

The Clothing of the Great depression



Everywhere clothing offered a natural province for economy. Men's attire was more sensitive to depression than women's, for even the most elemental sense of chivalry recognized the superior importance of fashion for the wife and daughter. As early as 1930, when the output of women's and children's dresses fell only thirteen per cent below the previous year, men's suits dropped twenty-five and in the next year sank thirty-two per cent under the 1929 level. For the sake of both economy and convenience, more males began to abandon stiff collars, hats, garters, undershirts, vests and the tops of bathing suits.

In women's clothes the early thirties saw the large-scale copying of smart frocks with cheaper materials and workmanship. Also, under pinch of need, the average girl tended as never before to make her own dresses and hats. "An accompanying return to statelier morals and manners" was forecast by a fashion report in September, 1930, concerning the longer skirts and more feminine modes which had begun to repudiate the boyish angularity of the jazz-age flapper. Ruffles, bows and curvaceous lines heralded the rediscovery late in 1931 of Empress Eugénie hats and other styles. Bravado at small cost found expression in brightly painted fingernails, introduced in Paris in 1929, which within the next two years spread from Park Avenue to the sales girl and typist.

Meanwhile the débutante slouch yielded to better fashions in posture, with a tendency to "tuck in and walk tall." Bobbed hair scored an apparently lasting triumph, although the close-cropped extremes of the jazz age grew rarer, and after the middle years of the period the page-boy or curled bob reaching to the shoulder dallied with the old-fashioned idea of crowning glory and comported with a passing vogue for bows in the hair and "little girl" costumes seen wherever dancers followed the rhythms of "swing." Loose, athletic clothing was so clearly the modern preference that by the mid-thirties skirts began to rise again—almost an index of national confidence—while the informality of Florida and California introduced beach pajamas, slacks and shorts to the rest of the country, under protest in many staid communities. Sandals for street and evening wear prepared the way in the latter thirties for the open-toed shoe.

THE AGE OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION 1929-1941

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