

PEACOCK REVOLUTION

American Masculine Identity and Dress
of the Sixties and Seventies

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PREFACE

The Peacock Revolution in menswear of the 1960s came as a profound shock to American society. Young men grew their hair long and dressed in clothes that greatly alarmed most traditionalists who viewed the new styles of men's dress as effeminate and even subversive. Pop culture, mass media, and especially the fashion industry seemed to collude in this perceived corruption of youth. "What I design for young people should shock," declared Pierre Cardin in a 1968 interview.¹

To the baby boom generation, though, the Peacock Revolution was about more than fashion fads. The radical changes in men's clothing reflected, and contributed to, the changing ideas of masculinity initiated by a youthquake of rebellious baby boomers coming of age in an era of revolutions. New ideas of masculinity emerged from the counterculture of activism that surged across America for civil rights, students' rights, women's liberation, gay liberation, Red Power, and Black Power, and against the Vietnam War, the draft, armed occupations of campuses, and the Establishment in general. From these movements came new forms of protest and street dress that altered conventions of masculine identity, ranging from long hair to unisex clothing. Moreover, the peacock dress of baby boomers was a welcomed nontraditional visual identity that was a distinct departure from that of their fathers—the conformist herd of men in gray flannel suits. And rather than concerns about effeminacy in their clothing choices, most youthquake men regarded their peacock shock dress as a personal expression of individuality and modernity. But most important of all, girls were attracted to the sexually confident peacock.

But the Peacock Revolution did not spring into existence suddenly and without warning. To better understand how the Peacock Revolution developed and why it was such a shock to post-World War II American culture, this study examines many of the socioeconomic, sociocultural, and sociopolitical factors that led to the emergence of the youthquake peacock in the early 1960s, and sustained him into the mid-1970s.

Chapter 1 lays out the evolution of the American idea of manhood and masculine identity before 1960. In the early years of the nation, the self-made man was the ideal, replacing the Old World patriarch whose socioeconomic power was derived from a hereditary class system. By the late nineteenth century, though, the self-made man encountered challenges that undermined his masculinity. Industrialization and urbanization threatened his individualism and self-determination as an ever-increasing number of men moved to cities and worked for wages. With fathers away at work, their sons were left in the care of women much of the time, inciting a national anxiety about the feminization of future generations of American men. Seeming to validate these fears, medical science discovered a new mental disorder called homosexuality, which confirmed the dangers of a feminized male. In addition, women began to demand equal rights with men, and increasingly entered male domains in the workplace and colleges. By the mid-twentieth century, women had achieved the vote and, during two World Wars, had proven that masses of women could work on an equal footing with men. Consequently, a crisis of masculinity confronted the American male. The established social order of separate spheres—men as patriarchs and breadwinners; women as housewives and mothers—seemed to dissolve further with each new generation. Instead, masculinity came to be codified into an orthodoxy of behavior and characteristics, ranging from excellence in sports and with machinery to resisting emasculating influences of women and especially any hint of effeminacy.

Throughout this one-hundred-and-fifty-year evolution of ideas and ideals of manhood, the visual representation of masculinity was short hair and a simple, sober three-piece suit. Even as socioeconomic and cultural challenges to masculinity developed over time, the visible self of American men remained fairly constant, with only glacial changes until the development of the sack suit in the 1850s, which then became the standardized uniform of masculine identity for the next hundred years. For post-World War II fathers, their expectations were that their baby boomer sons would likewise conform to the traditions of masculinity and dress identity that they and their fathers before them had learned and accepted.

But, as the first baby boomers entered their teen years in the early 1960s, many rejected the conformist conventions of manhood and the materialistic values of their fathers. Instead, they looked to the emerging counterculture for purpose and a new identity. In chapter 2, the pre-1960s foundations of that counterculture are examined. On the leading edge of nonconformity in the immediate post-World War II years were the Beats, who expressed their disaffection with the prevailing consumer society through their writing and poetry. By the 1950s, young followers of the Beats, who came to be known as

Beatniks, demonstrated their youthful rebellion against social norms by adopting a bohemian lifestyle in urban slums. Two other types of nonconformist men of the era were bikers and playboys, the former viewed as criminal gang members, and the latter, as selfish and immature young men who negated their obligations to society as respectable husbands and fathers.

Also discussed in chapter 2 is the emergence in the 1950s of the teenager as an important and unique consumer demographic. Their collective spending power on rock and roll music, movies, magazines and comic books, soft drinks, and snack foods contributed tens of millions of dollars to the postwar economic prosperity. Consequently, industries such as entertainment, publishing, and prepared foods manufacturers developed new consumer product niches and marketing that targeted the teenager. Growing up in the 1950s, the baby boomers observed all this special attention focused on their older siblings, and upon becoming teenagers themselves in the 1960s, felt likewise special and entitled.

Unlike the teens of the 1950s, though, who were anxious to get through adolescence and on to adulthood, the baby boomers embraced their youth and exulted in their historic time and place. In chapter 3, the interweaving of the youthquake, the counterculture, and the Peacock Revolution of the 1960s is detailed. It was an era in which young people fostered a Generation Gap by which they sought to establish their individualism and identity separate and distinct from anyone over age thirty. The youthquake generation boldly challenged authority; they organized and participated in social justice movements to effect significant changes ranging from civil rights to ending the Vietnam War. And in spite of the role models of their silent majority parents, the young wanted to be heard.

Through these efforts, youthquake men also developed new concepts of masculinity. To their parents, activism against the Establishment was immature rebellion at best, and at worst, for draft resistance and antiwar activities, an unpatriotic display of cowardice. For youthquake men, though, facing intimidation and violence from police, national guardsmen, and sometimes bystander mobs demonstrated courage and manly resolve. Moreover, their long hair and nonconformist dress were displays of bravery in the face of social opprobrium and open hostility from the Establishment. They were also open to the sexual revolution, including the idea of sexual equality with women. And they experimented with radical, nonconformist forms of masculine identity in dress, inspired in large part by the Peacock Revolution in menswear.

The development, evolution, dress styles, and social significance of the Peacock Revolution in America are chronicled in chapter 4. As with all revolutions, there were three phases, with some overlapping: a prescient beginning (c. 1960–65), a feverish middle (c. 1964–74), and a Thermidorian

conclusion (c. 1972-75).

Early indicators of the pending revolution included the development of experimental styles of menswear of the late 1950s, such as the slim cut Continental suit and sexualized styles like formfitting jeans and bikini underwear and swimwear. For most fashion historians, though, the launch of the revolution occurred with the 1964 British Invasion of boy bands like the Beatles, who introduced to American youth long hair and mod fashions from London's Carnaby Street. The immediate demand by youthquake men for granny print shirts, ankle-slim hiphuggers, and fitted suits inspired U.S. ready-to-wear makers to produce Americanized versions. Famous women's fashion designers entered the menswear market, expanding on the innovative looks from *Swinging England* and adding the cachet of branded labels to men's clothing. Through the second half of the 1960s, the American menswear industry found fresh ideas from Hollywood, such as Romeo shirts and sculpted adaptations of Gatsby suits. Street styles inspired bell-bottoms, prewashed jeans, tie-dyed and flower power print shirts and pants, and handicraft accessories for the mass market. The hippies' multiculturalism led to the Nehru jacket and loungewear kaftans. Red Power protest dress launched Apache scarves, fringed suede jackets, and moccasins. Black Power unity dress popularized African heritage styles such as the dashiki and Afro hairstyle, and, to a broader market, African prints. Blaxploitation films brought the Peacock Revolution to urban black baby boomers as neo-Edwardian suits, high heel platform shoes, and vividly hued nylon shirts. From the sexual revolution came see-through shirts and fashion underwear.

For many parents and traditionalists, the Peacock Revolution was especially worrisome. They feared that long hair on men, the colorful clothes, the beads and pendant necklaces, the sexual exhibitionism were all symptomatic of the feminization of America's young men. And such effeminacy in dress would turn men into homosexuals, who, at the time, were regarded as mentally ill by the medical establishment, as criminals by law, and as sinners by religious dogma. This fear also reflected the pervasive misogyny in American society; that is, since gays were womanly, and women were weak, the very defense of the nation against communism might be in jeopardy.

Certainly, most American young men did not dress as flamboyant peacocks day to day. Dress historians argue that "the reality is that many men, even young men, did not succumb to the trend, and few of those who did adopt the new styles continued to experiment with new expressions of masculinity for long."² Yet, the vast majority of youthquake men were indeed impacted by the Peacock Revolution. Long hair on men became a ubiquitous masculine identity that endures today. The sexualized slim cut of trousers, the body hugging fit of shirts, bell-bottom cuffs, the shaped suit jacket, synthetic textiles,

and colorful prints were all peacock influences applied to every variety of menswear.

The final phase of the Peacock Revolution occurred in the early 1970s with men's high heel platform shoes, glittery glam rock fashions, man bags, and earrings. At the same time, the end of the Vietnam War and a global economic crisis brought a close to the counterculture fervor. A regressive conservatism surged across America. A second wave of baby boomers entered the Me-Decade of the 1970s as self-absorbed yuppies, dressed for success in conformist, conservative clothes and short hair.

One final point about this study. Much of this era is in my living memory. As a high school student during 1967–70 and college student during 1970–74, I remember well the turbulence of the times. Color TV brought it all into our living room each night, and current events periodicals opened discussions in the classroom. As GQ later assessed, “The Sixties shot most of our lives from canons...It was the most exciting roller-coaster decade. The ‘ups’ were sky-high and the ‘downs’ sank to Hades depths. We were never on an even keel. Intense, yes, but never boring. During the Sixties we never once whined for the ‘good old days.’”³ Like the majority of baby boomers, though, I was not a counterculture activist. I didn’t even grow my hair long until 1971, and then only to my collar. But in coming of age during the late 1960s and early 1970s, I experimented with peacock shock fashions—selectively. For example, figures 8 and 15 feature photos of actual clothes I wore as a teenager (the 1968 Nehru jacket and chain pendant, and a 1970 vest suit). And even though most of my closet contained the standard fare in menswear, the influence of the Peacock Revolution was evident in my permanent press fitted shirts in paisley prints, slim cut bell-bottom hiphuggers, skinny rib knit tops in vivid colors, and shiny buckle shoes (1960s) and platforms (1970s).

dimension to the fashion cycle. For just as aware women came to realize that by scouting the output of designers they could find their own personal look—or looks—now the male can do so too.”⁸⁵

SUIT INNOVATIONS AND REVIVALS 1960-1975

Although much was written in the fashion press of the 1960s about the turn toward greater informality in men’s dress, the suit and tie remained the foremost masculine identity of American men. As Ernest Dichter’s research on the Peacock Revolution had shown, a young college graduate entering the corporate arena understood that “to succeed with a bureaucracy mandated the sack-suit uniform...which symbolized the security and substance of his achievements....The suit was a personal statement of ‘having arrived.’”⁸⁶ In looking at the persistent Ivy League suit in 1965, GQ advised that there was nothing wrong with a neatly fitting, well-pressed dark suit except, “it just happens to be dull. To believe that all there is to dressing is to be neat and clean is stultifying to a man with any creative urge about his visual personality.”⁸⁷ But unlike their fathers of the 1950s—those conformist herds of men in the gray flannel suits—youthquake career men instead had the best of both worlds: well-made ready-to-wear suits that projected their socioeconomic status as well as an array of suit designs that provided them with varying degrees of individualism and expression of personal style.

Initially, suit style options were subtle. As noted previously, President Kennedy had adopted the trim, two-button jacket and slim cut, plain front trousers as his preferred suit in 1960—a transitioning look in men’s suiting of the time that blended elements of the shaped Continental silhouette and traditional simplicity of the Ivy League style. Through the mid-1960s, the American suit underwent other gradual changes with both inside constructions and outside details. The waistline became marked, a sharp contrast with the straight-hanging lines of the Ivy League cut. Equally significant, the sloping, natural shoulder of the Ivy League jacket was abandoned in favor of padding and “invisible construction... engineered into the shoulder and armhole.”⁸⁸ The two-button closure, and in 1965, the one-button closure, extended the V-front opening, making the chest seem broader and accenting trim physiques. Trousers narrowed and the thick volume of pleats was replaced with a smooth, plain front. The resulting suit silhouette was more youthful and athletic—a new masculine identity for men under forty in the emerging era of the youthquake generation.

Most outside details of the transition suits were minimal but noticeable. Lapels gradually widened and some were edged with double topstitching.

Notches became more playful with rounded cloverleaf points, the wide fish mouth cut, or the L-shape with its right angle seam joining collar and lapel. Some jacket sleeves flared slightly from shoulder to wrist to add “balance,” as one maker’s ad explained.⁸⁹ Other sleeves were even constructed with the underside seam moved to the outer side.

Influences of the British Invasion mod looks and the Space Age designs of French designers Pierre Cardin and Andre Courrèges began to make an impact on American men’s suit designs in 1967. Suit jackets were shaped with contouring front or back darts or seams and sculpted with padded interfacings, giving the masculine body a youthful, athletic look. (Figure 7.) The double-breasted style made a comeback after largely being absent for almost fifteen years. New front closures ranged from one to five buttons for a single-breasted jacket and two to sixteen buttons for a double-breasted jacket. Pocket treatments were widely varied. The typical besom hip pockets were often set at an angle, with or without flaps. Some suit jacket hip pockets were turned vertical along a front seam like those for outerwear. The breast pocket was sometimes omitted, and some avant-garde suit styles had no outside pocket openings.

Among the most significant style dramas of men’s suits in the second half of the 1960s was collar treatments. In 1960, Cardin had created avant-garde men’s jackets without collars or lapels, which even at the end of the decade, looked startlingly new when adapted by ready-to-wear makers. The basic turndown bal collar in both pointed and round cuts became a trend for single-breasted jackets in 1968. Also that year, a round stand-up collar called the Nehru was applied to suit jackets, outerwear, and shirts. (See “Multicultural Influences” below.) For double-breasted jackets, the high Napoleonic collar added visual interest to sculpted silhouettes.

Despite the availability of such a wide assortment of nontraditional suit styles with which youthquake men could express their individualism, most American men who needed a business suit for work remained conservative and conformist in their choices. As previously noted, the trim cut of President Kennedy’s suit was an option for many younger men in the first half of the 1960s, but for the most part, the straight-hanging Ivy League cut remained the prevalent, safe style for the office. With the pop culture British Invasion, though, menswear makers began to update the traditional business suit without going to the extremes of mod looks. The first step was a reintroduction of the double-breasted jacket, which had largely disappeared during World War II due to fabric rationing and government restrictions on clothing designs. Because the boxy, straight hang of the Ivy League suit was affected by a double-breasted closure, causing diagonal drapes of the fabric from shoulder to waist, the style remained fairly dormant through the 1950s and early 1960s. Thus,

EUROPE CRAFT
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WINTER 1968
EDITION
VOLUME VI

HERALDING THE ULTIMATE IN EUROPEAN FASHIONS FOR THE AMERICAN MAN

INTRODUCING...THE
SCULPTURED SUITS

First casting, 1969
Molded from wool
and polyester
Imported by
Europe Craft
About \$100

Created by the men's division of
Europe Craft Imports Inc.,
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Prices slightly higher in the West

Figure 7. In the second half of the 1960s, suit options for younger men included shaped styles, featuring contouring seams and padded interfacings to accent trim physiques. Among the new fabrics for men's suits were polyester blends, which held sharp creases and resisted wrinkles. "Sculptured suits" from Europe Craft, 1968.

for the fashion industry, the reappearance of the double-breasted suit was a reach into the prewar past. In 1966, the fall menswear issue of the New York Times Magazine headlined “the thirties revisited,” and proclaimed, “the double-breasted suit for town is coming back.”⁹⁰ “What brings the current revival of the D-B? Well, the experts are saying the acceptance in recent years of the double-breasted blazers, raincoats, British ‘warms’ and pea jackets. Also, they say the designers are using less overlap and more suitable materials for comfortable sitting” compared to the original “ironclads” of the Depression era.⁹¹

In addition to these more comfortable materials, specifically the many new varieties of synthetics and wool blends, the new business suits in the late 1960s combined style details of the 1930s with the youthful shaped silhouette of mod inspired fashions. Like the 1930s “Superman” styles, both single- and double-breasted suit jackets were constructed with wide shoulders and broad chests, sculpted by engineered interfacings and padding and made more emphatic by tapered waistlines and huge lapels that extended almost to the shoulder sleeve seams. Further bolstering the broad-chest look were neckties that widened to five inches by the end of the decade, and shirt collars that descended into long points. Unlike the suits of the Depression era, though, updated jackets of the 1960s often had side vents that complimented marked waists, and suit trousers were flat-fronted, snug fitting, and by the end of decade, flared at the cuffs.

The trend of 1930s revivals in men’s suits was accelerated in 1967 by the hit movie *Bonnie and Clyde*. The Academy Award nominated period costumes of the movie inspired even more ready-to-wear makers to finally abandon the Ivy League style in favor of the 1930s revivals. “The Thirties scene has staged a comeback,” observed GQ in 1968. “Blame it on Bonnie, chalk-stripe it up to Clyde, or just acknowledge that a gentleman’s clothing in the 1930s proffered a devil-may-flair swagger.”⁹² Some fashion journalists referred to the revivals as the “Clyde look”⁹³ and others anachronistically referenced *Gatsby*, from the 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. “Gatsby’s white suit returns,” reported *Esquire* in 1968, “evoking, among other things, the special affection it has been accorded in movies, books, and plays....The white suit, as romantic a garment as any man ever put on his back, suffered an inexplicable neglect after the thirties.”⁹⁴

In the early 1970s, suit designs inspired by the styles of the Depression years continued to dominate menswear. “The thirties are alive and well in Ralph Lauren,” proclaimed a GQ headline in 1971.⁹⁵ Hollywood, too, reinforced the 1930s styling of men’s business suits through the first half of the 1970s. *Cabaret* (1972) and *The Sting* (1973) were both set in the 1930s and sumptuously costumed with men’s fashions of the period. These movies, pre-

dicted Men's Wear in 1973, would "make some ripples in the fashion market," particularly since "boutiques specializing in recycled fashion plus flea markets and swap meets on the West Coast have experienced a run on clothes of the '30s vintage and are reporting customer interest in hats as fun personality-expressing fashions."⁹⁶

Also in 1973, the fashion press was abuzz about a movie remake of *The Great Gatsby*, for which Ralph Lauren had been tapped to produce more than eighty suits. Although F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel was written in 1925, to the fashion industry, the *Gatsby* look was a Depression era suit style.⁹⁷ In March 1974, *GQ* dedicated much of the issue on "Gatsby flair: The movie that's influencing what you wear."⁹⁸ The magazine cover featured a deco-style illustration of Robert Redford as Jay Gatsby wearing a wide-lapel pink suit, just as Fitzgerald described it in the novel. Although, pink suits never became a trend in American men's business suiting of the 1970s, the thirties-style shaped silhouette with broad shoulders and wide lapels was further perpetuated through mid-decade. Even wide-legged, pleated trousers returned in 1973—branded by one maker as *Nostalgics*.⁹⁹ "What's this 'Gatsby' business all about?" challenged *Men's Wear*. "Gatsby was setting a mood for the germination of new fashion concepts as well as polarizing a host of disparate ideas that have been loosely labeled as 'elegant,' 'classic' and 'nostalgic.'"¹⁰⁰ And this classic elegance of thirties style suits was what young career baby boomers wanted as they entered the corporate world of the 1970s Me-Decade (discussed later.) The revival suit provided a modern masculine identity that was distinct from their freeform hippie classmates as well as from their conformist, man-in-the-gray-flannel-suit fathers. Suit makers and retailers "used the 'Gatsby' name to describe merchandise geared for the New Establishment, or 25-to-40-year-old who doesn't want to look like his father or his kid brother," concluded *Men's Wear*, "...resulting in the creation of clothes that are not as garish as Mod or as stuffy as Ivy League."¹⁰¹

INFORMALITY IN SUITING 1960-1972

As noted previously, the Peacock Revolution fostered an increasing informality in menswear. For business wear, many junior executives opted for a blazer and contrasting trousers as an alternative to their monochrome business suits. In the early 1960s, blazers and sport jackets of shantung silk in burgundy, ecru, sienna, or hunter green provided a youthful variety to workday wardrobes. In the second half of the decade and especially in the early 1970s, the new synthetics such as polyester double knits broadened the color palettes, textures, and patterns of men's sport jackets. Complex jacquards and

bold plaids were particularly popular.

For cocktail parties, gallery openings, and similar leisure but somewhat dressy occasions, the peacock male of the second half of the 1960s could select from a wide assortment of avant-garde suits and jackets, ranging from the exotic to the theatrical. As noted previously, mod suit styles of the mid-1960s included collarless jackets and jackets with nontraditional collar varieties such as the short, turndown bal adapted from outerwear. As the decade inched into 1966 and 1967, some men's suits, shirts, and accessories began to look like costumes for a fancy-dress ball. These Carnaby Street influenced styles were "often erroneously termed Edwardian" by the fashion press.¹⁰² Imports from London designed by Michael Fish (branded as Mr. Fish), Tommy Nutter, and John Pearse, among others, included luxurious velvet suits, some edged with satin; dinner jackets of opulent brocades; and tailored suits in "colors more often associated with Sicilian ice cream."¹⁰³ As a parody of the flamboyance of men's fashions (and the uniforms of marching bands), when the Beatles produced their Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band album in 1967, the Fab Four were featured on the cover dressed in vibrantly hued satin suits adorned with braid, embroidered appliqués, and fringed epaulets.

For a brief period during 1967 and 1968, the Nehru jacket, with its round stand-up collar, became a mass-market trend. (Discussed more below in "Multicultural Influences.") Since the Nehru collar did not allow for a turndown collar shirt underneath, and consequently, could not accommodate a necktie, many men added a loosely knotted, vividly patterned silk scarf to spill through the gap at the front. Instead of a scarf with their Nehru jacket, truly nonconformist men preferred a huge, dazzling jeweled pendant and chain necklace, which not only complemented the exoticism of the East Indian style jacket, but also was a defiant challenge to masculine conventions against ostentatious jewelry. (See Figure 16.)

Among the most popular casual suit styles of the late 1960s and early 1970s was the safari look. Like the original nineteenth-century colonial uniform, the modernized unconstructed safari jackets were made without padding or interfacing for ease and comfort. The classic safari bush jacket with its multiple patch pockets achieved high fashion status in 1969 when Yves St. Laurent adapted the look for men from his women's Saharienne collection of the previous year. Through the 1970s, American men's ready-to-wear makers continually produced varieties of safari jackets, often in nontraditional textiles such as polyester double knits, suede, and corduroy, and sometimes in vibrant primary colors. For example, as a dress option "suited for the non-occasion," GQ included linen and brushed denim varieties of the safari suit in their fashion forecast for 1972.¹⁰⁴

Inspired by and related to the safari suit were shirt-suits of the early

1970s, which often included patch-pocket, belted shirts that resembled the bush jacket. Like the safari jacket, most shirt-suit tops had long skirts and were worn untucked. The shirt-suit, especially in the new double knits, were “geared for comfort in all leisure activities.”¹⁰⁵

In 1968, a new idea in casual suits was introduced by ready-to-wear designer Mannie Mandel of Cone Mills. Initially the style was called a “sleeveless jacket” suit because it was made with a wide, turndown collar.¹⁰⁶ But collarless adaptations that became widely popular during 1970-71 were marketed as vest suits. “It’s the other suit lots of men will want to wear on non business-like occasions. Like a date, or at a ballpark,” claimed the copy in an ad for a vest suit.¹⁰⁷ Like safari jackets, the vest suit was unconstructed with only a lining or half-lining inside, and closures included single- and double-breasted button fronts as well as zip fronts. Vest skirts varied in length from hip level to mid-thigh. Many vests were designed with self-belts that could be tied in the front or secured with a metal pull-through buckle that cinched the waist or accented slim hips. (Figure 8.) Vest suits were made in a broad range of fabrics, including synthetic knits, wool and blends, corduroy, cotton duck, and cotton twill in bold prints and patterns. Most vest suits were worn with an open-throat, long-point collar shirt, but some makers suggested the style could be worn without a shirt.¹⁰⁸ A black velvet vest suit, worn with a black velvet butterfly bow tie, was even recommended by a fashion editor as “a formal approach for a less than formal occasion.”¹⁰⁹ Another after-six velvet vest suit by New Orleans’ designer Roland Dobson featured a square plunging neckline, revealing a lot of bare chest accented with a pendant necklace.¹¹⁰

One other casual suit style that made fashion news for a few seasons at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s was the knicker suit, which was part of the 1930s nostalgia wave in menswear of the time. “The mood of America is towards a more romantic, simpler time—which knickers aptly fit,” suggested *Men’s Wear* in 1971.¹¹¹ The original knicker suits (c. 1880s-1930s) were active sportswear for the middle and elite classes worn for outings and hunting in the country, skiing at resorts, and especially playing golf. Called plus fours, these pre-World War II cropped trousers were so voluminous that the excess fabric bloused over the knee bands about four inches or more. Peacock era versions, though, were more narrow and had less blousing fullness at the knees. They also were modernized by the elimination of “those tight straps, garters, buckles and buttons, which makes for bad blood circulation in the legs.”¹¹² Jacket types for modern knicker suits also varied. Where the correct jacket for the original knicker suit was a loose fitting norfolk with self-belt and multiple patch pockets, the modern adaptation included not only shaped replicas of the norfolk, but also regular suit jackets with padded shoulders and hard, wide lapels. Fabrications ranged from the traditional heavy tweeds



Figure 8. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the unconstructed vest suit was an informal alternative to the business suit for leisure time occasions. The style was fresh and modern for the time, and could be worn with or without a shirt. Left, wool pinstripe vest suit worn by the author in 1970; right, knit vest suit from Peter's Sportswear, 1970.

to light, softly draping synthetics and blends. Traditional cable stitch or argyle knee socks completed the look, or knee-high boots modernized the style.

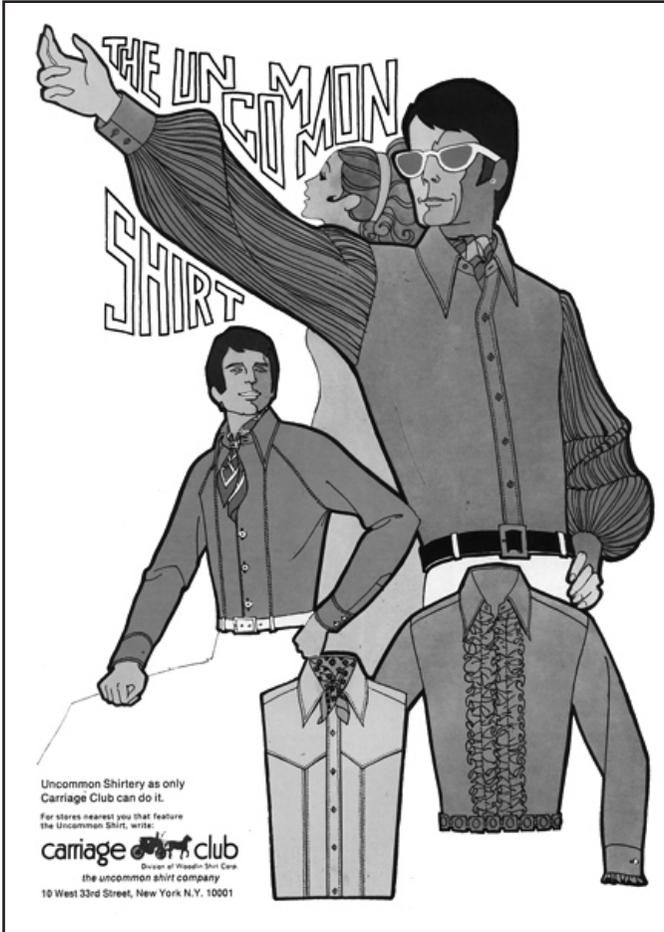
Unlike the popularity of vest suits, however, knicker suits were more of a novelty dress item, principally making an occasional appearance on golf courses in the early 1970s. Trade journals cautioned retailers that “knickers will be a fringe business...for one or two or maybe even three seasons.”¹¹³ Ready-to-wear makers such as Clubman hedged their risk on sales of the anachronistic knicker suit by also including a matching pair of long pants with updated flared cuffs.¹¹⁴ Still, the look was a topic in the fashion press of the time. *GQ*, for example, showed knickers as an “American discovery” in 1971, and on the ski slopes in the winter of 1972.¹¹⁵ Also in 1971, a knicker suit of deep blue crushed velvet, worn with a silk turtleneck and knee-high maroon boots, was a “madly modern” recommendation for formal wear.¹¹⁶

PEACOCK SPLENDOR

Prior to the 1960s, American men were largely resistant to much color in their clothing and particularly to the idea of fashion for men. Colorful, ephemeral fashions were, after all, antithetical to the traditions of gender-normative separate spheres they had learned from their fathers and grandfathers. Fashion was women’s domain. For men to take an interest in such frivolousness, insisted traditionalists, was to negate their masculine identity, and even worst, might just turn them into homosexuals.

But youthquake men paid little attention to the dire warnings, pleas, and sometimes threats of their parents and the Establishment. Many young Americans rejected the values of their elders, including conventions of manhood. Instead, youth’s role models for masculinity were often from pop culture, beginning with the British Invaders and subsequently American rock idols, both of whose presentation of a new masculine identity—long hair and a peacock splendor in clothes—opened vitally new and modern paths for youthquake men to follow toward finding their own identity.

In the mid-1960s, the mod looks from London’s Carnaby Street were fresh, radical even, and clearly nothing their fathers would wear. In the second half of the decade, long hair and colorful, nonconformist street looks from the counterculture were further opportunities for rebellious youth to widen the Generation Gap. And, through it all, by degrees, the fashion industry appropriated, commercialized, and disseminated the Peacock Revolution across America. Virtually all categories of men’s apparel were subjected to flower power patterns, tie-dyeing, art movement motifs, psychedelic abstractions,



“Uncommon shirts” by Carriage Club, 1969.

Figure 9. In addition to vivid colors, prints, and textiles, the peacock splendor of men’s shirts in the 1960s included the adaptation of historical elements such as full, gathered Renaissance sleeves and ruffled fronts, collars, and cuffs, as well as multicultural influences such as Nehru collars and East Indian embroideries.



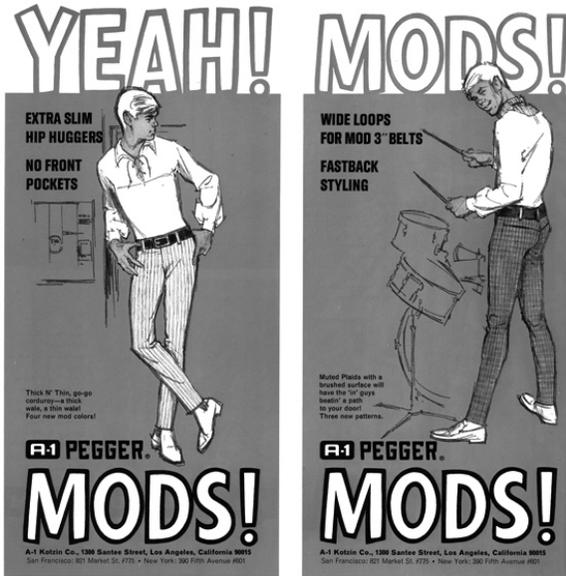
Machine embroidered shirt by Carriage Club, 1970.



Arrow ad, 1971: "Shirts that speak out. If you're fat and forty, forget it."



Romeo shirt with attached fringed scarf by Eros, 1969.



After all...nobody knows more about jean fabrics than Cone.®



Figure 10. Low-rise hip hugger pants were introduced to American youthquake men during the British Invasion of mod looks in the mid-1960s. At about the same time, bell-bottoms also became a fashion trend, a unisex look adapted from women's pant styles. In 1973, a retro style of pleated, high-rise, cuffed trousers called baggies were introduced. Top, hip huggers by A-1 Pegger, 1966; bottom left, bell-bottoms from Cone Mills, 1970; bottom right, cuffed baggies by Sutter Mills, 1973.



Figure 11. The unisex trend in the Peacock Revolution included garments such as bell-bottoms and capes that were adopted by both men and women. In addition, a wide variety of genderless clothing like tunics, sweaters, knit tops, jeans, and outerwear could be updated as unisex fashions by makers through matching color palettes, prints, patterns, fabrics, and materials for him and her. Cape, double-breasted jacket, and bell-bottoms by Tempo California, 1969.