

Chapter 1 : Natalie Rothstein (Author of Four Hundred Years of Fashion)

years of Fashion was an excellent read for the more scholarly-minded costumer in need of an accurate source book for their historical costuming.

Johann Christian Fischer , composer, in matching coat, waistcoat, and breeches, by Thomas Gainsborough , ca. For some four hundred years, suits of matching coat, trousers, and waistcoat have been in and out of fashion. The modern lounge suit appeared in the late 19th century, but traces its origins to the simplified, sartorial standard of dress established by the English king Charles II in the 17th century. However, the paintings of Jan Steen , Pieter Bruegel the Elder , and other painters of the Dutch Golden Era reveal that such an arrangement was already used informally in Holland, if not Western Europe as a whole. Regency[edit] In the early 19th century, British dandy Beau Brummell redefined, adapted, and popularized the style of the British court, leading European men to wearing well-cut, tailored clothes, adorned with carefully knotted neckties. The simplicity of the new clothes and their somber colors contrasted strongly with the extravagant, foppish styles just before. However, paintings of French men from onwards reveal that Brummel might only have adopted and popularized post-revolutionary French suits, which included tail coat, double-breasted waistcoat and full-length trousers with either Hessian boots or regular-size shoes. There is no 18th-century painting of Brummel to establish his innovation. The modern suit design seems to be inspired by the utilitarian dressing of hunters and military officers. Paintings of the decade reveal how the modern coat design with lapels emerged. Victorian[edit] Towards the start of the Victorian period , the frock coat , initially not just black, became popular, and quickly became the standard daily clothing for gentlemen. From the middle of the 19th century, a new then informal coat, the morning coat , became acceptable. It was a less formal garment, with a cut away front, making it suitable for wearing while riding. Towards the end of the 19th century, the modern lounge suit was born as a very informal garment meant only to be worn for sports, in the country, or at the seaside. Three men in wearing black tie variations. Parallel to this, the dinner jacket was invented and came to be worn for informal evening events. When it was imported to the United States , it became known as the tuxedo. Edwardian[edit] , a man in a morning coat. The beginning of the Edwardian era in the early 20th century brought a steady decline in the wearing of frock coats as the morning coat rose in relative formality, first becoming acceptable for businessmen, then becoming standard dress even in town. The lounge suit was slowly accepted as being correct outside its original settings, and during Edwardian times gradually began to be seen in town. While still reserved for private gatherings, usually with no ladies, black tie became more common. In North America , the "sack suit", a cut of lounge suit, saw a large rise in popularity, and, except for the shoulders, it is unfitted, loose, and informal, as it has no darts. Inter-war[edit] At the Treaty of Versailles signing in , the heads of state wore morning dress and lounge suits for informal meetings as seen here , but frock coats for formal daytime meetings. After the end of the first World War, most men adopted the short lounge coated suit. Long coats quickly went out of fashion for everyday wear and business, and the morning coat gained its current classification of "formal". During the s, short suits were always worn except on formal occasions in the daytime, when a morning coat would be worn. Older, more conservative men continued to wear a frock coat, or "Prince Albert coat" as it was known. In North America, for evening occasions, the short dinner jacket virtually replaced the long "full dress" tails, which was perceived as "old hat" and was only worn by old conservative men. In Britain, black tie became acceptable as a general informal alternative to white tie, though at the time the style and accessories of black tie were still very fluid. In the s men began wearing wide, straight-legged trousers with their suits. Younger men often wore even wider-legged trousers which were known as " Oxford bags. Trousers first began to be worn creased in the s. Trousers were worn very highly waisted throughout the s and this fashion remained in vogue until the s. Single-breasted suits were in style throughout the s and the double-breasted suit was mainly worn by older more conservative men. In the s, very fashionable men would often wear double-breasted waistcoats with four buttons on each side with single-breasted coats. Lapels on single-breasted suits were fashionably worn peaked and were often wide. In the early s these styles continued and were often even further exaggerated. Before and again in the s men

preferred snugly tailored coats and waistcoats. In , a complete change in style occurred. Loose fitting coats were introduced, trousers began to be tapered at the bottom and suit coats began to have tapered arms. These new trends were only reluctantly accepted by men at first. At first the waistcoat continued to be made in the traditional fitted and snug style. By , the waistcoat began to be made in a loose style which made it uncomfortable to wear. In fashion magazines of the day, men complained how these new vests continually rode up when they happen to sit down or bend over. Fashionable men changed their preference to the double-breasted suit coat at this time and it would remain in fashion for the next two decades. By this time, morning dress was being replaced by day time semi-formal, known in North America as the stroller. This was quite popular, but has actually been outlived by the morning coat. Since the s it has been used as a black version of the lounge suit as an informal look to the dinner jacket. In modern times the black lounge suit has become popular to wear during the day. Post-war[edit] Reflecting the democratization of wealth and larger trend toward simplification in the decades following the Second World War , the suit was standardized and streamlined. Suit coats were cut as straight as possible without any indication of a waistline, and by the s the lapel had become narrower than at any time prior. Cloth rationing during the war had forced significant changes in style, contributing to a large reduction in the popularity of cuts such as the double-breasted suit. Flannel had humble beginnings – the name is reputedly derived from "gwlanen," Welsh for woolen cloth – and was used for underwear in the 19th century. In the s white flannel was worn for summer sports; by the s the more seasonless gray had become a favorite. When the Prince of Wales wore gray flannel trousers on his trip to America, they were aped by collegiates on both sides of the Atlantic. Cary Grant and Fred Astaire then carried the trend through to the s. In the s, a snug-fitting suit coat became popular once again, also encouraging the return of the waistcoat. This new three-piece style became closely associated with disco culture, and was specifically popularized by the film Saturday Night Fever. Fashion brands such Hagggar meanwhile started to introduce the concept of "suit separates", a production innovation that reduced the need for excessive customization. The s saw a trend towards the simplification of the suit once again. The jacket became looser and the waistcoat was completely dispensed with. A few suit makers continued to make waistcoats, but these tended to be cut low and often had only four buttons. The waistline on the suit coat moved down again in the s to a position well below the waist. By , three-piece suits were on the way out and making way for cut double-breasted and two-piece single-breasted suits. The late s saw the return to popularity of the three-button two-piece suit, which then went back out of fashion some time in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Practical and sturdy, riding habits were worn not only on horseback, but also for travel and other daytime pursuits. Jacket-and-skirt ensembles not intended for riding appeared in the later 19th century. Both riding habits and walking suits reflected the skirt and sleeve styles of the day. Until the s, coat and skirt ensembles were usually described as "costumes" rather than suits, and the term "suit", as applied to such sets, was not usual until after the First World War. Recent influence of casual dress[edit] Over the past half-century, the wearing of suits has become far less common than it once was and is now usually reserved for formal and business activities. During the s, many businesses in North America adopted casual dress codes, beginning with " Casual Fridays " and then extending to the entire business week. The abandonment of a uniform dress code has led to considerable confusion over what is considered appropriate business wear. More recently, some organizations have reinforced formal dress codes, although they may never again be as common as they once were. As early as , Emily Post addressed what she termed the "freak American suit" in her influential guide *Etiquette*: You will see it everywhere, on Broadway of every city and Main Street of every town, on the boardwalks and beaches of coast resorts, and even in remote farming villages. It comes up to hit you in the face year after year in all its amazing variations: Such progressive styles may not reflect the international tastes or etiquette. Some of the non-traditional tailored suit styles of the past century include: The Zoot suit of the late s and s. The Western suit, a form of western wear featuring a tailored jacket with "western" details such as pointed yokes or arrowhead pockets. The Nudie suit , a highly decorated form of western wear. The Mod suit, a fashion of the s, and again in the early s. Characteristics include a very slim cut, narrow lapels, three or four buttons and a strongly tapered waist. Usually single-breasted and grey. The cloth generally consists in part of mohair , tonic, houndstooth , or two-tone fabric. The Safari suit , a fashion of the

s. Patterned after military dress uniforms worn in hot climates, it consisted of long, but sometimes short trousers and short-sleeved jacket with patch pockets of a light suiting fabric, typically of beige or pastel shades of blue and green. It was worn with a short-sleeved shirt, mostly of open neck design, but occasionally with a tie. Another style associated with this was the leisure suit, which had a long-sleeved shirt-like jacket. The Disco suit, a fashion of the s with exaggerated lapels and flared trousers and usually necktie omitting, often in white or brightly coloured polyester fabric, the jacket was based on the jackets popular in the s. The Power suit of the mids and early s:

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