

**THE 80S**

**A STUDY OF THE FACTORS AFFECTING  
FASHION IN THE 1980S**

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**AN HONORS THESIS (HONORS 499)**

**BY**

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In the Home Economics Department at Ball State University there is a class students are required to take. That class is Costume History. In the class the students learn traditional garments from the beginning of recorded history.

Since many textbooks on this subject only sufficiently cover history up until about 1900, there has been developed a slide presentation covering each decade up until the 1980s. And obviously the 80s are now behind us. Therefore there was a need for the collection to be updated. This is why my advisor and myself chose this project.

The slide presentation (housed in the Practical Arts building, Home Economics department) covers such factors as economic, social, and cultural influences on what we wore. There are 69 slides.

1. The 80s, another decade of ups and downs, including the economy, the stock market, the labor force, and as usual hemlines.
2. Ronald Reagan was elected President of the United States in the 1980 election...
3. ... with running mate George Bush.
4. Reagan promised an increase in military spending, tax cuts, decrease in social programs, and a balanced budget. But in his term in office the national deficit tripled to over \$2.3 trillion.
5. Social security became a problem to the elderly as funds were cut.
6. During the first part of the 80s Wall Street experienced a bull market. Stock prices were strong getting stronger.
7. But all that changed on Black Monday. On October 19, 1987 the Dow Jones average declined more than 500 points. Workers on 3 continents were affected, and it sent 15,000 Wall Street workers looking for new jobs.
8. A recurring recession sent inflation and energy costs soaring. In turn, the average American was forced to spend 90% of their disposable income on necessities including food, housing, energy, transportation, and medical costs. Taxes and savings were a major concern. With the economy in this condition 'value' became a key word when shopping. Consumers either bought low prices or high quality classics. These classics included wearable fashions. There was a mass refusal to follow designer names, as they seemed too extravagant. Women's dress and tailored pant suits became popular, as did dressy sweaters.
9. For men, there was a resurgence of the 3 piece suit, this time with straightleg pants and a medium lapel.
10. Another imperative was a versatile wardrobe, including plenty of coordinates.

This was a result of the layered look which became popular in the 70s.

11. The customers looking for lower prices began shopping at outlet malls, which were a new concept in the 80s. These malls provided the same merchandise as traditional retailers at discount prices.

12. Another concern of the 80s was the all time low of the labor union movement, and industrial deregulation. Some of the major changes affecting the labor force were new technology, internationalization of corporations, corporate reorganization, and failed government regulation. Along these lines were retailer takeovers. Most familiar to Hoosiers was the takeover of Block's by Federated Department Stores.

13. Widespread occupational shifts led to retraining of workers to avoid unemployment. There was an increase in the female labor force, and some decrease in occupational segregation. And blacks were finally gaining equality.

14. With that, in the late 80s the music industry was exploding in the pop/rap division. Hip hop and breakdancing became a way of life with such greats as Ice-T, Kid 'n' Play, Public Enemy, and Ton-Loc. The b-boy style of dress was baggy jeans and shorts, professional sports team gear, baseball caps turned backwards, and chains with huge gold pendants. Their hair was short above the ears and tall on top. This was called the Philly cut, or a black crew. And many had logo's cut into their hair, such as Adidas or VW.

15. There also was an increase in attendance at institutions of higher learning.

16. Concerning the family in the 80s, more commonly both spouses were employed and both claimed responsibility for the housework. Although there was also a trend towards house cleaning done by someone outside the family. The number of one parent homes was also growing. The average household in 1980 was 2.7 and in 1987 was 2.8.

17. Homes in the 80s were becoming increasingly mechanized as the food processor, personal computer, and answering machine gained popularity.

18. Composition of the classrooms of the 80s was more mixed, including minority students such as blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian American.

19. The 80s also brought shifts between and within religions. There was an increase in individualism and independence of those involved in a formal religion. Along with this came societal conflicts in regards to abortion, the role of women, gay and lesbian rights, and foreign policy.

20. New mass communications include multi-digit postal codes, computer linked cable t.v., mass telephoning, and laser print technology. And along with cable t.v. in '87 came MTV, Music Television. Enter Madonna. This diva of pop-rock really rocked our world with 16 top 10 hits and 3 movies.

21. Other music favorites were Loverboy, George Michael, Def Leppard, INXS, Billy Joel, U2, Prince and the Revolution, ZZ Top, Styx, Foreigner, and New Edition. And they all created their own fashion statements, including torn jeans, long hair, leather jackets, the 5 o'clock shadow, and headbands.

22. Another musical genius of the decade was Michael Jackson. Formerly of the Jackson 5, this is the only sibling that really left his mark on the pages of pop history. His most popular album, "Thriller" sold to every music lover from age 5 to 35. The album landed him 7 number 1 hits.

23. The early 80s brought about the punk movement, what some called the 'blank generation', supposedly because of the blank looks they all wore. Zandra Rhodes was the first punk designer. She specialized in torn haute couture covered with safety pins.

24. One of the most outstanding trends of the era was religious imagery, and most pictures of these musicians portrayed a postcard image.

25. The amazing hairdos of this generation required the concoction of food coloring, sugar, lard, toothpaste, margarine, oil, glue, soap, and egg whites. Some of

the musical greats of the punk movement were Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols, Billy Idol, Adam Ant, and Boy George of the Culture Club.

26. Dreadlocks showed the devotion to the Rastafari faith. Here, favorites included Bob Marley and Scritti Politti.

27. Environmentalism became a trend in the 80s. Park visits grew. Government sanctions such as the Nuclear Waste Act of '82 and the Clean Water Act of '86 set the ball rolling. 1986 saw the settlement of the Karen Silkwood case concerning the leakage of nuclear waste from a powerplant. The settlement was for \$1,380,000. This case provoked the movie "Silkwood", starring Meryl Streep, Kirk Douglas, and Cher.

28. 1986 also saw the nuclear explosion at Chernobyl. This was not the worst that could have happened. Surface water, air, crops and soil were contaminated, and there were birth defects, cancer, and lowered immune systems as a result. This sparked the '87 agreement between the USSR and the US to eliminate intermediate-range nuclear forces.

29. Another memorable and heartwrenching event in '86 was the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger.

30. The shuttle was carrying Christa McAuliffe, a teacher who had been picked to travel with the crew.

31. A growing concern of AIDS, an increased market for birth control devices, and the release of the most provocative movie of the decade, *9 1/2 Weeks* starring Mickey Rourke and Kim Basinger, marked the sexuality of society. As did the change in attitudes toward homosexuality. Homosexuality was not a secret anymore as more and more gays 'came out of the closet'. Politicians suggested "shoot the queers" or mass quarantines. Movies like *Tootsie* in '85 and *Victor/Victoria* in '82 challenged the relationship between clothing and the gendered body.

32. In the fabric industry, natural fibers grew in popularity, and the pile fabric industry experienced a growth. This promoted the sporty look with such fabrics as

terry cloth, velour, and corduroy. Another popular fiber was polyester.

33. Shopping trends changed as 'shops within shops' became the norm in upscale department stores. The mail order business expanded rapidly, and warehouse showrooms became a place to shop.

34. Probably the biggest fashion trend of the 80s was jeans. Women were wearing jeans now not for a political statement, but for a comfy pair of casual pants. Early in the 80s they were tight, straight legged, creased, and as blue as the night sky. But denim wasn't appropriate for the night life.

35. Names prevalent in the jeans industry were Gloria Vanderbilt, Levi's, Jordache, Sasson, and Calvin Klein.

36. Later, the poor boy look emerged sporting ripped denim. Colored denim was popular also.

37. Another trend included studs, rivets, and buttonflies. Jeans that were faded were sexy.

38. In 85 'shrink to fit' or preshrunk jeans emerged...

39. ...as did stonewashed and acid washed denim.

40. Later in the 80s the Marciano brothers introduced us to Guess jeans.

41. Western wear hit big for a short time, and found us all wearing jeans...

42. ...boots, and plaid shirts.

43. The preppie look was another style worn by many.

44. Part of this look included boat shoes, oxfords, pinstripes, and Izods.

45. Exercise, fitness, and bodybuilding grew in popularity, even among females.



46. Rollermania swept the nation as everyone grabbed a pair of rollerskates and their favorite leotards.

47. But leotards weren't just for skating and dancing, but everyday wear.

48. Easy styled shirtwaist dresses were popular for daytime.

49. And sweater dressing was popular for daytime also.

50. Here is shown a popular classic look, combining sweater dressing with corduroys, argyl socks, and loafers.

51. Ralph Lauren was the designer who's clothes epitomized classic, with easy styles, neutral colors, and high quality.

52. Evenings found people of all ages disco dancing, a style of dancing made popular by the movies Fame and Flashdance.

53. Here are some typical disco outfits...

54. ...but the 'uniform' of disco was a spaghetti strapped dress with a floaty skirt, and strappy heels.

55. and 56. Heels like these were the most popular for disco.

57. Business attire was accessorized by spectator pumps like these.

58. And casual styles found these complementing them.

59. Summer outfits were always accompanied by a pair of Dr. Scholl's. These sandals claimed to build beautiful legs by the way they were shaped, making the wearer grip her toes.

60. Speaking of summertime, bikinis were all the rage. There was the one piece...
61. ... the one piece that looked like a two piece...
62. ... and the two piece.
63. The most popular style of sunglasses were the mirrored Ray-Bans.
64. Makeup styles emphasized eyelashes.
65. And the ultimate sports car of the decade was the Ford Mustang.
66. Down coats kept us warm in the winter, the most popular style of these was the spectator coat, distinguished by the 3 stripes on the sleeves.
67. Swatch made a name for themselves with a watch for every outfit.
68. Some of the more popular movies were Rocky Horror Picture Show, Breakfast Club, Top Gun, and Platoon, which kept us entertained in the evenings, whether on a date or sitting at home watching a rented tape on the VCR.
69. The decade came to a close with the re-emergence in popularity of leather bomber jackets, not for patriotic reasons, simply because they looked good. And so another decade came to pass, along with its most popular styles.

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