

## ABSTRACT

Author: Muhaymina Plair  
Title: African American Fashion: Modesty in Historical and Cultural Dress  
Thesis Advisor: Siobhan Carter-David  
Department: Department of History and Honors College  
Year: 2021

In Western culture, clothes take on many different meanings and implications, which have changed over the centuries. The meanings we have attached to clothing tell us why clothes are important but also which clothes are important. There are many factors that shape the way we dress. History, culture, race, and body type are mainly the most influential of these factors. The history of African Americans from slavery to the hip hop generation, has created a context to clothes that is unique to us. The overall, once a symbol of oppression for African Americans, became a symbol of strength and endurance as well as style. The zoot suit represented a time of racial divide but also of the rise of African American creativity, extravagance, and success in the entertainment industry and in the mainstream American culture as a whole. Cross Colours, with its products, exposed the swagger and culture of hip hop to America and gave a voice to the youth of a community that expressed itself through fashion, song, and art. Modesty also plays a role in how African Americans dress as our bodies demand slightly modified styles that accommodate cultural differences and larger bodies. There have been barriers, however, to how accessible modest where has been in the mainstream American fashion industry, but as awareness and research on dress, dress history, and modest dress grows, we may see more accommodations for people of different faiths, races, and shapes.