

Learning Fashion Construction and Manufacturing Methods from the Past: Cultural History and Genealogy at the Middle Tennessee State University Historic Clothing Collection

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Abstract : In the millennial age, with more students desiring a fashion major yet fewer having sewing and manufacturing knowledge, this increases demand on academicians to adequately educate. While fashion museums have a prominent place for historical preservation, the need for apparel education via working collections of handmade or mass manufactured apparel is lacking in most universities in the United States, especially in the Southern region. Created in 1988, Middle Tennessee State University's historic clothing collection provides opportunities to study apparel construction methods throughout history, to compare and apply to today's construction and manufacturing methods, as well as to learn the cyclical nature/importance of historic styles on current and upcoming fashion. In 2019, a class exercise experiment was implemented for which students researched their family genealogy using Ancestry.com, identified the oldest visual media (photographs, etc.) available, and analyzed the garment represented in said media. The student then located a comparable garment in the historic collection and evaluated the construction methods of the ancestor's time period. A class 'fashion' genealogy tree was created and mounted for public viewing/education. Results of this exercise indicated that student learning increased due to the 'personal/familial connection' as it triggered more interest in historical garments as related to the student's own personal culture. Students better identified garments regarding the historical time period, fiber content, fabric, and construction methods utilized, thus increasing learning and retention. Students also developed increased learning and recognition of custom construction methods versus current mass manufacturing techniques, which impact today's fashion industry. A longitudinal effort will continue with the growth of the historic collection and as students continue to utilize the historic clothing collection.

Keywords : ancestry, clothing history, fashion history, genealogy, historic fashion museum collection

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