



A Perfect Fit: Clothes, Character, and the Promise of America

Jenna Weissman Joselit

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A striking and inventive social history of the role of clothing in the making of modern Americans.

While fashions of the rich and famous have been lessly chronicled, little attention has been paid to the meaning of clothes for everyone else. Yet between 1890 and the outbreak of World War II, as ready-to-wear came into its own, the clothes of ordinary Americans claimed the nation's attention. Allied with civic virtue, fashion now played an increasingly important role in shaping the national character.

Drawing on a wealth of sources -- from advertisements, trade journals, and health manuals to sermons, science, and songs -- acclaimed historian Jenna Weissman Joselit shows how the length of a woman's skirt, the shape of a man's hat, and the height of a pair of heels enabled Americans of every faith, color, and class to feel part of the modern nation. As moral arbiters warned that extravagant attire might undermine equality, and gentlemen worried that wearing colored shirts rered them less manly, the newly arrived and newly emancipated -- immigrants and African-Americans -- wondered just how much jewelry was appropriate to their new status as citizens. Engaging, imaginative, and original, A Perfect Fit uncovers a time in American history when getting dressed was more about fitting in than standing out and vividly shows how clothes expressed the spirit of democracy and the promise of America.

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