From New York to Chicago: A Plan for America's Fashion Centers

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From New York to Chicago: A Plan for America's Fashion Centers

Abstract
The purpose of this research was to compare the historical components of political promotion of New as the World's Fashion Center in the 1940s to the establishment of Chicago as a fashion center in the 2000s.

Keywords
fashion centers, New York, Chicago, history, ready-to-wear

Disciplines
Advertising and Promotion Management | Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Fashion Business | Marketing | Sales and Merchandising

Comments
From New York to Chicago: A Plan for America’s Fashion Centers

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The purpose of this research was to compare the historical components of political promotion of New York as the World’s Fashion Center in the 1940s to the establishment of Chicago as a fashion center in the 2000s. Fashion centers provide important economic stimuli to a city resulting from the design, creation, marketing, and selling of apparel. These centers also provide opportunities for artistic inspiration and civic and cultural pride (Mayor’s Committee for World Fashion Center, 1944; Sander, 2007). To explore this topic and to analyze the components of promotion and creation of these fashion capitals, the researchers systematically examined newspapers from New York (*The New York Times*) and Chicago (*The Chicago Tribune*), trade publications such as *Women’s Wear Daily*, and primary governmental reports and secondary sources.

The emergence of the American fashion industry began early in the twentieth century (Marcketti & Parsons, 2007; Welters & Cunningham, 2005). While proponents within the industry fought for the development and recognition of U.S. design talent, Parisian couture remained the major arbiter and creative hub for styles and inspiration of garments (Milbank, 1989). It was not until events of World War II, however, that heralded the transition from Parisian dominance to American recognition (Magidson, 2008). But which region of the United States would reign supreme as the fashion center? Numerous social, economic, and cultural advantages contributed to the success of the apparel industries in New York City, but California sportswear bolstered by Hollywood, junior dresswear produced in St. Louis, and women’s apparel production in Kansas City, Dallas, and Chicago threatened New York’s supremacy (Drake & Glaser, 1942).

To ensure fashion leadership, Mayor F. H. LaGuardia headed the promotion of New York as a world fashion center. His committee analyzed the economic importance of fashion to New York City and developed a plan for post-war expansion to provide a method for fashion industries “to protect and promote their leadership in the creation, production, and sale of products” and “to encourage the freest and widest expression of talent from all over the world” (Mayor’s Committee for World Fashion Center, 1944, p. 25). While other regions of the United States would continue to develop their apparel manufacturing and designing credentials, the Mayor’s plans helped ensure promotion of New York as the fashion center in the United States (Buckland, 2005; Milbank, 1989).

Similar to the New York World Fashion Center Campaign in the 1940s, Chicago’s Mayor, Richard J. Daley appointed a Fashion Council in April 2006, to use the unique resources of Chicago including four fashion design schools and a design community of handicraft artisans to make the city a fashion hub (Chicago Fashion Resource, 2007; Jones, 2006). Similar strategies for promotion of the fashion centers in New York during the 1940s and Chicago in the 2000s include support of local art museums to be used as inspiration for nascent designers, education of designers in creativity and fashion processes, and attempts to highlight local designers through fashion shows and the news media to gain publicity (Chicago Fashion Resource, 2007; Sander, 2007).

The initiative of Mayor LaGuardia significantly contributed to the world fashion center of New York that we know today. As Mayor Daley positions Chicago as a fashion hub, we are increasingly becoming aware of the design talent and unique retailers native to this Midwestern city. By comparing the strategies of
these political attempts to create and promote unique fashion centers, we may better understand the
development of fashion industry and culture. This research offers an explanation into the wide reaching
sectors of fashion, particularly economic and political motivation.

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