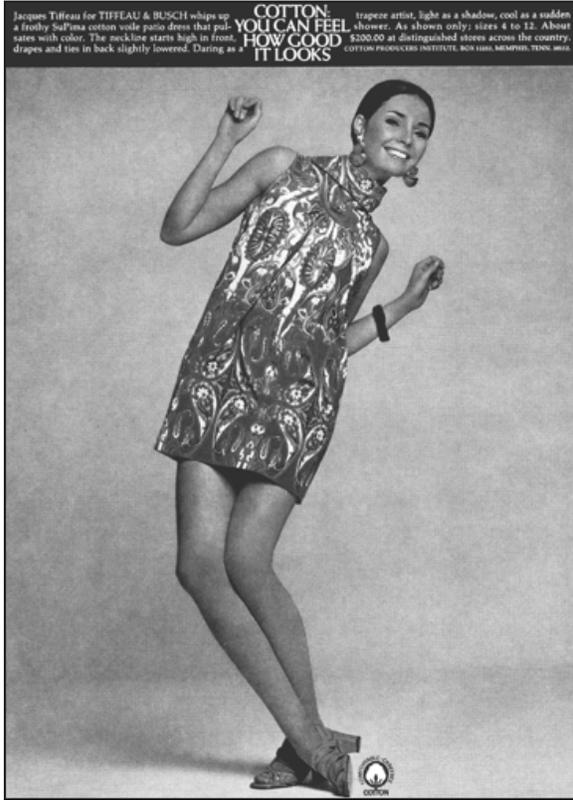
About morality, concerning motivation, ideals, and one’s own actions, the hippie offers to the [Establishment’s] code, best described in practice by the term expedience, this alternative: “Get your own head straight first.” About ethics, concerning one’s reactions in worldly situations and one’s reaction in interactions, to the [Establishment’s] controlling code of consistency, the expected at almost any cost, the hippie answers: “Let every human being do his own thing.”<sup>16</sup>

During the 1967 “summer of love,” hippies indulged in doing their own thing by dancing in the parks and streets, com-

**Figure 5-9.** Influences from Hollywood once again were felt in the American fashion industry during the midsixties. The movie *Cleopatra* inspired exotic makeup and Near Eastern styles of clothing and textile prints. *The Agony and the Ecstasy* provided a source for romantic dresses of silk, velvet, and other luxurious fabrics. Dan Millstein ad 1963, Silk Association ad 1965.



**Figure 5-10.** Hollywood's costume films of the midsixties such as *Cleopatra* and *Lawrence of Arabia* inspired exotic evening-wear to be worn mostly for home entertaining. By the late 1960s, numerous varieties of Eastern garments, textiles, trimmings, and accessories were adapted to streetwear by counter-culture groups. Vanity Fair ad 1967, Chester Weinberg ad 1968.



**Figure 5-11.** By the late 1960s, hemlines were ubiquitously thigh-high. The freedom and simplicity of the contemporary silhouette, coupled with the new directions of groovy accessories, conclusively ended the long-running influence of the New Look. Ads 1968–69.

muning with nature, exploring new sexual experiences, and experimenting with recreational drugs. That year the Beatles sang, “All you need is love,” and the Rolling Stones released their album *Flowers*. The look of the flower children was a myriad of unique and self-styled images: pattern-mixed gypsy costumes; ethnic garments from Africa and Asia; bell-bottom jeans and fringed leather vests; monochromatic military surplus; thrift-shop castoffs; tie-dyed anything; flower-printed everything. Yves Saint Laurent found inspiration from the colorful look of the hippies and presented gypsy-print shifts and headkerchiefs in his 1968 Paris collections.

But even thrift-store clothes—not to mention rent, groceries, and pot—cost money. Some hippies sold tie-dyed T-shirts, handmade peasant blouses, bead jewelry, or flower-embroidered jeans for income. Many others collected together into communes and became self-sufficient away from the demands of society and other tentacles of the Establishment.

As a subculture, the hippie movement was social drama, but narrow and short lived. For mainstream, Main Street youth, the hippie philosophy of “do your own thing” was only



selectively applied. As for the look of the flower children, most Americans preferred less dramatic alternatives. For men, Eastern influences included the Nehru-collar jacket, with the occasional short paisley scarf or, more daringly, love beads or a jeweled pendant around the neck. However, there were no complete masculine wardrobe conversions to the theatrical Sergeant Pepper costumes. For women, the hemlines were ubiquitously thigh-high. Prints were bold and colors vivid with unorthodox combinations of pink and orange or purple and red. (Figure 5-11 and color plate 21.)

The young styles looked fresh and contemporary, with no vestiges of the New Look left. The groovy new miniskirt silhouettes seemed especially modern when photographed on the model of the day, Leslie Hornby, better known as Twiggy. Even though few women past their teens had Twiggy's ninety-pound figure and her long, slender legs, women still wanted, and wore, all the permutations of the mini, including the fingertip-length micromini. (Color plate 22.)

Bell-bottom hiphuggers likewise were best suited to the slim, teenage figure. The low-rise waistband cut across the hips with a visual emphasis similar to the midgy of the 1950s, except now, the ideal was narrow, boyish hips rather than the full, rounded contours of the New Look. With such an exclusive requirement, hiphuggers paired with skinny-rib or other knit tops quickly became the casual youth look with mass appeal. (Color plate 23.)

This redefinition of feminine beauty included new applications of cosmetics and completely different hairstyles. As mentioned above, the movie *Cleopatra* had changed the ideals of makeup. Multicolored eye shadows were now blended over a wider area around the eyes. Glitter and sequins were applied to add sparkle in the flashing lights of discothèques. Frosted and metallic colors of lipstick and nail polish projected a futuristic look. Hippies liberally applied body paint depicting flowers, ankhs, peace symbols, and antiestablishment slogans. The TV variety show *Laugh-In* featured young “sock-it-to-me” dancers wearing bikinis and painted head to toe with similar graffiti.

Hairstyles also were modernized in the sixties. The bouffant bubble cut worn by Jackie Kennedy was popular with women across a wide range of ages. By middecade, the geometric wedge cuts of Vidal Sassoon better complemented the space-age and youthful British mod fashions. As the free-flowing look of the flower children became more widely publicized in the mass media, young women opted for unstyled, straight hair. Many girls ironed their tresses to simulate the looks of Cher or *Vogue's* premier model, Verushka. Men grew their hair long, and electric hair dryer sales soared while hat sales plummeted. The hit musical *Hair* toured the country in

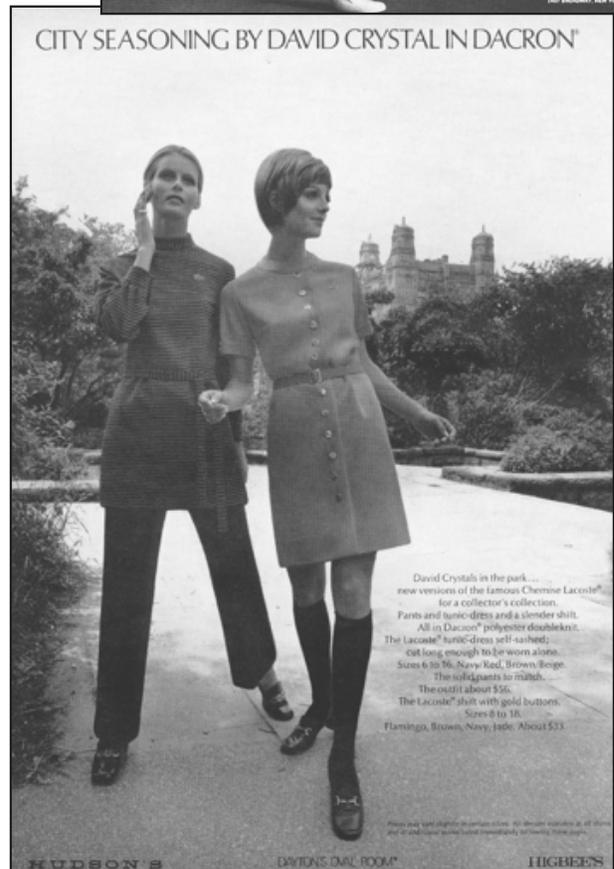
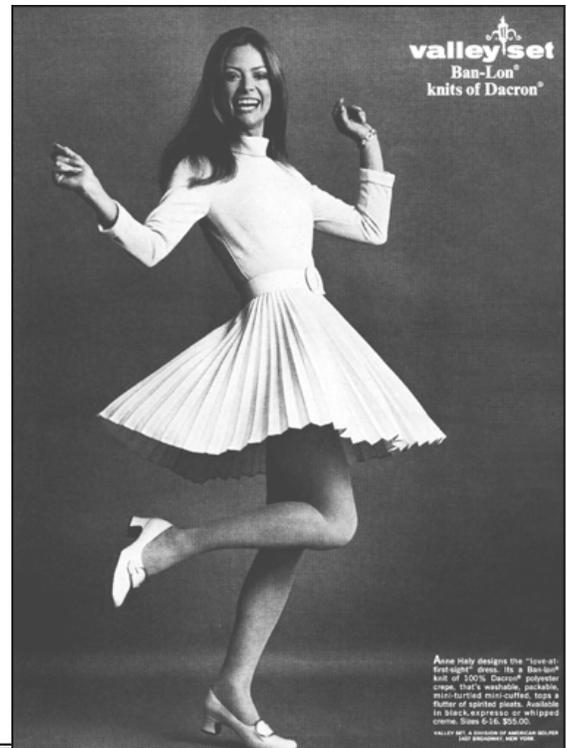


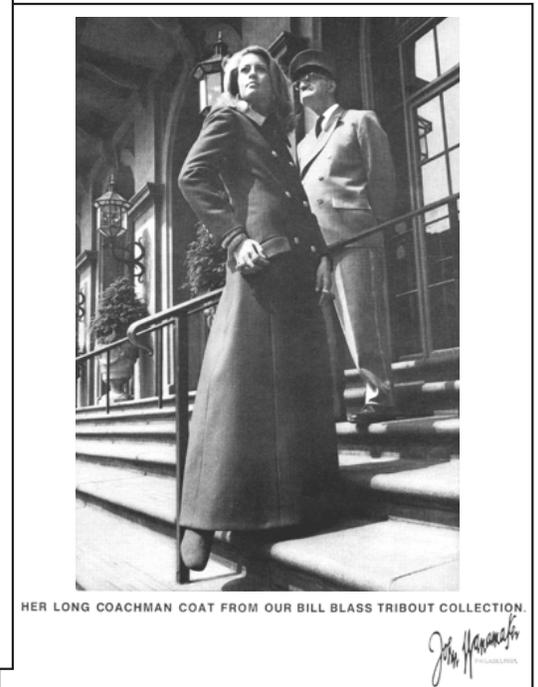
Figure 5-12. For many young women of the late 1960s, fashions and styles of the counterculture were antithetical to their disillusioned mood. The preppie look reflected a backlash of traditionalism. Ads 1969.



1968



1968



1969

**Figure 5-13.** Costumes created for the hit movie *Bonnie and Clyde* inspired fashion designers to experiment with lower hemlines in the late sixties. The midi extended to mid-calf and the maxi dropped to the ankles. However, women generally rejected the looks.

1968. “Give me down to there, hair!, shoulder-length or longer.” Young blacks, men and women, grew natural Afros rather than chemically straightening their hair as had their parents and grandparents.

New emphasis on ethnicity in America went far beyond the haircuts and hippie adaptations of ethnic clothing. From the successes of the civil rights movement of the late fifties and early sixties, the African American experience evolved into a new pride and self-awareness. At the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, black champions raised their fists overhead during the awards ceremony as a demonstration of black power. That same year, the slogan “Black is beautiful” first appeared in the mass media. Many blacks expressed their African heritage by wearing loose-fitting tunics called dashikis, wrap-around dresses, and headwraps. Some of these garments were made from hand-loomed fabrics woven with African patterns, and others were sewn from kente cloth printed with brightly colored tribal motifs. Boutiques and mail order businesses operated by black entrepreneurs supplied these specialized garments to their niche market and advertised their goods in publications such as *Essence* and *Ebony*. Beauty products such as

the Flori Roberts line were formulated specifically for African Americans and distributed to upscale department stores nationwide.

The social changes, the impact of the youthquake, the restlessness and turmoil that have come to symbolize the revolutionary sixties reached a crescendo in the final two years of the decade. Peace demonstrations and a change of administrations had not brought an end to the Vietnam War. In 1968, young, idealistic Bobby Kennedy was assassinated in California after a triumphal primary win there in his bid for the presidency. That same year, Nobel Peace Prize-winner Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, where he had gone to continue his work toward civil rights. Desegregation pressed inexorably forward in the South, but in northern cities, ghetto riots erupted in reaction to police actions and de facto segregation.

The last two years of the decade also saw momentous achievements. The first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks were conducted with the Soviet Union. In July 1969, the lunar module *Eagle* landed on the moon and Neil Armstrong made his “one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” The fol-

lowing month, three hundred thousand young people gathered for the three-day Woodstock music festival near Bethel, New York, and forever set the image of the counterculture generation in the nation's psyche.

Fashions of the closing years of the decade continued to run on parallel courses of futurism, the counterculture, urban ethnicity, and sexual exhibitionism. One reaction to all the diversity of looks, lifestyles, and attitudes was a broad-based return of the preppie look. (Figure 5-12.) Many young people became disillusioned with the confusing results of the dramatic changes of the decade. Consequently, in a backlash of traditionalism preppie clothing became a hallmark of those young people who wished to distance themselves from groups associated with the counterculture. Their look was simplistic, conformist, and comfortably familiar. Wardrobe staples including plain turtlenecks with pleated schoolgirl skirts, alligator logos on dresses with longer hemlines, button-down shirts, cableknit pullovers, knee socks, Pilgrim buckle shoes, and penny loafers. These were the core clothing lines of Penney's and Sears, certainly not boutique fashions.

Hollywood also became a key influence in the last years of the decade. In 1967, the movie *Bonnie and Clyde* kindled an interest in costumes of the thirties, especially the longer hemlines. Designers responded with the midi at midcalf and the maxi to the ankles. (Figure 5-13.) Although the longer skirts provided designers with fun and interesting new challenges, women largely rejected the looks. To appease women who liked the leggy look of the miniskirt, designers even tried versions of the midi that buttoned or zipped up the front and could be worn open to mid thigh. But women would have none of it. Only the maxi coat had any moderate success, primarily in northern climates where miniskirts offered little warmth against winter's blasts.

Another historical costume style that gained wide appeal at the end of the sixties was the flapper look. (Figure 5-14.) In 1966 an exhibition in Paris called *Les Années '25* featured art deco graphics, paintings, and decorative arts of the 1920s. Soon afterward, museums in America coordinated similar shows and produced catalogs, books, and posters on art deco. Fashion designers adapted the 1920s dropped waistline to the modern-day chemise, or extended loose-fitting overblouses, sweaters, and cardigans over the hips to simulate the look. Even versions of the cloche were revived at a time when hats were seldom worn by young people anymore.

At the conclusion of the 1960s, Americans were divided on many fronts, not the least of which included fashion and personal style. The counterculture generation had coined the slogan "Do your own thing," which manifested itself in looks as diverse as those of the hippies, urban ethnics, and suburban



**Figure 5-14.** Exhibits of art deco posters, paintings, and decorative arts renewed public interest in styles of the 1920s and influenced a fashion revivalism of the flapper look. Robinson's ad 1968, Enka ad 1969.