

Welcome to a Deep Dive I'm Reggie.

In this episode, I thought we might take a little travelogue through some of the histories of men's clothes, the passion for color, the adornments, and all that style. Who knows, maybe you'll find some inspiration for your own wardrobe.

Thanks for joining me for, Pink on purpose.

I can see him even now. I was making my way into Manhattan from JFK and this time I decided to take the Long Island Railroad instead of the subway. I take the air train then make my way to the LR platform and as I come down the stairs and round the corner there he was.

He was wearing a white tracksuit, white hat, white Balenciaga sneakers. Peeking out from under the tracksuit top was a bright pink t-shirt.

As we boarded the train and he and his partner sat opposite me. She was dressed in dark clothes making his outfit stand out even more. I was fixed on him trying not to stare my mind turned to how much men's relationship to color and style in their clothing has changed over the last 50 years.

In this episode let's take a look at the rich history of men's clothes, the passion for color and adornments, and all that style.

Thanks for joining me for Pink on Purpose.

Before we can take this trip there are at least two big ole elephants in the room we have to acknowledge The first is misogyny. Let's just acknowledge what men have worn over the centuries has had a direct impact on what women have worn. Much of that history has involved an attempt to control and restrict women's bodies, their sexual freedom, and at times their literal movement.

The second elephant in the room is strangely related to the first and it's the role of gender social conditioning. You know, the whole pink is for girls and blue is for boy's thing.

From the time a child is born in the United States at least, the culture conspires to train our preference either male or female and often color is used as the signifier, pink for girls and blue for boys. Yet study after study suggests that the most popular color for babies, children, and adults is blue. Pink doesn't come in a close second.

Even though pink doesn't register highly in any color test it persists as a cultural indicator of femininity or homosexuality in men. The most lethal example of this use was the Nazi's pink triangle to designate gay people marked for death.

I wonder as our thinking expands about gender fluidity and gender identity how long it will take before the use of color as a signifier is no longer useful.

Deciding where to stop first on this men's fashion tour is easy. Edo, Japan. The Edo period in Japan from 1603-1868 ushered in 264 years of peace all centered around the castle city of Edo in what is called Tokyo today. The shogun Ieyasu Tokugawa ruled Japan with an iron fist which is one of the reasons why Japan had such a sustained period of peace.

The government instituted laws for about nearly everything and generally, they were based on your social status. They were even sumptuary laws restricting which sorts of fabrics and materials could be used by whom.

These sumptuary laws were primarily used to control the merchant class who were the yuppies or tech boys of the age. Their wealth was diametrically opposed to the worsening fortunes of the Samurai who in peace were without work and daimyo lords who were being forced to spend large portions of their wealth on commanded yearly increasingly showy trips to Edo where they paid respect to the shogunate, another reason for the sustained peace.

There are so many articles of men's clothing I could tell you about but the best example of the Japanese intersection of utility and aesthetic self-expression is the kosode.

Straight cuts of fabric sewn together created a garment that fit every body shape, easy to wear and could be made in a range of fabric treatments and embellishments.

In the Edo period, it became common for the kosode, which was normally worn as a bathrobe, to be worn by both sexes and children as an outer garment.

While it's true that the kosode was a very democratizing garment it was what you did to your kosode that told the story of your social status. Fabric quality, choice of pattern, thread, paint, wood-block print, and color were essential criteria for presenting the rank, age, gender, and refinement of the person wearing the kosode.

Sumptuary laws that sought to control what the visiting Daimyos and the despised merchant class could wear restricted which types of fabrics and even colors certain classes could wear, but slowly the merchant class began to employ the best craftspeople to make their kosodes and many of these examples can be seen today.

Wearing a sweatshirt to express your support for your favorite team doesn't even come close to the use of symbols in Edo. Family crests, the changing seasons, poems were all used as a cultural shorthand.

In addition to the kosode, almost all men wore a pouch called inro. The inro's closure was a cord that you could adjust to open or close the pouch. A bead was used to close the pouch and

at the top of the cord, you would hang your netsuke from the belt or cord is worn around your waist.

One of the great additions to the kosode was the netsuke and inro worn around the waist. There were no pockets and fellas needed a way to carry their stuff so beautiful pouches were crafted and the ropes that were used as closures had struck from them carved figures called netsuke.

My favorite netsuke I've ever seen including the three I own is a banana. It's at the Asian Museum in San Francisco you can't miss it, it's a banana. The dandy, coined for men who dressed with great flair and distinction can be throughout history and around the world, in Edo dandies roamed the streets of dressed in Portuguese silks, wide-legged pants, and headbands. Using their swords as walking sticks. Can you imagine how the retired samurai must have felt seeing these guys?

The gender fluidity that we talk about today was prevalent in Edo. Young men who specialized in playing exclusively female roles in Kabuki were called onnagata. Some of the lived as what was commonly referred to as the third sex off stage. These performers often worked as prostitutes and were highly desired.

As I said earlier, if you were born you wore you would most likely wear your clothes until they were rags but even the rags had a purpose. Buro is the art of patching clothes and bedding which grew out of poor people's need to work with what they had. Clothes and bedding would be patched over and over again then passed down to members of your family. Many of the oldest Buro are now worth thousands of dollars and collected by museums as highly prized works of craft and art.

The forced opening of Japan in 1878 and the Meiji restoration ushered in Japan's version of the industrial revolution and just like every other industrialized place in the world men's clothes surrendered to the suit and tie. In the aftermath of the cultural shifts of the 1960s thinking about dress and style began to change in Japan. Over the next 20 years, Japan would become the place for innovation leading the world in fashion and style.

Music

Around 3000 B.C. Mesopotamian men began to start wearing fringe around long knee to ankle skirts. They were so mad for fringe that all of the succeeding groups in the Tigris-Euphrates valley, the Sumerians, Babylon's, and Assyrians all adapted fringe in their dress. This style would remain in style for the next 2 thousand years. So maybe a little fringe around the bottom of your jeans.

Music

Let's face it, when it comes to self-expression the industrial revolution sucked. It would be more accurate to say that the resurgence of a more Calvinistic religious practice in the U.S.A. combined with a similar sobriety when it came to being a captain of industry dictated that men's clothing have gravitas and not a hint of frivolity.

In the late 1700s, people all dressed the same in their social classes. Wealthy women wore fancy dresses and the men suits with top hats. Farmers generally wore their overall of other farming gear to church or town. Clothes were expensive and took a long time to make but as the industrial revolution began to spread so did manufacturing and over time working-class people could buy clothes for different occasions they could even afford accessories.

With the industrial revolution, Jimmy the stock clerk could dream of one day having a finely tailored suit just like the boss. Even if it was little more than a fantasy most of the time the uniformity of dress meaning Jimmy's cheap suit connected him to the boss by a common language arrived at by suit and tie. You know what? That mode of dress for men from Saville row to the power play of the 1980s is still with us today. Sure men's suits have changed in length, cut, and color since the glided age and of course with a few exceptions men rarely wear suits to work anymore but think about the last time you went to a wedding or funeral where the men weren't dressed in some remnants of a suit. Jacket no tie, shirt and tie no jacket.

Before we leave the 1700s let's just talk about France around 1790. A new style of dress arrived with a vengeance and more than a hint of confused social protest. As a reaction to the ending of the "terrors" when both the bourgeois and their bourgeois excesses had been punished, a new version of fashion access began to appear.

were members of a fashionable aristocratic subculture in Paris during the French Directory (1795–1799). Whether as catharsis or in a need to reconnect with other survivors of the Reign of Terror, they greeted the new regime with an outbreak of luxury, decadence, and even silliness. They held hundreds of balls and started fashion trends in clothing and mannerisms

The Incroyables wore eccentric outfits: large earrings, green jackets, wide trousers, huge neckties, thick glasses, and hats topped by "dog ears", their hair piled high then combed forward sort of like a mohawk. They walked as if they were hunchbacked, and wore clothes that padded and pulled the body out of proportion. Eat your heart out Vivienne Westwood. Their coats were cropped under the chest in front with long tails in the back that almost brushing the floor.

On the one hand, they rebelled against convention and their parents while on the other hand indulging in extravagant clothing that would have gotten them killed only a few years before.

Music

By the mid-1880s there was a growing backlash to these forms of dress. Dr. Gustave Drouineau developed a system of dressing called hygienic dress a uniform of a kind. After I read you his description of how men dressed you'll understand his regime:

My favorite example of a persistent dandy is the author of the novel *Les Diaboliques* Barbey d'Aurevilly da-Ore-Villeee who at 77 who still proclaimed himself a dandy describing his daily wear.

In the mid-18th century, England had its own version of the Incroyables.

Do you know the song about Yankee Doodle Dandy? Who according to the song, "Stuck a feather in his hat and called it macaroni." That song is a reference to a style of young British dandies who had been on the grand tour where they discovered macaroni. They affected continental mannerisms, spoke in an exaggerated way and wore giant pompadours topped by tiny hats.

The Americans adopted this style adding brightly colored ribbons to their little hats, elaborate ribbon rosettes to their shoes and my favorite detail they wore two watches, one to tell the wearer the time and the other to report what time it was not.

The 1830s gave us a little innovation that you're most likely sporting today. It was the first time men's pants buttoned down the front. You know that satin stripe that runs down the side of a pair tuxedo pants? It's a nod to the side button.

Not everyone loved the button fronts. Mormon leader Brigham Young called them "fornication pants." Isn't that great? Fornication pants.

The button front, of course, leads us to the first appearance of denim jeans in 1850. There is so much to say about denim that I won't even start. Except to say, that it would take almost 100 years before denim wear would become an expectable article of clothing for anything other than physical labor.

I don't know about you but I am mad for plaid. I love the patterns and the sheer variety of treatments and colors. A few years ago I bought some plaid fabric to make a shirt and when the fabric arrived it was a beautiful plaid but the fabric was rayon and cotton, kinda lightweight not like old school woolen tartan plaid at all. It made an amazingly attractive shirt.

The archeologist Elizabeth Wayland Barber describes the Charchen Man unearthed from the mountains of Central Asia. The body was found wearing "a twill tunic and tartan leggings," these articles of clothing could date back to the 8th century B.C. Tartans like so many of other patterns, fabrics, and articles of clothing have a depth of political and social context to them.

If you don't own any plaid you should check out Pendleton. They make wool plaids in an amazing array of colors and they last forever, at least they used to. Love them.

Last year I saw an exhibit about the Mogul empire from the late 1800s to the end of the British rule in 1947 and the jewels displayed in this exhibit rivaled any of the British's booty with the extra bonus being men dripping in jewels. Something foreign to western-style then and sadly now.

Like in Edo Japan, it was the royal men in India the Maharajas who wore the bulk of the jewels because like in Edo it was the men who were given the bulk of the power. The Maharajas of India wore ropes and ropes of pearls, diamonds, sapphires, and rubies as a symbol of their power.

In the 1920s the Maharaja of Patiala became interested in the Parisian styles of jewelry. He commissioned Cartier to re-set his Crown Jewels which was one of the largest single commissions in Cartier's history. The downside to all this splendor is that diamond mining was notoriously dangerous and workers equally notoriously underpaid.

<https://www.christies.com/features/Cartier-and-the-Indian-style-9918-7.aspx>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IBmJtiDzk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tauHib8v1D4> In the USA and around the world Hollywood from the 1930s-1980s was enormously influential on men's fashion and style.

The 1930s swing and Hollywood movies like Andy Hardy gave teens something to identify with and by the 1940s teen girls dressed in a way that was their own, oversized men's shirts and dungarees but it took teen boys a while to catch up. Many of them were still dressing like miniature versions of their fathers. When a style did start to emerge it was jeans, known as dungarees, corduroys, and khakis. Clark Gable had scandalized the country by wearing a t-shirt in the 1938 film *It Happened One Night* by it started a trend and by the 1940s the bad boy teens wore t-shirts usually with rolled-up sleeves. Though this sounds pretty much like what teens and adults wear today in the 1950s adults and institutions started to freak out.

AUDIO. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ham3ljTPmk>

One of the great fabric treatment inventions of the 1950s and men's clothes was the invention of banlon. This factory-made polyester was highly flammable but man was it pretty. Banlon was knit like and because it was a manmade fiber the stretch could be controlled and the colors. So many colors, stripes of color in hues most men had never worn before. Before thrift store shopping became a thing friends and I used to frequent this Wash DC thrift store which was little more than a giant room with bins and the treasure you could fling there. The Saturday morning we arrived and there was a boutique set up on the ground floor we knew the moment was about to pass. You can find banlon shirts online still in beautiful colors.

The influence of African American style on the world's style is undeniable. Men's fashion, in particular, has been influenced by everything from the dashiki (google it) to the overwhelming

influence of rap and hip-hop style on everything from saggy pants to puffer jackets, from timberlands to designer brands.

The other cultural influence on men's fashion is that of Latino and Hispanic style from the cholo and Chula style that put Dickies on the map now worn by everyone from Rhianna to the youth of Japan, Thailand, and Hong Kong. Let's not forget about the hijacking of the Cuban guayabera. When the narrator of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* spots three young men wearing zoot suits he notes, these youths were not simply grotesque dandies parading the city's secret underworld, they were the stewards of something uncomfortable, and I would add dangerous. Ellison hit it right on the head.

The terms zoot suit came into common circulation in the late 1930s within the urban jazz scene. Zoot was something worn or performed with extravagant style. The style at the time among young black and Latino jazz musicians on the east coast was a long jacket with extremely padded shoulders and high-waisted trousers that were dramatically tapered from baggy to a narrow lower leg. Around this same time, young Chicanos on the west coast and in Texas began to create their own versions of the zoot suit blending into their own style. Like on the east coast young people wore these suits to clubs and the more suave among them adopted the style of the Pachuco wearing zoot suits all the time.

In the 1940s as World War II was underway the racism that Chinese Americans and immigrants faced began to ease a bit and the racism that had near really abated towards Mexican Americans and immigrants increased.

The police in Los Angeles and in Texas associated the Pachucos and their zoot suits with being gang members so when white soldiers stationed on the west coast began attacking Chicano youths who wore Zoot Suits police did little about it other than arrest Chicano youth for trying to protect themselves. These attacks came to a head in 1943 when white soldiers attacked black and brown young people wearing a zoot suit on the streets of Los Angeles often tearing their clothes off beating them with anything they could get their hands on and as in every other incident, the police mostly arrested the Latino youth.

It seems at its core white soldiers and their mob mentality could not stand the idea of a defiant brown man wearing something other than a military uniform and wearing it with pride in his ethnic identity and the soldiers sought to destroy this sense of pride.

As a result of these attacks, the US military for one of the first and last times issued a ban on the zoot suit under a wartime scarcity claim.

Without overstating the case the zoot suit assaults and the mistreatment by the police of brown and black youths helped inform the political impulses of both Cesar Chavez and Malcolm X.

There are Mexican Americans still holding up zoot suit dressing in beautiful suits educating folks about the legacy. You also find traces in the long jackets and baggy pants in a vast array of colors popular with some African American men in urban and southern regions of the country.

One last zoot suit note. At the height of the Los Angeles assaults in June 1943, the New York Times published a front-page article claiming that the first zoot suit had been purchased by a black bus worker, Clyde Duncan. The Times went on to claim that Mr. Duncan had been inspired by the film 'Gone with the Wind' he wanted to look like Rhett Butler. So much for all those black swing jazz performers and sytlin black and brown youth wearing these suits for nearly a decade. It was Gone with the Wind. Amazing.

In the 1960s the look of the civil rights movement began to change. The 1950s respectability politics of the suit and tie had given way to a new more militant strain. The Black Panthers adopted a uniform of black as an in your face symbol of power. They wanted black folks to know they were unapologetically powerful and they didn't mind if white folks were afraid of their message or appearance.

It was the black panthers who encouraged men and women to grow an afro, the bigger the better, Afro centrism was not a byproduct it was central to the movement of black empowerment. The black power movement wasn't asking for change and started to demand it, as Malcolm X famously proclaimed, by any means necessary. It's almost impossible in the time I have to hear to count the ways in which the Black Panthers influenced much of the body politic and nearly every aspect of popular culture in the United States.

Like nearly everything that rises to prominence in the US soon the black panther's militaristic style became a style worn on the streets and then in Hollywood. By the time Shaft was released in 1971 the Panthers leather jacket had been transformed into a ¾ coat worn with a black turtleneck and black trousers. Its star Richard Roundtree with his matinee-idol looks was such an elegant hero that Shaft became an international symbol replacing the Panthers politically informed uniform with something that was heavy on style and a lite-on politics.

But that wasn't the end of the Panther's influence. When the rap group N.W.A proclaimed "Fuck tha Police!" from their ravaged neighborhoods of Southern California they were invoking the Black Panther challenging the state. The rap group N.W.A. chose black hoodies and baseball hats instead of the black berets, the black sunshades remained, along with raised leather-gloved fists.

NWA could not have imagined the effect that their politically motivated style and that of rap and hip-hop would have on fashion and global style and commerce.

Rappers referencing fashion designers like Versace, Gucci, Armani in their work or wearing certain sneakers started to elevate the brand's status and street cred and corporate America noticed.



Michael Jordan started the craze for high dollar sneakers but it was rap and hip hop performers who really elevated the sneaker as a symbol of youth and cool. Sneakers have proved to be so profitable for most male designer fashion houses that you'd be hard-pressed to find a season of men fashion without sneakers prominently featured.

I've left so many styles of men's clothes out of this little travelogue the greaser, the mods, the romantics, I'll include a few honorable mentions on the Deeper Dive website.

If you want to brighten up your wardrobe but you don't know where to start. Start with your socks. I'll leave a link to a few of my favorite sites to buy fun socks.

Finally, I want to thank my pal, Dr. Rodriguez. When I asked him if there were any colors he would avoid wearing this fairly conservative dresser in his professional life said,

I see color as a synthesis of the philosopher's stone. A process of alchemy or psychological transformation. Where the personal and collective unconscious are brought into consciousness. Wow.

Alchemy, consciousness, transformation. Talk about food for thought.

Outro.

Thanks for joining for Pink or Purpose. If you'd like to see some of the clothing referenced in this episode or you'd like to read the rest of the Doc's thoughts on the alchemy of color you can find them all on The Deep Dive website. Thanks to Joshua Rich for allowing me to use his song Rain. You find a link to his other work on the Deep Dive website.

Please subscribe to the podcast it really helps others find it.

Thanks to the owners of the Pissouri Bay Divers Shop in Cyprus Greece for their kind words and support.

Pink on Purpose was researched and written by me, Reggie.

Thanks for joining me see ya next.