

11-2007

# American Fashions for American Women: Early Twentieth Century Efforts to Develop an American Fashion Identity

Sara B. Marcketti  
*Iowa State University, sbb@iastate.edu*

Jean L. Parsons  
*Iowa State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/aeshm\\_pubs](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/aeshm_pubs)

 Part of the [American Material Culture Commons](#), [Fashion Business Commons](#), and the [Fashion Design Commons](#)

The complete bibliographic information for this item can be found at [http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/aeshm\\_pubs/11](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/aeshm_pubs/11). For information on how to cite this item, please visit <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/howtocite.html>.

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Apparel, Events and Hospitality Management at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Apparel, Events and Hospitality Management Publications by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).

---

# American Fashions for American Women: Early Twentieth Century Efforts to Develop an American Fashion Identity

## **Abstract**

The article presents an investigation into attempts to create an American fashion identity for women in the U.S. that emerged during the early 20th century, just as the women's ready-to-wear clothing industry was beginning to take shape. The development of design talent in the U.S. is traced through an examination of trade publications promoting a uniquely American fashion sense. Particular attention is paid to the establishment of the publication "Women's Wear" in 1910. Campaigns supporting the development of an American style promoted by the National Ladies' Tailors' and Dressmakers' Association are analyzed.

## **Disciplines**

American Material Culture | Fashion Business | Fashion Design

## **Comments**

This is an author's final manuscript of an article from *Dress* 34 (2007): 79–95.

## American Fashions for American Women: Early Twentieth Century Efforts to Develop an American Fashion Identity

Sara B. Marcketti and Jean L. Parsons<sup>1</sup>

Sara B. Marcketti, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Textiles and Clothing Program at Iowa State University, Ames, IA. Her research interests include the history of the ready-to-wear apparel industry, design piracy, and the scholarship of teaching. Jean L. Parsons is an associate professor in the same department. Parsons's research interests include fashion design/apparel arts and history of women in the needle trades.

Identifying a starting point for the true emergence of an American design identity has posed a challenge to scholars of twentieth century dress. The confluence of factors associated with World War II--scarcity of raw materials, separation from Paris as a center of innovation, the changed focus of the fashion press--has led scholars to concentrate on this period as the defining moment that gained acclaim for American designers.<sup>1</sup> In spite of this, evidence suggests that the emerging idea of American design began to grow at the beginning of the twentieth century. Almost at the same time that the women's ready-to-wear apparel industry started taking its first steps.<sup>2</sup> Though Paris remained the center for creative ideas for some time, by 1910 proponents within the American industry began to fight for the development and recognition of U.S. design talent.<sup>3</sup> An examination of early industry and trade publications shows support for and promotion of a distinctly American fashion sense, an approach that was not dependent on copying and following Parisian fashion.<sup>4</sup> This movement coincided with the establishment of the trade publication *Women's Wear* (now *Women's Wear Daily*) in 1910 and can be demonstrated through the first two decades of its existence.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, women's apparel manufacturing in the U.S. was a fledgling industry originally based on the production of corsets, bustles, and outer wraps. However, American firms expanded dramatically after 1900, due at least in part to the popularity of shirtwaists.<sup>6</sup> In New York City, the industry center, the number of women's apparel companies grew 350% between 1900 and 1917, increasing from 1,856 to 6,392 firms.<sup>7</sup> By 1920, U. S. apparel manufacturers had become the major producer of clothing for American women.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Marcketti, S. B., & Parsons, J. L. (2007) American fashions for American women: Early twentieth century efforts to develop an American fashion identity. *Dress*, 34, 79-95.

This rapid growth was encouraged by the need to constantly and rapidly produce new styles for an increasingly active and diverse American consumer.

Early on, a complex set of factors worked to stymie the direction that manufacturers took. Was it style, price, quality, or timing that would lead to American success?<sup>9</sup> Unlike other large-scale manufacturing concerns, apparel companies struggled within an industry greatly influenced by fashion. Then, as now, forecasting and managing fashion change presented a fundamental challenge to the burgeoning number of manufacturing and retailing associations formed to provide structure to the developing industry.

As the industry searched for answers to the style, price, and quality questions, it began to recognize factors that affected the operation of the fashion system.<sup>10</sup> In one of the first issues of *Women's Wear* in 1910, editors attempted to identify sources for innovation, speculating about the roles of influential women, prominent actresses, clothing manufacturers, and Parisian dressmakers.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, they believed Paris attribution was a major influence guiding consumers, whether women looked for a dress with a Paris label or an advertisement that suggested French origins.<sup>12</sup>

At first, the incipient apparel industry was reluctant to wean itself from the influence of Paris. Many companies relied on a growing core of style commissioners who sold both authorized and unauthorized copies of Parisian designs for inspiration and for copying. Manufacturers presumed these “commissionaires” to have a “thorough knowledge of the American market.”<sup>13</sup> The role of American designers employed by manufacturing firms and custom salons in department stores was to create salable adaptations of prevailing French fashions that were in tune with American tastes. However, this system of copying and refining French ideas was cumbersome. The sustained demand for ready-to-wear clothing at all price levels convinced manufacturers of the need to create efficiencies. For the United States ready-to-wear apparel industry, rapid growth and the ability to reach consumers of all economic levels depended on its capacity to streamline the system and rely on unique styles of its own.

### **The Campaign for American Fashion**

By the second decade of the twentieth century, increasingly strident voices began to demand development of an American style not dependent on Paris.<sup>14</sup> A unified message emerged when the National Ladies' Tailors' and Dressmakers' Association organized an advertising campaign and slogan, “American Styles for American Women”; both the popular and trade

presses quickly adopted the concept.<sup>15</sup> At least initially, one of the Association's concerns was the timing of production for the ready-to-wear industry. There was a perceived need to wait for the Paris showings, but these were too close to the actual buying season for manufacturers to plan production efficiently. Described in *Women's Wear* as the "worst evil" of the industry, this design dependency hampered mass production techniques.<sup>16</sup>

Determining the obstacles in transitioning to an industry fully dependent on American designs characterized a portion of the campaign debate. As ideas volleyed back and forth in the trade and popular press, questions of industry-level creativity and originality entered the discussion.<sup>17</sup> However, to the manufacturer, the customer was at fault for granting status to anything with a French label. Designers already modified the foreign designs for a woman perceived to be healthier, more athletic, and to have a more active lifestyle than her French counterparts. This would seem to give U.S. designers a significant advantage, but they held American women responsible for waiting for the French openings before making their purchasing decisions. Some manufacturers and editors also accused the customers of a slavish tendency to follow French fashion, rather than dressing for their own individuality.<sup>18</sup>

Between 1910 and 1920, the debate about American fashions for American women wore on in the U.S. press with advertisements, articles, and letters to the editor celebrating, questioning, and decrying the possibility of American-created fashion (**Figure 1**).<sup>19</sup> Despite demands to promote the national economy, practice patriotism, and disavow "the freakish, tasteless, and audacious Parisian models," the celebration and copying of Parisian models continued to be the norm.<sup>20</sup> Fashion writers, designers, and commentators continued to question why U.S. manufacturers and designers, who always had adapted Parisian designs to fit American tastes, could not take the next logical step forward and originate their own creations.<sup>21</sup> While some gradual acknowledgment of American design finally occurred in the 1930s, most American designers did not achieve name recognition until the 1940s.<sup>22</sup> This would not have been possible, however, without the groundwork laid in this emergent period of the U.S. ready-to-wear apparel industry.

### **What Were American Fashions?**

To many observers the distinction between French and American designs was ambiguous. A judge in *The New York Times* "American Fashions for American Women" fashion design contest in 1913 stated, "It is very hard to frame in words that subtle difference between

the gown which is French in spirit and the one that is American. It is a quality, not a fact that distinguishes French and American design.”<sup>23</sup> Most writers agreed that Paris would continue to be the fountainhead of fashion innovation, but there were instances when French designs were inappropriate for the supposedly discerning, common sense American woman. Some outspoken critics lambasted the “absurdities and occasional immodesties of French fashions.” They also suggested that while French women set fashion, their “taste is open to question.”<sup>24</sup>

In the campaign for American fashion, promoters believed American women had distinctive personalities and body types that required clothing made by those who thoroughly understood their sensibilities.<sup>25</sup> This became apparent when American designers and manufacturers adapted Paris fashions to the needs, figures, and temperaments of the American woman. Yet the perception of what constituted “American” style remained vague. It was essentially one of impression, rather than individual silhouettes or fashion details. Certainly practicality was important. As explained in *The American Cloak and Suit Review*, “American” style combined the artistic cuts of Paris haute couture with the practical designs desired by the U.S. woman.<sup>26</sup> But exactly what constituted “practical” was not explained. The best examples that can be cited are the shirtwaist, tailored suit, and walking-length skirt—all viewed as “distinctly American products”—that were valued for their practicality and fashion durability.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps American design was a matter of simplicity and expense. U.S. firms regularly advertised their skill in adapting haute couture garments into less expensive versions. The manufacturing company Simpson Crawford Co. was so proud of their adapting skills that they displayed in their store window an original Drecolle imported gown costing \$485, reproduced in every detail by their dressmakers for sale at \$24.75. This comparison was provided as evidence by the company, to fashion-forward American women, that U.S. dressmakers were the peers of those of Paris, at least in technical skill, if not design sense.<sup>28</sup> By 1914, it was evident that American designers looked to the general idea of Parisian couture but had the skill and design sense to make extensive and creative changes to style details.

The diversity of American women, comprising a variety of national and cultural backgrounds also clouded the issue, making it difficult to refer to a single original American style. The Parisian-born stage actress Sarah Bernhardt maintained that it should be easy to create an American costume, as the United States did not have a national heritage to follow, yet she was at a loss to describe the distinguishing characteristics of a truly “American” garment.<sup>29</sup> Although

efforts to describe the essence of American dress continued to flounder, it was apparent that many within the United States ready-to-wear industry felt that “American women too long have endured the imposition of foreign fashions designed by foreign dressmakers without any sound reference to American conditions and American appropriateness.”<sup>30</sup> **(Figure 2)** Although the actresses, designers and editors quoted in *Women’s Wear* suggested that the U.S. customer increasingly appeared to turn away from Parisian styles and to seek American-created garments, the reality was less apparent.<sup>31</sup>

### **The War for American Style Independence**

*Women’s Wear* and other publications, including *The New York Times*, provided continuous coverage of the American design movement from 1910 through World War I, although the focus of the editorials changed. Prior to the war, commentators celebrated and sought to encourage the growth of the U.S. apparel industry and criticized the outrageous French styles. However, when the war started in August 1914, there was initial concern about losing access to French designers and dressmakers. This change in focus--from criticizing Europe when her goods were available, to fear that Paris would be closed--indicated both the continued dependence of the Americans on the French fashion industry and an ambivalent sense of France’s importance.

Further into the debate, nationalism was touted as reason to support American design. Before World War I, American columnists and apparel industry members expressed a desire to escape the “shackles” of dependence on the French fashion industry.<sup>32</sup> They argued that as one of the largest industries in the country, “it should be a matter of national pride to keep this industry... truly American.”<sup>33</sup> To Edward W. Bok, senior editor of *Ladies Home Journal*, it was a matter of pride. He reasoned that “each garment bought in the United States means the support of some people who spend their money with us. Every merchant should have sufficient pride in his bosom to say to his trade, ‘this garment is of American goods; American labor and I stand in back of the maker’s label.’ We stand in front of the American flag with a reverence short of worship. Let us do the same in pride of our American products.”<sup>34</sup>

The rhetoric also turned to a decidedly anti-French tone. American women were encouraged with militaristic gusto to shun the following of every French fashion. In an article originally printed in 1913 in the *New York Evening Post* and reprinted in *Women’s Wear*, the author encouraged the women of America to “fight a new war of independence... against the

enemy far across the seas, in the *Rue de la Paix*, the *Place Vendome*, and the *Avenue de l'Opera*. There the Parisian dressmaker sits and plots his fall designs, which designs are immediately copied by the dressmakers of the rest of the world.” The author felt that the United States should be the first to rebel against the “ancient tyranny” because “on principal we are... the enemies of foreign domination and we are the one nation that can afford to take the chance.”<sup>35</sup> That the fighting of copied designs was likened to women’s suffrage may seem a blithe contention until one considers the conviction with which authors argued for American designs made by and made for American women. Considered un-American in spirit and enterprise, the reliance on Paris for fashions forced U.S. manufacturers into second place, “to scramble to catch up with the Frenchman.”<sup>36</sup>

Part of the strategy was to attack the quality and craftsmanship of French design. Criticism came from all directions--French and American entertainers, average consumers, singers, and actresses all expressed disappointment in Paris fashion.<sup>37</sup> An article in *The New York Times* in 1912 claimed that the “French have lost their art and have put into its place the commercialism of grotesqueness and vulgarity.”<sup>38</sup> Critics blamed the French for an increased commercialization and interest in quantity production, ironically caused by America’s insistence on new goods. A portrait of a scheming and dominating French fashion industry emerged. Contemporaries claimed that the tradesmen of France, in an attempt to keep production continuous, changed styles as often and as drastically as possible. Some writers believed that the French would sell “any old thing” only to change the prevailing style completely later on.<sup>39</sup> This was an interesting attempt to blame the French for changing fashion--an overall tendency of the fashion system itself.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout 1912, in particular, there was a constant stream of criticism aimed at French designers.<sup>41</sup> Those who considered French styles too extreme most often turned the spotlight on the designs of Paul Poiret. For example, James Blaine, designer for New York-based Thurn, (who had previously worked in Paris) described one of Poiret’s early lines as “a lot of queer little girls” wearing “slinky little Greek-line garden party gowns, with their broad sleeves and their ropes about the middle.” Poiret’s “jupe culottes,” which he described as an idea for the future, was singled out for criticism and evidence of the ridiculousness of French design.<sup>42</sup> Poiret, on the other hand, accused the ready-to-wear industry of vulgarizing his more avant-garde ideas as designs were copied at all prices.<sup>43</sup>

The increased demand for clothing by a greater number of customers intensified the call for originality but also increased the likelihood that ideas would be replicated. American women complained that they had “become sick and tired of being charged preposterous prices for supposedly personal models, and finding that model copied a hundred times over in Paris and in New York.”<sup>44</sup> When wealthy, prominent, society women wore a gown, second-rate designers and mediocre design houses copied these models for less wealthy women. American Edith Rosenblum, a buyer stationed in Paris, complained to *Women’s Wear* that American manufacturers visiting Paris received the same exact styles of garment even if they were willing to pay more money for an exclusive haute couture garment.<sup>45</sup> Parisian women were likewise concerned with duplication. This came to a point in 1912 when protesting Parisian women intentionally dressed exactly alike in blue taffeta dresses and matching hats and paraded in the Bois-de-Boulogne to express their frustration with the duplicating of styles. The women told *Women’s Wear* reporter M. Marcignac they had found it “impossible to wear a toilette or hat original either in color or in cut without seeing a few days later, their model [in cheap, inferior materials] for sale in all the large stores and made by every petty dressmaker.”<sup>46</sup>

False Parisian Labels: “Advertising Bait and Merchandising Bluff”<sup>47</sup>

Part of the problem with establishing a uniquely American design presence was that many American-designed garments were passed off as French in order to boost sales (**Figure 3**). The rampant copying of French dressmakers and designers continued because the prestige of a French creation still swayed many customers. For some manufactures and retailers, the easiest route to a “French” design was to attach a fake French designer label. Large and small retailers alike used these labels, imported from Paris or created in the United States, as important selling points.<sup>48</sup> One leading U.S. dressmaker claimed that “there are dozens of shops in New York where American-made clothes bear French labels, because American women would not buy them otherwise.”<sup>49</sup> Some felt that false labels were deceptive to the consumer, while others argued that “any American woman knows that she can’t get a new Paris hat for twenty dollars. If she doesn’t she’s a fool and she deserves to get swindled.”<sup>50</sup> Others argued that the vendors should bear the legal and moral responsibility for deceiving their customers.<sup>51</sup>

The French fashion houses were certainly aware of the copying. In 1912, one French house complained that of the 1000 models found in retail outlets bearing their labels only 200 were legitimate.<sup>52</sup> Parisian houses debated withholding their designs from Americans in order to

slow the counterfeiting of labels. The illogic of this action was pointed out by, Francis, a designer stationed in Paris: “If Paris wants to continue to develop and force the American people to become creators instead of copyists, this is the very best way for Paris to go about it. It puts a premium on the development of American designing and it forces America to a much more intense and conscious development than she could possibly have under the old method. If the best French models are withheld from American buyers, America will produce designers, or go elsewhere to procure models.”<sup>53</sup> This statement shows the ambivalence that existed on both sides of the French-American design relationship.

The issue of garment quality on both sides of the Atlantic also came into play. For example, the presence of counterfeit labels on less-than-top-quality designer goods disappointed some consumers, which may have led to a decline in the purchase of imported gowns and to the promotion of American design. According to fashion editor Dorothy Dix, “American women are flocking to American fashions not only because of the merit and real values from a design viewpoint but also because of the so frequent fraud and disappointment of the so-called foreign goods.”<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, if the quality was good, counterfeit labels falsely promoted French designers. Despite the fact that he also used counterfeit labels, James Blaine, head designer for Thurn, lambasted the practice: “America has made Paris and it is a pity. All that time we were sewing in fake labels we were building up the reputation of the Paris houses, and all the time we were killing our own chances. That is what I mean when I say that America has made Paris. We have been doing the same work here with the same materials and the same designers which Paris has had and we have been giving Paris all the recognition.”<sup>55</sup>

Others expressed fears about what the promotion of French-labeled American design could do the American fashion campaign. According to Nathan Nadoolman, women’s tailor and chairman of the fashion committee of the National Ladies’ Tailors and Dressmakers Association, the support of French design and garment styles did a double injustice to the welfare of the United States. First, it forced American designers to deny their own creations and second, it kept the U.S. industry from realizing greater economic profits because of the constant boosting of “French” modes. He claimed the loss in profits caused idleness and unemployment to thousands of needle workers, as well as loss in profits to U.S. companies, and to general American prosperity. The promotion of anything foreign [supposedly] angered manufacturers because the false labels belittled and hid their work.<sup>56</sup>

By late 1912, *Women's Wear*, *The New York Times*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and other trade and mass media publications routinely printed ideas for getting American fashions and designers recognized based on merit. One exasperated writer for *Women's Wear* stated: "Simply American labels on American goods. That is the whole question and the whole solution. ... Surely there can be no defensible objection against allowing American women to know what they are really buying?"<sup>57</sup> The situation created a double-edged sword. Although it was evident that many writers, manufacturers, designers, and retailers were angered that U.S.-created goods were seemingly only salable with a Parisian label, U.S. women presumably preferred and demanded the cachet of a French label and continually sought novelties and up-to-the-minute ideas in fashion. Much work needed to be accomplished before American-created goods with American labels were appreciated and, more importantly, sought after and purchased.<sup>58</sup>

### **Changing Trade Regulations**

While the debate raged on about the role of Paris as an obstacle to American design, government restrictions finally began to ameliorate the situation. Historically, the tariff has been the most effective weapon in the arsenal of U.S. business promotion against foreign competition. Tariffs (duties on foreign goods that are or could be domestically produced) have been touted as protecting industries for national defense, contributing to national prosperity, and raising the standard of living for U.S. workers. Due to the protectionist policy of tariffs during the early part of the twentieth century, infant industries grew into giants, and lack of competition allowed for organization and monopoly. The U.S. government systematically raised tariffs on silks and mercerized cottons in the 1909 tariff regulations based on intricate classification schedules of weight and fineness of grade.<sup>59</sup> The consistent rise in tariffs on silks and cottons, the primary materials for dress goods, was intended to encourage domestic production of these frequently imported goods.<sup>60</sup>

Having been in effect since the end of the Civil War, tariffs repeatedly rose through the 1930s and negatively affected the purchase of consumer goods from France. Exports from Paris to the United States declined sharply in the early twentieth century. They dropped 50% from the first to second financial quarter of 1912, as garments were assessed duties as high as 50 to 150 percent of their value. Continual increases in duties meant that fewer U.S. establishments made regular trips to Paris, and, when they did, only the larger firms bought many Parisian models. R. J. Shoninger, President of the American Chamber of Commerce, stated in 1912 that the high

tariffs and duties caused Americans to find the Parisian market less attractive than previously and helped boost American fashion production. According to Shoninger,

Not long ago, hundreds of American dressmakers made regular trips to Paris twice a year, returning with an average of a dozen new models each, they passed more or less duty free. Now duties are charged and the result is only the large firms buy Paris models. Of course, it is quite natural that none of the great Paris dressmaking establishments should be willing to acknowledge this fact, but from all accounts it is now beyond doubt that America, and New York especially, has become a fashion center to be reckoned with, even by Paris.<sup>61</sup>

Although women desired French fashion labels, many of the products worn in America were now produced in New York.<sup>62</sup> According to the front page article in *Women's Wear* in 1911, "What is very good in New York all one season is good all over the country beginning the next."<sup>63</sup> While the industry and its relations debated strategies to control Paris fashion domination, no scattered industry efforts had the same impact as government regulations.

As World War I approached, some within the apparel industry expressed concern that Paris would be cut off from trade during the war. Others optimistically viewed the potential conflict as an opportunity to create an independent U.S. ready-to-wear industry.<sup>64</sup> A *New York Times* writer commented, "Not the least beneficial result to this country of the European outbreak will be the opportunity for American manufacturers of women's wear to throw off the shackles of custom that have bound them to Paris for so many years and to make the creations of their own minds takes the place of copies of the ideas of designers overseas."<sup>65</sup>

Although French designs ultimately were not cut off from the United States during World War I, rising wholesale and retail prices of French goods from 1914 to 1927, along with U.S. tariffs, negatively affected the desire for and purchasing of French garments by American consumers.<sup>66</sup> *Women's Wear* in 1919 reported that wholesale prices jumped from 300 to 500 percent of previously recorded levels and that the availability of luxury goods grew increasingly scarce and progressively more expensive: "Before the war 25 francs would buy the fine handkerchief linen chemise adorned with superb embroidery and real Valenciennes lace. Today you pay 85 francs for a linen [chemise] with shirred bands of cotton tulle and consider yourself lucky."<sup>67</sup> The rising wholesale and retail prices of French goods prompted innovative ways of "borrowing" from the French such as the smuggling of Parisian gowns into the United States via Canadian ports without the payment of revenues to U.S. customs officials.<sup>68</sup> These economic conditions also spurred support for American design independence.

## Development of an American Design Presence

While calls for “American fashions for American women” made good news stories, organizational structures needed to be put into place to educate American designers, encourage American fashion development and promote the United States as a fashion center. The expansion of the ready-to-wear industry in the early twentieth century, plus a growing spirit of nationalism,<sup>69</sup> opened the door and created a demand for American designers. Two problems were the lack of a support network for design in this country and the lack of recognition and publicity of U.S. style “voices.” Once the need and desire for American creative talents was established, how would interest in design careers be cultivated, and how would designers be trained? Numerous proposals were offered in the pages of *Women’s Wear* to expand formalized education for nascent American designers, to create museums and style libraries, to publicize American designers in the media, and to support the creation of associations to advance American creative design.<sup>70</sup>

Design education developed simultaneously with the growing women’s ready-to-wear industry.<sup>71</sup> The earliest programs were founded to train designers for the wholesale and retail garment trade in both mass production and for dressmaking establishments. The ready-to-wear industry required a designer with different skills than the custom dressmaker – the traditional source of sewing and design training for women.<sup>72</sup> U.S. ready-to-wear manufacturers and retailers demanded efficiency and salable goods from their designers. In the ready-to-wear apparel industry, successful styles meant a compromise between the creative ideas of the haute couture and the necessary economies of mass production. To succeed in ready-to-wear, designers needed to create a great number of variations based on one model, and they had to embrace a work environment was often a factory – a very unstylish setting.

Schools such as The New York School of Design (American School of Design, established 1896) and The Pratt Institute in New York City (established 1887) were firmly established by the beginning of the twentieth century. Many schools were established between 1910 and 1925, in part because of the fear of the suspension of the Parisian fashion industry due to World War I, but also as a result of the desire for “American” fashions. Schools with programs in apparel design included The New York School (1906) today known as The New

School, Parsons School of Design; Cooper Union (1910s); the Fashion Academy (1912); Metropolitan Art School (1919); The Traphagen School of Fashion (1923); and Grand Central School of Art (1924).<sup>73</sup> Smaller, lesser known schools such as Professor I. Rosenfeld's School of Designing on Second Avenue in New York City and The Anna Morgan School of Expression in Chicago also advertised design education programs in the trade press.<sup>74</sup>

Artistically minded schools, such as the Pratt Institute in New York, taught students fashion design, sewing, and drawing, as well as pertinent business methods. Within the more commercial vocational schools, students typically decided between programs in fashion illustration and dress designing. Depending on the talent and needs of the student and the availability of jobs, students were encouraged to consider working in any area within the apparel industry, including manufacturing, retailing, fashion journalism, and even modeling. Prominent industry members urged young designers to take history of textiles, costume design, and artistic courses and urged travel to both domestic and exotic locales.<sup>75</sup>

According to Alexander Grean, chairman of the "Society for American Fashion for American Women," speaking to a group of students at the Teachers College of Columbia University: "It makes no difference how clever you may become with the pencil. The most important thing is to cultivate your aesthetic taste by observing and studying everything that is beautiful and harmonious in nature and in art."<sup>76</sup> Promising designers were encouraged to analyze fashion tendencies in light of recent events and probable future trends and to recognize important silhouettes. Students were pushed to train their powers of observation and analysis by keeping journals and scrapbooks, cutting out illustrations of dresses, suits, coats, hats and shoes, and recording the popular designs. Grean, a dressmaker and tailor, stated that it was more important to learn artistic drawing than pattern cutting because the United States had enough pattern makers; it needed artists. This was in direct contrast to the vocational programs for dressmakers, which also emphasized sewing and patternmaking skills. He also urged students to develop "interpretive design creations" and not blatantly copy Paris or even U.S. designs.<sup>77</sup>

At least in the early part of the twentieth century, women were discouraged from pursuing careers in design because of the assumption that they would marry, have children, and abandon the profession. Leading proponents of the "American fashions for American women" campaign urged manufacturers to pay a designer enough money so that *he* could, "work designs, eat designs, drink designs, and at night he must dream designs or pay a fine for every dream that

is alien to the profession.”<sup>78</sup> This was an interesting pronoun choice given the title of the essay: “Girls who Apply for [Design] Positions.” Indeed, apparel industry designers in the early nineteenth hundreds were most often referred to as masculine.<sup>79</sup> As the twentieth century progressed, however, women were encouraged to pursue careers in design.<sup>80</sup>

Since the turn of the twentieth century, American manufacturers had congratulated themselves on excellent workmanship and adaptations of French designs.<sup>81</sup> What seemed to be missing was a source of inspiration for the development of original design ideas, something the French not only had in abundance, but knew how to use to advantage. A relatively young country, the United States did not have the same artistic environment or design and creative history as France. In explaining the dominance of Paris, *Women’s Wear* in 1912 noted, “On the side of the Paris fashions is all the weight of long customs, great publicity, and real atmosphere, merit, and natural public preference. There is all the glamour of Paris.”<sup>82</sup> Could Americans create new marvels in fashion if provided with the same artistic environment as Europeans?

American designers were encouraged to adapt from the same historic sources used by the French fashion houses. Museums such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The American Museum of Natural History, and the Brooklyn Museum of Art were some of the first to open their collections for the study of historic and ethnic clothing. M.D.C. (Morris De Camp) Crawford, editor for *Women’s Wear*, former research associate in textiles at the American Museum of Natural History, and author of several fashion books, established a strong alliance between museums and the garment and textile trades in the early twentieth century. By 1917, he had orchestrated the founding of study rooms, lectures and workshops at the American Museum of Natural History to the enthusiasm of leading manufacturers and designers.<sup>83</sup> Supporting these efforts were Max Meyer of A. Beller and Company, Jessie Franklin Turner of Bonwit Teller, Mary Wells of John Wanamaker’s and representatives from the cotton and silk industry such as the Belding Brothers, Cheney Silk, and Sowden and Company.<sup>84</sup> Crawford, through his writings in trade and art-focused publications became an important spokesperson for the “creative research” that museums could provide to the fashion world.<sup>85</sup> To make clothing that was as beautiful as that found anywhere else in the world, he believed that designers needed to study not only the trend of fashions, life, and necessities of the day, but also documents in the chief New York City libraries and museums.<sup>86</sup>

In addition to museums and style libraries, America was missing both the cultural ambience and legal protection enjoyed by Parisian designers. Commentators suggested that to compete with Paris, Americans needed similar venues, such as horse races where French fashions usually premiered, magnificent open air restaurants, and cafes where good music could be heard and afternoon tea consumed, and where fashionable women could be seen.<sup>87</sup>

### **Advertising and Promotion**

One reason American designers struggled to achieve recognition in the early part of the twentieth century was lack of attention from the press. Parisian designers were celebrated as superior creators of exquisite design, whereas American designers were routinely commended for their technical abilities for copying Parisian design. Advertising and editorial content in the fashion press highlighted French designers Poiret, Doucet, Paquin, and Cheruit, while American designers were rarely mentioned by name in advertising spreads.<sup>88</sup> According to dress designer James Blaine, the newspapers were to blame for the “bewitching and hypnotizing of women” for all things Parisian.<sup>89</sup> Each season, Parisian design decisions, tendencies, and innovations filled American department and specialty store ads while American stores rarely commented on U.S.-made merchandise. This was in part due to the American system in which many American designers created goods under a manufacturers’ name, a department store, or even a false Parisian label. Clara Simcox, one of the rare American designers who advertised her own creations and received credit for her designs stated,

If we had the support of our own press (who are giving Paris so much free advertising), if they would recognize our talents without fearing that an ad might get lost by boosting our home industries, American women would soon generally realize the great mistake in buying the poorly finished and hurriedly made French dresses.<sup>90</sup>

It was argued that if the press promoted the work of American designers, stores would naturally be more “courageous in advocating and pushing American-made goods.”<sup>91</sup> American dressmakers wondered why the U.S. press gave so much space to French and other foreign merchants, especially since these advertisements competed with U.S.-made clothing sold in retail shops.<sup>92</sup>

Manufacturers, however, were responsible for advertising their products and their own designers. In advertisements to consumers, manufacturers rarely listed their designers, choosing to highlight the company name. Interestingly, theatre programs publicized and recognized their

American costume designers. According to one dressmaker, in 1912 there were 50% more American-made gowns worn in the theatre than 1911, and 85% more than in 1910.<sup>93</sup>

Interestingly, early twentieth century suggestions for promoting American-made goods sounded like ideas used later in the century. Many writers stressed the importance of advertising American-made goods in U.S. newspapers. Other manufacturers and designers suggested developing special departments in stores or the development of special chain stores that only carried American-crafted merchandise. To “build up consumer appreciation of good materials and good design even in inexpensive merchandise” American retailers were urged to “sincerely and intelligently back talent.”<sup>94</sup> In 1919, the women’s ready-to-wear department of the Bush Terminal Sales Building hired U.S. designers to create “works of art” that were to be produced by the Bush manufacturing department and sold exclusively in their women’s wear department, thus creating, promoting, and selling American-made ready-to-wear clothing.<sup>95</sup>

One attempt at promoting the American creative designer was through competitions. *The New York Times* conducted the first newspaper contest for an American designed hat and dress in 1912<sup>96</sup> (**Figure 4**). Stating the purpose of the first “American Fashions for American Women” fashion contest, *The New York Times* declared, “This contest constitutes the first comprehensive presentation of American genius applied to the designing of women’s dress. It seems to foreshadow a new war of independence, in which, no doubt, American enterprise, adaptability, and taste will soon find some effective means of adequate self-expression.”<sup>97</sup> One of the winners of the competition was Ethel Traphagen, a fashion designer credited with introducing shorts and slacks into American women's fashion, as well as founding the Traphagen School of Fashion in New York City in the 1920s.<sup>98</sup> Other American fashion contests included one held in 1916 at the Art Alliance of America which included professional artists, amateurs, and school children; a manufacturer-sponsored contest called the Albert Blum Contest for hand-decorated fabrics which included batik, tie-and-dye process, and block-printed fabrics created in America; and contests sponsored by Wanamaker’s Stores in New York and Philadelphia in 1918.<sup>99</sup>

Another approach to promotion involved creation of American-focused associations. Members of the Fashion Art League regularly promoted the designs of U.S. dressmakers. Other organizations that held meetings and discussions regarding fabric, designs, and products made in the United States included: The Waist and Dress Designers’ Association, The Dressmakers’ Protective Association, the National Association of Clothing Designers, the Advertising Men’s

League (**Figure 5**), and the Chicago Dressmakers' Club Convention.<sup>100</sup> The National Ladies' Tailors and Dressmakers Association formulated plans for a Fashion Congress, to create some uniformity in the showing of models throughout the country.<sup>101</sup> The chairman of this organization believed, however, that the very men most loudly denouncing Parisian ideas at the Style Congress "knew in their own hearts that they must utilize designs which originate across the water."<sup>102</sup>

All of these efforts set the stage to develop the American design component of this rapidly expanding industry. By the end of the 1920s, attitudes about women professionals had changed. More women graduated from design schools, and organizations such as The Fashion Group began to support women working in the industry. While the fashion press continued to focus on Paris as the center of creative fashion design, it was in the 1920s that many now familiar design names began their careers including Claire McCardell and Norman Norell who both worked for New York-based ready-to-wear designer and manufacturer Hattie Carnegie.<sup>103</sup>

In the 1930s, recognition of the importance of promoting American fashions by U.S. retailers and the popular press resulted in, to a degree, the advancement of American designing talent (**Figure 6**).<sup>104</sup> By 1940, however, the apparel industry still grappled with the concept of American fashion for American women. Some writers argued that the mass production of ready-to-wear clothing was something to marvel at, "like the production of automobiles, breakfast cereals, and canned foods, which are so integral a part of the American scene."<sup>105</sup> Others such as Charles Rendigs, head of Nanty Frocks, a firm that produced high priced dresses selling for \$150 to \$550 in the 1930s, wondered if America could ever produce original pieces of fashion not dependent on Parisian design inspiration. According to Rendigs,

We in America don't have time for originality. In France, a designer can sit with a cigarette in his mouth and think. He can go out to lunch for two hours and if he doesn't want to come back, he might not; he has time to be original. All you need to be successful in this country is to take a French garment with the originality etcetera add American ingenuity, talent, and machines, then it can be done right.<sup>106</sup>

### **The Stage is Set for American Design**

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed an influx of manufacturing and retailing businesses and associations interested in promoting the consumption of American fashion. While at all price levels, American-made garments clothed the majority of U.S. women, the design inspiration and credit for these garments was Parisian. Frustrated not only by lack of

credit for their creations, but also by an inability to control fashion change, many in the ready-to-wear industry resolved to actively alter the perception of American-made clothing. The campaign of “American fashions for American women,” opened the door not only for suggestions, but also actions aimed at supporting and encouraging emergent creative talents in the United States. These included a call to teach design students independence from Paris, to establish style libraries and museums for American designers, pleas for U.S. stores to recognize American design talent, and the creation of associations to promote the American designer.

While some writers called the work of the “American fashions for American women” promotion untimely, it is evident that many early twentieth century voices requested and even demanded a style independent of Paris. Although some of these efforts seemed to be personal crusades, this early campaign played a significant part in the beginning stages of development of American creative design talents. In 1941, when some within the ready-to-wear apparel industry claimed U.S. design styling and selling was “floundering” partly due to the absence of Paris, M.D.C. Crawford stated, “1914 to 1918 began the greatest era of prosperity and creative design in the costume industries of America.”<sup>107</sup> Clearly, the early U.S. ready-to-wear industry thrived and continued to grow, however chaotically, without recognition of the men and women who created the designs. Nevertheless, in this early period of the twentieth century, the acknowledgment and promotion of American-made garments and attempts to educate and nurture those who designed them can be heralded as a necessary step in the creation of an independent American design presence.

## Bibliography

- Cohen, Julius H. *Law and Order in Industry: Five Years Experience*. New York: Fairchild Publications, 1970.
- Crane, Diana. *Fashion and its Social Agenda*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Daves, Jessica. *Ready-Made Miracle: The American Story of Fashion for the Millions*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967.
- Donahue, Mary. "Design and the Industrial Arts in America, 1894-1940: An Inquiry into Fashion Design and Art and Industry." PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2001.
- Kidwell, Claudia, and Christman, Margaret. *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America*. Washington: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974.
- Leach, William. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.
- Leipzig, Sheryl F. "It Is a Profession That is New, Unlimited And Rich!: The Promotion Of The American Fashion Designer in the 1930s." Phd diss., Iowa State University, 2005.
- Marcketti, Sara B., & Parsons, Jean L. "Design Piracy and Self Regulation: The Fashion Originators' Guild of America: 1932-1941." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 24: 214-228.
- Milbank, Caroline Rennolds. *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989
- Richards, Florence S. *The Ready-to-Wear Industry 1900-1950*. New York: Fairchild Publications, 1951.
- Schorman, Rob. *Selling Style: Clothing and Social Change at the Turn of the Century*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Seleckman, B. M., Walter, Henriette, & Couper, W. J. *The Clothing and Textile Industries in New York and its Environs*. New York: Regional Plan of New York and its Environs, 1925.
- Shaw, Madelyn. "American Fashion: The Tirocchi Sisters in Context." *From Paris to Providence, Fashion, Art and the Tirocchi Dressmakers' Shop, 1915-1947*. Providence, R.I.: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 2000.
- Smith, Bernard. "A Study of Uneven Industrial Development: The American Clothing Industry in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries." PhD diss., Yale University, 1989.

Troy, Nancy. *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003.

U. S. Census Office. *Census of Manufacturers, 1921*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924).

Welters, Linda, and Patricia A. Cunningham. "The Americanization of Fashion." *Twentieth Century American Fashion*. Oxford: Berg, 2005.

## Endnotes

---

<sup>1</sup> Jessica Daves in *Ready Made Miracle* notes that American production of U.S. produced goods did not wholeheartedly occur until World War II. Milbank noted the years between the stock market crash of 1929 and the outbreak of World War II as most formative for American design. Jessica Daves, *Ready-Made Miracle: The American Story of Fashion for the Millions* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), 34; Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Linda Welters and Patricia A. Cunningham, "The Americanization of Fashion," *Twentieth-Century American Fashion* (New York: Berg, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> *Women's Wear*, August 10, 1910; *Women's Wear*, Oct. 29, 1910, as quoted in Bernard Smith, "A Study of Uneven Industrial Development: The American Clothing Industry in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> The focus of this paper is the campaign for "American Fashions for American Women" promoted in *Women's Wear* and *The New York Times* by industry executives and fashion editors and critics. The voices of consumers and American designers was largely absent from the debates regarding the importance and necessity of "American" design in these publications.

<sup>5</sup> The majority of the data for this paper originated in *Women's Wear* during the early nineteen hundreds. On January 3, 1927 the name of the trade newspaper *Women's Wear* was changed to *Women's Wear Daily*. In this paper, the title *Women's Wear* is used. Data for this paper was collected through a systematic analysis of *Women's Wear*, citations of American designs and fashions located in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* and from the *New York Times Index*. Publications such as *Ladies Home Journal* and the *Journal of Home Economics* were systematically scanned for reference to American design.

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the rapid development of the U.S. industry in the 1890s was at least in part due to shirtwaist production. See Jean L. Parsons and Jennifer Schulle, "The Shirtwaist: Changing the Commerce of Fashion," (paper presented at the Costume Society of America Region III meeting, Cincinnati, Ohio, October, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> B.M.Selekman, Henriette R. Walter and W.J. Couper, *The Clothing and Textile Industries in New York and Its Environs* (New York: Committee of Regional Plan of New York and Its Environs, 1925), 50.

<sup>8</sup> American women also could acquire clothing from dressmakers or create their own clothing at home. However, production of factory-made clothing expanded greatly during the late nineteenth century due to improvements in sewing machine technology, sized patterns, and the application of electric power to drive the sewing machine and the cutting knife by machine. Other specialized machines mechanized pinking, button-holing, snap-fastening, and once-laborious hand processes. Acquisition of factory-made clothing was promoted in rural areas through the wide availability of mail-order catalogues. See Claudia Kidwell and Margaret Christman, *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America* (Washington: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974); Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agenda* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 72-76; Florence S. Richards, *The Ready-to-Wear Industry 1900-1950* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1951).

<sup>9</sup> See Smith, "A Study of Uneven Industrial Development" and Julius Henry Cohen, *Law and Order in Industry: Five Years Experience* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1970).

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of fashion systems, see Mary Ellen Roach and Kathleen L. Musa, *New Perspectives on the History of Western Dress* (New York: Nutri-Guides, 1980).

<sup>11</sup> "The Mystery of the Fashions," *Women's Wear*, 1910.

<sup>12</sup> "How American Retailers Promote Foreign Goods," *Women's Wear*, October 18, 1912, 2, 6-9; Sarah Bernhardt, "Can the American Woman Design her Own Clothes?" *Ladies Home Journal* (1912), 9; "We are Advertising Foreign Styles While they are Copying our own Smart Women," *Women's Wear*, October 15, 1912, 1; "Can American Fashions be Successful," *Women's Wear*, January 6, 1913, 7.

<sup>13</sup> "We are Advertising," 1.

<sup>14</sup> “Home Fashions for America,” *The New York Times*, December 8, 1912, 12; Bernhardt, “Can the American Woman,” 9; “What America Needs,” *Women’s Wear*, August 6, 1912, 1; Edward Bok, “If America Had her Own Fashions,” *The New York Times*, September 25, 1912, 7; “American Styles for American Women,” *Women’s Wear*, October 9, 1912, 1.

<sup>15</sup> “Style Congress of Ladies Tailors and Dressmakers Opens,” *Women’s Wear*, June 27, 1912, 1. The slogan was quickly accepted and *Ladies Home Journal*, *The New York Times* and subsequent issues of *Women’s Wear*, among others, printed related essays and editorials.

<sup>16</sup> *Women’s Wear*, March 22, 1912.

<sup>17</sup> These concerns focused on promotion of American-created styles in general, and not on promotion of individual designers.

<sup>18</sup> Luisa Tetrazzini, “Should we Design our Gowns?” *Harper’s Bazar* 45 (1911), 286.

<sup>19</sup> Babette A. Muelle, “New York Dressmakers,” *Good Housekeeping* 36 (1903), 302-303; Tetrazzini, “Should we Design our Gowns?” 286; Those Artistic French Fashions,” *The New York Times*, December 12, 1912, 9; “The Instinct of Dress,” *The New York Times*, December 13, 1912, 14; “Worth Declares America is Right,” *The New York Times*, December 20, 1912, 12; “As to American Fashions,” *The New York Times*, December 26, 1912, 8; “Geraldine Tarrar on American Styles,” *The New York Times*, December 29, 1912, 11; “American or French,” *Women’s Wear*, February 24, 1913, 3, 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> “We are Advertising Foreign Styles While they are Copying our own Smart Women,” 1.

<sup>21</sup> “Paris Losing its Vogue,” *Women’s Wear*, December 1, 1912, 16; “If American Had Her Own Fashions,” *The New York Times*, September 25, 1912, 7; “American Designs and American Goods to Rival Best in Paris,” *The New York Times*, June 13, 1913, 6; “Can American Fashions be Successful?” *Women’s Wear*, 7; Jessie Trimble, “Why Paris is the Capital of Fashion,” *The Delineator* (1907), 291, 408.

<sup>22</sup> Sheryl F. Leipzig, “It is a profession that is New, Unlimited and Rich!: The Promotion of the American Fashion Designer in the 1930s” (PhD diss., Iowa State University, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> “Fashion Contest for Times Readers,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 1912, 9. *The New York Times* sponsored the first contest to encourage “native” American fashion art in December 1912. “American or French,” *Women’s Wear*, 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> “Home Fashions For America,” 12.

<sup>25</sup> “As To American Fashions,” 8; Anna Burnham Westermann, “Can America Originate its Own Fashion?,” *Ladies Home Journal* (1909), 11-12; ; Bernhardt, “Can the American Woman,” 9; “Mme. Nardica Says American Fashions Are Already First,” *Women’s Wear*, January 3, 1913, 6; “Lady Duff Gordon says American Women are Creating their own Fashions,” *Women’s Wear*, November 11, 1912, 9; “The Tastes of American Women in Dress is Excellent, Says M. Redfern, But Famous Costumer Denies That America is Developing its Own Style,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 1909, 4.

<sup>26</sup> “Style vs. Quality,” *Women’s Wear*, December 13, 1912, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Westermann, “Can America Originate?,” 11.

<sup>28</sup> “That American Women are the Peers of Those of Paris Evidenced by Comparing Original Drecoll Model with the American Made Copy,” *Women’s Wear*, October 28, 1912, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Bernhardt, “Can the American Woman?,” 9.

<sup>30</sup> “Style and the American Woman,” *Women’s Wear*, April 26, 1912, 9, 13.

<sup>31</sup> “Dress Show at McAlpin,” *The New York Times*, June 13, 1913, 6; “Mme. Nardica Says American,” 6; “Lady Duff Gordon,” 9.

<sup>32</sup> “Paris may see end of style control,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 1914, 15.

<sup>33</sup> “As To American Fashions,” 8.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Bok immigrated to the United States from Den Helder, the Netherlands. His autobiography, *The Americanization of Edward Bok*, won the Pulitzer Prize for best autobiography. At least one writer suggested that Bok’s enthusiasm for American design was an enthusiastic effort to sell products printed in the pages of *Ladies Home Journal*. “In Her Own Right,” *Women’s Wear*, December 13, 1912, 7.

<sup>35</sup> “The Judgment of Paris,” *Women’s Wear*, January 9, 1913, 3.

<sup>36</sup> “Home Fashions For America,” 12.

<sup>37</sup> “Mme. Nardica Says American,” 6. The actress Madame Nardica complained of hastily and poorly sewn gowns, publicly doubting and even renouncing the renowned craftsmanship of Paris. “New York Says Paris Dressmakers are No Longer Creators of Fashions, but Merely Adopters,” *Women’s Wear*, May 15, 1911, 5; “Parisians Adopt Uniform,” *Women’s Wear*, May 31, 1912, 1, 4; “Two More Prominent American Women Come Out for Open Recognition on Merit of American Styles and Merchandise and Announce Intention to Support Movement,” *Women’s Wear*, December 24, 1912, 7; “Paris Losing its Vogue,” *The New York Times*, December 1, 1912, 16; “Advisors on Modes Proposed in Paris,” *The New York Times*, December 1, 1912, 3; “Nazimova for American Mode,” *The New York Times*, December 14, 1912, 10; “How to Beat Paris at her Own Game,” *The New York Times*, December 19, 1912, 8.

<sup>38</sup> “Home Fashions For America,” 12.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Sara B. Marcketti and Jean L. Parsons, “Design Piracy and Self Regulation: The Fashion Originators’ Guild of America: 1932-1941,” *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 24 (2006): 214-228.

<sup>41</sup> As reported in *Women’s Wear*, under the caption “American Fashions for American Women” the *New York World* commented editorially that the proposed revival of Robespierre demonstrated that “Paris was mentally and morally unbalanced. ...It will be... a freak in New York. It is time for America to have American dress for American women.” “American Fashions for American Women,” *Women’s Wear*, July 6, 1912, 15. In the article, “Second Day of Style Congress,” *Women’s Wear*, June 28, 1912, 1, 11, the original president of the Boston branch of the National Ladies Tailors and Dressmakers Association decried the very existence of Parisian fashion, which was reportedly met “with an outburst of applause.”

<sup>42</sup> “It was America that Made Paris,” *The New York Times*, December 22, 1912, 11.

<sup>43</sup> See Nancy Troy, *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), 192 for a discussion of the “precarious balance that Poiret strove to maintain after 1909 between an allegedly disinterested commitment to high culture and the demands of an increasingly complex, sophisticated, and diversified commercial enterprise....” Styles of both American and Parisian origination were copied at lower price points and flooded the American market with cheap imitations of higher-end goods. Sara B. Marcketti, “Design Piracy in the U.S. Ready-to-Wear Apparel Industry: 1910-1941” (PhD diss., Iowa State University, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> “Mme. Nardica Says American Fashions Are Already First,” 6.

<sup>45</sup> “Edith L. Rosenblum’s Letter,” *Women’s Wear*, February 8, 1912, 1.

<sup>46</sup> “Parisians Adopt Uniform,” *Women’s Wear*, May 31, 1912, 1, 4.

<sup>47</sup> “How American Retailers Promote Foreign Goods,” 2.

<sup>48</sup> “Paris Labels,” *Women’s Wear*, October 18, 1912, 2.

<sup>49</sup> “Publicity,” *Women’s Wear*, December 24, 1912, 7.

<sup>50</sup> Samuel Hopkins Adams, “The Dishonest Paris Label: How American Women are being fooled by a Country-Wide Swindle,” *Ladies Home Journal*, March 1913.

<sup>51</sup> “Two More Prominent American Women,” 7; “Paris Labels,” *Women’s Wear*, October 25, 1912, 12; “Costumes,” *Women’s Wear*, October 25, 1912, 12.

<sup>52</sup> “Costumes,” *Women’s Wear*, February 18, 1913, 1.

<sup>53</sup> “Francis of Paris has Radical Views on the Present French Situation,” *Women’s Wear*, April 23, 1913, 1, 12.

<sup>54</sup> “Grean Lectures to the Women Students at the Teachers College of Columbia on American Fashions,” *Women’s Wear*, November 23, 1912, 8-9.

<sup>55</sup> “Head Designer for Thurn Comments on How America’s Publicity Has Boosted Paris,” *Women’s Wear*, December 23, 1912, 6.

<sup>56</sup> “Nadoolman says American Newspapers Force American Designers to Deny their Own Style Creations,” *Women’s Wear*, October 22, 1912, 1.

<sup>57</sup> “Two More Prominent American Women,” 7.

<sup>58</sup> The number of American firms rose sharply in the early twentieth century to keep up with the demand for the newest novelties. The value of dresses manufactured increased nearly 39% from 1914 to 1919. U.S. Census Office, *Census of Manufacturers, 1921* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924). According to articles such as “How American Retailers Promote Foreign Goods,” published in *Women’s Wear* in 1912 and Adams, “The Dishonest Paris Label” published in 1913, many of these garments were marketed and sold with false French labels.

<sup>59</sup> The duties rose as the percentage of silk became greater in a product. For instance, in 1897 the duties on silk piece goods weighting 1 1/3 to 8 ounces per square yard and containing 20% and less of silk were fifty cents per pound. In 1909, a new classification was made subjecting light weight goods, 1 1/3 to 2 1/2 ounces per square yard to duties of 70 cents per pound. F.W. Taussig, *The Tariff History of the United States* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1914), 390.

<sup>60</sup> Protectionism, in the form of high tariffs, was firmly established as an enduring policy in the U.S. by the end of the Civil War partly due to national fiscal needs. After World War I, several industries such as dyestuffs and other chemicals stressed their infancy and argued that without protection they would be unable to withstand competition. Taussig, *The Tariff History*, 361; Percy W. Bidwell, *The Invisible Tariff* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1939); Merle Fainsod, Lincoln Gordon, and Joseph Palamontain, *Government and the American Economy* (New York: W.W. Norton And Company, 1959).

<sup>61</sup> “America Lifting Paris Fashion Yoke,” *The New York Times*, July 14, 1912, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Due to the demand for ready-to-wear and the growth in number of small and medium-sized firms, the rate of expansion in factory employment from 1900 to 1920 was faster than at any other time thereafter. By 1923, New York was producing 79.9% of women’s clothing; other clothing production occurred in other large cities such as Chicago and St. Louis. Of all of the workers engaged in manufacturing industries in 1919 in the five boroughs of New York City, nearly one in every six was at work on women’s clothing. U.S. Census Office, *Census of Manufacturers, 1921*.

<sup>63</sup> “Today in New York,” *Women’s Wear*, July 1, 1930, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Miner King, “War, Women, and American Clothes,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, (1917), 592-598.

<sup>65</sup> “Paris may see end of style control,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 1914, 15.

<sup>66</sup> Eleanor L. Dulles, *The French Franc 1914-1928*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929): Appendix, 143.

<sup>67</sup> “Paris Advises Americans to Shop at Home,” *Women’s Wear*, December 12, 1919, 1, 17.

<sup>68</sup> “See New Conspiracy to Smuggle Gowns,” *The New York Times*, December 12, 1912, 24.

<sup>69</sup> As stated by Schorman, “the relationship between clothing and citizenship became particularly visible during the 1890s with respect to two issues:” the Spanish-American War in 1898 and the emphasis many European immigrants placed on clothing as a means of “becoming American.” Rob Schorman, *Selling Style: Clothing and Social Change at the Turn of the Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>70</sup> “Designers Establish Employment Bureau,” *Women’s Wear*, September 12, 1919, 3; “Leading Tailors and Dressmakers Organize for Protection and Elevation of their Industry,” *Women’s Wear*, October 9, 1919, 1; “Associated Dress Industries of America,” *Women’s Wear*, January 17, 1919, 32-33; M. D. C. Crawford, “You Must Raise America’s Standards of Design,” *Women’s Wear*, November 5, 1919, 2; M. D. C. Crawford, “America Lacks Costume Inspirational Sources - More Museums and Libraries of Costume Ideas Essential in Apparel Centers,” *Women’s Wear*, January 8, 1920, 3; “Need Retailers’ Aid to Elevate American Style,” *Women’s Wear*, January 19, 1920, 1, 54; M. D. C. Crawford, “Suggests Establishment of Special Stores to Carry Merchandise of American Craftsman,” *Women’s Wear*, July 1, 1919, 2; “How American Retailers Promote,” 2; “Nadoolman Says American Newspapers,” 1, 12.

<sup>71</sup> Mary Donahue, “Educating Women for the Feminine Apparel Industry: Fashion Design, Dressmaking, and Domesticity, New York 1894-1950,” in *Research in Science and Technology Studies: Gender and Work*, ed. Shirley Gorenstein, 107-128 (Stamford, CT: JAI Press, Inc, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Various state colleges taught sewing and dressmaking in domestic arts and science programs since the 1870s; however, these curricula did not stress professional training for employment as designers or stylists until the 1930s.

<sup>73</sup> Mary Donahue, "Design and the Industrial Arts in America, 1894-1940: An Inquiry into Fashion Design and Art and Industry," (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2001).

<sup>74</sup> "Designers, Stop Guessing!," *Women's Wear*, March 20, 1912, 9.

<sup>75</sup> "The Chicago Dressmakers' Club Convention," *Women's Wear*, March 15, 1911, 1-2; "What Makes a Good Designer?" *Women's Wear*, April 18, 1913, 4.

<sup>76</sup> "Grean Lectures on American Fashions," *Women's Wear*, November 23, 1912, 8-9.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>78</sup> "Girls who Apply for Positions," *Women's Wear*, April 18, 1913, 4.

<sup>79</sup> In the 1910 U.S. Manufacturing Census, 1689 out of 1824 (91.5%) of suit, coat, cloak and overall designers were men, while 1061 out of 1959 (54%) of designers in all other categories were men.

<sup>80</sup> Leipzig, "It is a Profession that is New."

<sup>81</sup> Disappointed by American adaptations, a member of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture* stated, "It is altogether surprising to see these [buyers] come to Paris and buy goods because they have the air of knowing exactly what they want. One of them says, 'you are wrong to use taffetas.' Another declares, 'Americans will not wear tartans this season.' Why not make it themselves? Once they agreed to accept what the Parisian dressmakers had discovered. Today they decide among themselves whether to adopt certain novelties or reject certain daring ideas. The whole proceeding is entirely un-commercial."

"Threaten to Bar American Buyers," *The New York Times*, March 4, 1914, 4.

<sup>82</sup> "American Styles for American Women," 8.

<sup>83</sup> Designed to inspire and edify, eminent artists and university professors presented educational lectures that included the topics of "History of Woolens, Worsteds, Silks, Ribbons, and Velvets," "Concerning the Practical Phases of Art Work," "About Dyestuffs of the Ancient World," "On Costume Design, Specifically The Various Colors, Lines, and Values of The Proportions of the Human Body," and "Textile Designers Studying Primitive Art At Schools And Museums." Museum records state that manufacturers, artists, designers, and "regular" citizens attended the lectures. See Donahue, "Design and the Industrial Arts," for a discussion and history of the relationship between art museums and the fashion industry; Ethelwyn Miller, "Americanism: The Spirit of Costume Design," *The Journal of Home Economics* (1918): 207-211.

<sup>84</sup> Donahue, "Design and the Industrial Arts," 2001.

<sup>85</sup> It is unclear if Crawford's publications in art journals were read by fashion designers and manufactures. It is more likely that his regular column "Design Department" in *Women's Wear* which addressed promotion and training of American design was more accessible to American designers and manufacturers. M.D.C. Crawford, "Museum Documents and Modern Costume," *The American Museum Journal*, 1918, 288.

<sup>86</sup> M.D.C. Crawford, "How Is a Costume Created?" *Arts and Decoration* (1921): 228-229; "What America needs," 1; "What Makes a Good Designer?," 4.

<sup>87</sup> Parisian designers further enjoyed legal protection of their work, elevating fashion design to an art form rather than just a mechanical process used to create a saleable item. See M.D.C. Crawford, "We Need Interpretive Creation-Not Copying," *Women's Wear*, June 28, 1919, 3; Henrietta Harman, "Development of the American Designer," *Journal of Home Economics*, 23 (1931): 423-6.

<sup>88</sup> *Vogue* did not devote editorial space to American designers until 1938, although they included ads for U.S. dressmakers. *Harper's Bazar*, on the other hand, included American custom designers early on in the twentieth century. See Madelyn Shaw, "American Fashion," in *From Paris to Providence*, Susan Hay (ed.), (Providence, R.I.: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 2000), 107.

<sup>89</sup> "It Was America That Made Paris," 11.

<sup>90</sup> "[Clara] Simcox [Importer] Says Exclusive American Fashions Are Not Working Against Public Opinion But With It," *Women's Wear*, October 24, 1913, 1, 9. On the other hand, mention of Simcox's designs in *Harper's Bazar* state that she had a Paris inspiration. "From Fifth Avenue Shops," *Harper's Bazar*, March 1915, 53. Other U.S. designers and dressmakers who received some press coverage in the 1910s and 1920s included Jessie Franklin Turner, Hattie Carnegie, and E.M.A. Steinmetz.

---

<sup>91</sup> “American Fashions for American Women,” *Women’s Wear*, September 7, 1912, 13.

<sup>92</sup> Some retailers with exclusive custom shop did advertise the services of their in-store designers (Shaw, “American Fashion,” 117).

<sup>93</sup> It might have seemed more reasonable and profitable to show a play with advertised American designers. The same might not have been necessarily true of ready-to-wear apparel sales. American Fashions for American Women,” 1; “Nadoolman Says American Newspapers,” 1, 12.

<sup>94</sup> Crawford, “Suggests Establishment of Special Stores,” 2.

<sup>95</sup> Further discussion of the Bush Terminal was not found by the authors in later *Women’s Wear* articles. “To Create U.S. Styles for Bush Terminal Building,” *Women’s Wear*, July 3, 1919, 5.

<sup>96</sup> The contest was created and promoted based on a feeling both “economically as well as sentimentally speaking.” *Ladies Home Journal* editor Edward Bok was the chairman of the jury. Judges included Mrs. John Alexander, artist; Annie Russell, actress; Eleanor Hoyt Brainard; fashion writer; Abby Underwood, illustrator of fashions; and Orosvenor Olenn, editor of *American Milliner*. Contestants were to send in colored drawings with a not-more-than-100-word description of the originally designed hat or dress.

“Fashion Contest for Times Readers,” *The New York Times*, December 5, 1912, 9.

<sup>97</sup> “Fashion Contest for Times Readers,” 9.

<sup>98</sup> The Historic Costume and Textiles Collection, The Ohio State University, “The Traphagen Collection,” [http://costume.osu.edu/The\\_Collection/traphagencollection.htm](http://costume.osu.edu/The_Collection/traphagencollection.htm).

<sup>99</sup> Miller, “Americanism,” 207-211.

<sup>100</sup> “Informal Meeting of Waist and Dress Designers’ Association Held Last Night,” *Women’s Wear*, September 20, 1911, 5; “Clothing Designers Meet,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 1912, 11; “Ad Men Boost American Made Goods,” *Women’s Wear*, March 27, 1913, 1, 8, 9, 12; “The Chicago Dressmakers’ Club Convention,” 1. Limited information is available regarding these associations and organizations.

<sup>101</sup> “National Ladies Tailors and Dressmakers Association plan Fashion Congress,” *Women’s Wear*, April 11, 1911, 5. The objective of the National Ladies’ Tailors and Dressmakers’ Association was “not to dictate styles to American women, but to offer the best efforts based upon all good ideas received...and if possible to create some uniformity in the showing of models throughout the country.” It was stated in the *Women’s Wear* article that the committee expected the “Fashion Congress a big success in the introduction of American productions.” James Blaine was one of the appointed officers.

<sup>102</sup> “National Ladies Tailors,” 5.

<sup>103</sup> Developments in department stores and the rise of consumerism also led to additional opportunities for women in fashion careers. See William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

<sup>104</sup> Helen Cornelius, “American Designer Movement,” *Journal of Home Economics* (1934): 500-501; Leipzig, “It is a profession that is New,” 2005.

<sup>105</sup> Selma Robinson, “America Dresses Herself,” *Woman’s Home Companion* (1941), 15.

<sup>106</sup> Charles W. Rendigs, Oral History Project of The Fashion Industries of the Fashion Institute of Technology, Fashion Institute of Technology Special Collections, New York, New York.

<sup>107</sup> M.D.C. Crawford, “One of Best Things Written on Subject,” *Women’s Wear*, April 29, 1941, 21.