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Back cover illustrations:

Left: Cabinet card photo from Honesdale, PA, of an unidentified young mourner in winter attire, ca. mid-1880s. Her bereavement should make her uninterested in fashion, but she demonstrates that she is keenly interested in that very topic. She is expensively and fashionably dressed while following the prescribed rules for mourning attire. A long black crepe veil is pinned to her hat with black pins that catch a bit of light but have a dull finish that does not constitute an attractive or decorative element. The same can be said for the coat buttons, which appear to be of self-fabric, namely black wool. Her earrings, probably black glass or jet, also have a dull finish. Her black crepe necktie is trimmed with fine black lace, and her purse is eye-catching with its three textured sections. But the most arresting features of her appearance are her sumptuous fur trim and her perfect double row of “water curls.”

Right: Cabinet card photograph, ca. 1887-1889 of an unidentified young woman from Shippensburg, PA, posing in what is most likely her white debutante gown. The long, vertical pleats in her skirt date the dress to the end of the decade, as does the long asymmetrical front drapery that reaches nearly to the hem of her skirt. The bodice has a dramatic double-breasted front trimmed with knife pleats between the rows of buttons. The lower portion of the bodice has fine lacing cord between the buttons and crossing over the pleats. It is then tied in a generous bow at the lower center front point. She has a dainty broach at her throat, right below her neck frill. For daytime wear, she has chosen her dark leather, probably black, boots with pointed toe. She would wear the dress with white shoes when properly attired for evening. Her floral corsage, a fashionable feature for both day and evening during the 1880s, provides a delightful splash of color.

All catalog photographs and paper ephemera are courtesy of K. and B. Bohleke unless otherwise indicated.

Black silk dresses are always popular, because they are always so useful. One celebrated dressmaker in Paris made over one hundred black silk dresses in two months.

“Fashions for March,” *Peterson’s Magazine* LI:3 (Mar. 1867): 236.



A woman can never be too fine while she is all in white.

Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814).



A toilet composed principally of black may be sombre, but it is always elegant.

“Fashions for October,” *Peterson’s Magazine* XL:4 (Oct. 1861): 316.



But both black and white are colours of denial; and what they deny is colour.

John Harvey, *Men in Black* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 211.



Neither black nor white is considered as a color; black may be formed by the mixture of the three primitives [red, blue and yellow]; grey consists of an equal portion of black and white.

Mrs. Merrifield, “On the Harmony of Colors, in its Application to Ladies’ Dress,” *Peterson’s Magazine* XXII:1 (Jul. 1852): 53.

Introduction

Mrs. Merrifield understood a concept that modern science has confirmed: the two colors that dominate Western fashion and special occasions are not actually colors at all. Objects that appear white do so because they reflect all wavelengths of light. In other words, these objects are composed of all the colors. Black objects appear the way they do because they absorb all wavelengths of light, creating an absence of color in the absence of reflection. The question of why and when we choose to don what seems to the unscientific eye to be the absence of color, in the form of white, or the full weight of all primary colors combined to create black, is replete with charged cultural connotations and layers of meaning.

An entire life-cycle surrounding black and white is still in force in modern Western society: infants who are formally christened or baptized in a church setting still wear white, often a cherished family heirloom long robe; traditional Catholics still receive their first communion attired in white; and many high schools, often private with strong historical roots, still require white dresses for graduation ceremonies. Débutante and “coming out” balls, a staple of Southern society, often require white gowns as well. Of course the sequence culminates in the traditional white bridal gown, dreamt of by many nineteenth-century women but unavailable to those of limited financial means. Poorer brides elected to wear a new dress, in colors such as brown, green or blue that could become a best dress for regular use after the wedding. Thus white, in this context, is a powerful symbol of innocence, virginity and a last farewell to childhood freedoms as well as a potent economic statement proclaiming the affluence of the bride’s family. If modern accounts of extravagant weddings are any indication, the latter concern is of considerable importance. Thus childhood, adolescence and young adulthood have their special occasions profoundly marked and signified by white. Full adulthood, particularly sexualized and sexual adulthood, is marked by black evening attire, conservative business attire and the widow’s mourning weeds.

Twentieth-century fashion’s love affair with the LBD (“Little Black Dress”), otherwise known as the FPU (“Fashion Person’s Uniform”) has been well documented elsewhere.¹ The great couturiers have all made their pithy remarks on the role of black clothing for men and women in modern fashion history. But nothing in the fashion world is without antecedent, and the shifting trends and social forces that eventually led to the creation of a modern wardrobe staple have their roots firmly in the nineteenth century and even earlier. This topic has rarely been explored in any depth as it pertains to women’s clothing.

The meaning of black attire can be divided into three main categories: it is safe and conservative, it is glamorous and sexy, and it expresses grief. Thus daily work clothing in modern and historical times is very often black, with gray offering an acceptable lighter alternative. Men in particular have been locked into black, gray and white attire for both day and evening since the Industrial Revolution. In addition, designers of evening attire understand very well that black is the perfect foil for glittering jewels, trims and carefully selected zones of exposed flesh. One has only to think of Sargent’s scandalous 1884 “Portrait of Madame X” to realize that sexy black evening wear has profound historical roots. Lastly, the mourner, particularly the widow, casts a dominant shadow over our understanding of the past, essentially due to Queen Victoria’s assumption of mourning attire on a permanent basis after the death of Prince Albert on December 14, 1861. She gave not only a name to an age, but also an enduring fashion memory. However, grief, ever present in a pre-antibiotic age, was not the only aspect under which black attire was assumed, and to focus exclusively on this aspect of nineteenth-century black clothing does a disservice to the layered meanings of dress at that time. As the period quotes throughout this catalog will show, the source material is often contradictory: the contradictions reflect both temporary changes in fashion, on its most simplistic level, and the fashion world’s negotiations with the different connotations that black had acquired, which is of far greater significance. Modern fashion and attitudes are a product of this shifting and exploratory dialog.

¹ See Valerie Mendes, *Dressed in Black* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1999) and Amy Holman Edelman, *The Little Black Dress* (New York: Simon & Schuster Editions, 1997).

The three categories of conservatism, glamour and grief leave out an additional crucial element surrounding the issue of black and white attire: the simple question of which color flatters a wearer's skin tone, figure and age. Subtlety was not always a concern in the nineteenth century, and the period advice does not flatter or mince words. Many of the suggestions are still very much in force today, with only a few having been discarded.

Finally, one "dark" aspect of essential color symbolism should be mentioned. White and black both have connotations that symbolize the worst in human nature: nothing has generated more fear and terror than the white robes of the Ku Klux Klan and the black uniforms of the Nazi *Waffen-* and *Allgemeine- Schutzstaffeln* (SS). And the simple gray and white striped cotton uniforms worn by concentration camp victims exemplify unspeakable and immeasurable suffering. It is no accident that villains always wear black, and that the hero rides a white horse and wears a white cowboy hat. Human beings are dual in nature, and our clothing illustrates and represents our worst and our best selves.

This exhibit invites the viewer to explore not only the fashions of the past, but also to explore his or her relationship with Western culture's most powerful "non-colors." What personal meaning do black, white and gray hold? Why reach for that particular black dress or gray suit when modern technology has created a brilliant array of vibrant dyes with which to ornament ourselves? Thus a personal, historical and social journey can bring us closer to our own deep inner preferences and motivations.

Karin J. Bohleke



Left: A delightful miniature Churchill brand hat and box, ca. 1960s-1970s, illustrate a long-standing staple of the masculine wardrobe: the gray fedora. The set was used in presenting gift certificates for a hat. S1985-04-001 Stoner.

Right: Drawn gray silk bonnet, ca. early 1860s, lavishly trimmed with black lace, dotted point d'esprit netting, and artificial flowers. The wide gold silk ribbon ties provide a striking contrast that harmonizes with the golden tones of the floral sprigs. Courtesy of K. Krewer.



*"It is decided economy to keep a child in white until it is a year old. It then always looks neat and clean, and its clothes are easily taken care of."*²

Left: A devoted mother spent many hours arranging yard upon yard of cotton wavy braid, now known as rick-rack, in intricate patterns to ornament her child's dress with an airy yet washable and sturdy trim. Such wavy braid ornaments were particularly common on children's clothing and underwear and adult women's underwear from the 1860s to the 1880s. Fashion magazines regularly provided patterns that combined the braid with embroidery and/or crocheting to create durable lace effects. Ca. 1878-1883. S1982-64-018 Wm. Penn. White cotton child's bonnet, ca. 1884, bears the inscription "Marjorie's grandma Cover made" penciled on the brim. S1990-24-003 Killian.

Center: Sumptuously hand-embroidered cotton batiste christening gown worn by Milton C. Phillips, of Pittsburgh, for his christening in 1873. S1982-07-060 Nickles.

Right: Child's sheer cotton net dress hand-embroidered with geometric patterns, ca. 1878-1883. S1981-28-060 Brewer.

² Godey's Lady's Book XLV:2 (Aug. 1852): 205.



It seems counter-intuitive to the modern mind to dress infants in white, given the extent to which they soil their clothing. However, it actually makes perfect sense: white clothing is more washable and bleachable. Sturdy natural fibers, namely linen, cotton, and wool, bear lengthy periods of soaking. The absence of color means that there are no unstable dyes that can run when wet, and when the wash is drying outside in warmer weather, the sunlight brightens whites as effectively as it fades colors.

Left: A photo of a smiling baby is always a refreshing sight, even if it is impossible to tell whether the child is male or female due to the lack of hair and nineteenth-century gender-undifferentiated infant clothing. Both the long robe and its accompanying long petticoat which protrudes below are richly embroidered. Cabinet card, ca. early 1890s, from Columbus, OH.

Right: A study in contrast from the smiling baby above, this solemn infant (probably a boy) from Baltimore stares with nervous uncertainty at the photographer sometime during the 1880s. The fact that he is older is demonstrated through the shorter length of his white dress, which consists of elaborate openwork crochet worn over a colored underdress to highlight the whitework. *Godey's Lady's Book* explains the transition from long robes to shorter dresses for both boys and girls:

*"...we go on to the consideration of that important point in a child's toilet, the introduction of short clothes. The age at which this becomes advisable is somewhat a matter of opinion and circumstances, some mother adopting the abbreviation as early as four months, others keeping the graceful sweep of long drapery twice that time. The season, too, must be consulted. It is not advisable to expose the little creature to the chance of taking cold in the severity of winter, or the inclemency of fall and spring. But somewhere between the ages of four and eight months the newcomer seems to crave a freer use of limb than the swaddling clothes will permit; and the disposition to creep about the carpet which now becomes developed, is also impeded by them. Many mothers lay aside the long dresses, and procure an entirely new wardrobe.... Others think it easier to tuck up the skirts, and, if need be, widen the waist of the dresses already in use."*³

³ Godey's Lady's Book XLV:2 (Aug. 1852): 205.





Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mothers kept their children in white clothing well beyond the initial year suggested by *Godey's Lady's Book*.

Above left: A little girl identified only as Agnes poses with her brother. Her white dress is beautifully trimmed with *broderie anglaise* (literally “English embroidery”), the standard nineteenth-century term for eyelet embroidery. A dark underdress highlights the lavish hand-sewn openwork that literally covers her dress. *Carte de visite*, ca. late 1850s. No backmark, but the photo is possibly English.

Below left: Wavy braid trim adorns the hem, sleeves and collar of an unidentified little boy's dress. Cabinet card, ca. 1880-1885, New York, NY.

Above right: An unidentified and highly fashionable little miss from Ridgefield, CT, looks at the photographer calmly and with a mature gaze, ca. 1905.

Below right: Detail of bodice embroidery from Milton C. Phillips' 1873 christening gown.



Left: Gyda "Bibi" Koren, born September 1900, provides a rare glimpse of children's winter underwear when worn in a photo with a note indicating that she is two years and two months old. Like their clothing, children's underwear is mostly white. The only exceptions to this general rule are wool petticoats, often butter yellow or red, and wool stockings, which are frequently black. Black shoes and stockings are quite common in photos for both adults and children, in spite of fashion advice which states that "Light boots and dark dresses, dark boots and light dresses, are indicative of bad taste."⁴ Note the delightful scaled-down washstand, ideal for a two-year-old, and the proportioned washbowl, bucket and pitcher. But did she find the fish in her bowl, or is she going to drop it in there? *Carte de visite*, Kristiania (Oslo), Norway, 1902



Above right: Children's shoes throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relied heavily on basic black and white, and combinations thereof. High button boots with ornamental embroidery, late 1890s-early 1900s; girl's 1880s leather shoes with red lining. S2004-01-080, 081 Thompson.



Below right: Wearing a delightful coat and dress ensemble beautifully trimmed with black braid, a little girl from Hudson, NY, looks determined to survive her photographic ordeal. Braiding patterns ready for tracing appeared regularly in the ladies' fashion magazines, or one could go a shop that specialized in stamping patterns onto fabric for the maker. Ready-made stamps were also available for purchase. Sturdy white cotton piqué braided in black was highly recommended for such outfits for both boys and girls. Note her wonderful straw hat with bright plaid silk ribbons resting near her feet and the bright patent leather tips of her boots. *Carte de visite*, ca. early 1860s.

⁴ Richard A. Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress of the Best American Society* (Springfield, Mass; Des Moines, Iowa: King, Richardson & Co., Publishers, 1891), 328.



Left: Mrs. Bridget Funk's sister, Nellie, wore the fine whitework dress on the right at her first communion in 1901. Mrs. Funk wore the dress on the left for her own first communion in Steelton, PA, in 1903, when she was 11 years old. The dress was purchased at Pomeroy's department store in Harrisburg. S1983-65-001, 002 Funk.

Above right: The tight-fitting sleeve, topped by a relatively small puff, dates the photo to ca. 1897. In Victorian photography, a combination of symbols and dress often reveal the special occasion commemorated by a trip to a photo studio. In the case of first communions, the combination of youth, white clothing and a prayer book are often the key indicators. This young lady is growing up: her bodice has an adult cut and style to accommodate her growing figure, and she wears heeled shoes. But her hair is still swept back in a youthful braid, and her hemline has not yet reached a full adult length. Note her lovely hat on the table. Cabinet card, Bridgeport, CT.

Below right: Cabinet card photo of another first communicant from Baltimore, ca. 1885-1887. Indulgent parents bought their daughter a sumptuous dress with a wide lace trim and broad silk ribbon. Like her counterpart above, her clothing is acquiring an adult style and look, while still retaining youthful hallmarks such as a shorter skirt. The horizontal drapery on her overskirt has started to lengthen, a process that would culminate ca. 1889 in a fashionable pointed asymmetrical overskirt nearly as long as the skirt itself. Then, the overskirt would disappear.



Aside from her wedding-day, there is no one particular time of such great importance to the girl as her graduation-day. Dressed in daintiest white, with father, mother, and all the aunts and cousins for once paying her the honor and applause which she feels is her due, she receives the diploma for which she has worked through many days, from the first grade on.

Beyond loom vistas of ambitions to be realized, delights to be tasted; behind her lies her childhood, for now she feels that she has entered upon womanhood, that period of life of which she has heard, but outside whose threshold she has hitherto stood. [...]

The schools regulate to a great extent some of these things; for instance, white shoes and stockings are demanded by some, while others require black....White gloves, either long or short, according to the length of the sleeve, are the order of the day, as they add the touch of formality which goes with the diploma and the importance of the event.⁵

Above right: Minnie Grace Liebegott Geist wore this dress to her graduation in Harrisburg in 1916. Her elder sister, Flora Liebegott, made the dress for her. It is typical of the early twentieth century in its lavish use of multiple cotton trims and fine batiste. S2008-15-002 Tussey. Frances Cromer Patterson wore the white shoes trimmed with a cut-steel buckle and silk taffeta ribbons to her graduation from CVSNS (now Shippensburg University) in 1896. S1985-24-018 Konold.



⁵ Fashion Editor, "The Last Day of School," *McCall's Magazine* XLII:9 (May 1915): 31.



In Victorian iconography, the combination of a white dress and a large scroll representing a diploma are the indicators of a high school graduation photograph. Like a first communion, the occasion warrants as sumptuous and fashionable a dress as the proud parents can afford.



Above left: With her tight-fitting trained dress, this young resident of Louisville, KY, is at the height of fashion, ca. 1878-1879. The congratulatory bouquets may actually be hers and not a studio prop.

Above right: In making this dress, a skilled dressmaker deployed all the decorative techniques at her command: lace, tucks, gathers, ribbons, pleats and poofs. The relative plainness of her bodice contrasts noticeably with the elaborate work on her skirt. Cabinet card, ca. 1887-1889, Reading, PA.

Above center: The tight sleeve leading to an oversized puff covering her entire upper arm dates this young lady's graduation to ca. 1893-1894. Her overskirt, understated and elegant though it is, had ceased to be fashionable around 1889. Thus it is possible that her dress has been made over from an earlier one in which the silk on the underskirt does not go up all the way to the waistband, making it impossible to avoid the double layer. However, the overall shape is completely in keeping with the current narrow, slightly A-line silhouette. Restyling, including dramatic picking apart and reshaping of garments, was very common. Cabinet card, Grinnell, IA.

Below right: Although this photograph comes from a studio that did not put its mark on its products, someone wrote "Georgee Smith Class of 99" on the back of this cabinet card. With her draped and yoked bodice and slightly puffed sleeves, Georgee is beautifully attired at the height of fashion for young women in 1899.





*"A girl, at her début, usually wears a white gown of lace, chiffon, crêpe de Chine, French embroidered muslin, or a simple organdie...."*⁶

*"Fashion has made white almost uniform for evening dresses."*⁷

*"Black or dark-colored silks are no longer considered in good taste for evening dresses; they should be of a light shade."*⁸



Young women traditionally wore white at their official début into society, and continued to wear it and other pastel colors at social functions such as balls. In photographs, débutante attire is generally marked by shorter sleeves, evening gloves and a fan. A lower neckline is possible, but is not guaranteed to be a design element in the young lady's gown depending upon the prevailing fashion and personal or parental preference.

Above left: A young lady from York, PA, wears a tight-fitting trained skirt fashionable ca. 1878-1879. The dress is made of fine batiste and trimmed with yards of lace and silk ribbon.

Above center: In a cabinet card photograph dated 1890, a young woman from the Burnham family wears a rich silk evening gown.

Above right: The signs of fashions to come are already evident in the design of this dress, ca. 1892, worn by an unidentified woman in New Haven, CT. The sleeves are becoming larger when compared to the 1890 photo, and the lace on her shoulders makes them appear even wider. The tip of one dainty white shoe peeps out from below her skirt hem in a manner identical to fashion plate illustrations.

Below left: Another young lady from Rome, NY, wears a fine white silk dress with a sheer overlay of either gauze or tarlatan. Again, the most arresting feature is the generous size of the sleeves, which would become still larger in subsequent years. Note the exquisite lace of her fan. Cabinet card, ca. 1892-1893.

⁶ Mrs. Burton Kingsland, "Woman's Dress for All Occasions," *Correct Social Usage*, 9th rev. ed. (New York: The New York Society of Self-Culture, 1907), 142.

⁷ "Fashions for January," *Peterson's Magazine* XLI:1 (Jan. 1862): 96.

⁸ "Fashions for May," *Peterson's Magazine* XLV:5 (May 1864): 390.



Adelaide Gordy (b. 1841, Franklin, LA–d. 1871, New Orleans, LA), wore this delicate gown made of tarlatan hand embroidered with silk in satin stitch and tambour work. Perhaps the dress had to be ready in a hurry, for the embroiderer forgot or was unable to complete one section on the upper skirt (see detail upper right). The gown passed down through the generations as Adelaide's wedding dress, but it may very well have done double duty, for she may have also worn it at the 1857 Mardi Gras ball, where she met her future husband, John Blount Robertson (b. 1826–d. 1878). It seems to have been a whirlwind courtship: the ball took place on February 24, and the couple married on April 15, 1857, and resided in New Orleans for the remainder of their lives. Two of her diminutive shoes survive: the most important of these is the small heelless slipper. It is hand inscribed in black ink on the insole as follows: "Slipper of Adelaide Gordy/Worn at Ball of Mystic—I saw/Mardi Gras 1857 [illegible] Street. By JBR," demonstrating a great deal of sentimentality surrounding the ball and their first encounter. It is truly a Cinderella story, for family history indicates that she lost the shoe, and her admirer and future husband picked it up. He then gave it back to her at their wedding. The inscription, faded as it is, possibly bears out the family tradition. However, the portrait (below left) that has always been identified in family lore as Adelaide, dates to ca. 1838–1839, and is quite possibly her mother, who died in 1847. Adelaide was her only child, and therefore the logical recipient of the portrait.



The story of John's first introduction to his future wife at the ball reveals the high importance of balls, dancing and similar social occasions throughout the nineteenth century. Certainly, they were highly enjoyable, and the Victorians' keen sense of fun is evident in their choreography, music and party games. But it was at such events, both large and small, that young people could meet and begin to form relationships while still under the careful supervision of older adults. That Adelaide and John met at a ball was quite within normal, and even expected, parameters.



Thus, a young lady's début into society in her white dress was also an understood social sign that she was now, quite literally, on the "marriage market," and ready to wear a similar (if not the same) white dress at her wedding. In New Orleans today, the Mardi Gras balls and débutante balls are one and the same.

The fragile inscribed slipper is important for another reason: 1857 was the year that a group of leading citizens formed the Mystic (or Mystick) Krewe of Comus to give what is now recognized as the very first modern Mardi Gras parade. The theme that year was "The Demon Actors in Milton's *Paradise Lost*," and all floats and costumes were designed around that literary reference. It was also the first time that some floats were used in the parade, although the majority of the participants walked the route on foot. Afterwards, a private invitation-only ball was held at the Gaiety Theatre, and that was where Adelaide captured John's heart. Historically speaking, losing her shoe for a romantically-inclined man to retrieve was the best thing she could have done, for it is one of the few identified objects to survive from that first critical event which helped shape the traditions for which New Orleans is now famous.

Courtesy of K. McFarland.



*"The dresses of the bridesmaids are not so elaborate as that of the bride. They also should be of white, but they may be trimmed with delicately colored flowers and ribbons."*¹⁰

Miss Jane L. Loring wore the dress on the left as a bridesmaid on March 23, 1848. Shortly thereafter, on May 4, 1848, she wore the dress on the right for her own wedding. Both dresses show the variety of effects possible with fine sheer batiste. Deep tucks on one gown create a bold striped effect, whereas the other dress features a remarkably deep hem creating a counterweight to the gathering and shirring on the bodice. Both bodices are of a style known as a "fan front" and illustrate subtle variations on an existing fashion: the bridesmaid dress on the left features a soft, rounded point at the bodice's center front, and the bodice waistline is piped with a heavy cord as a highlight; the wedding gown has a deeper and sharper point, with much greater control of the gathered fabric at the waistline, which has been sewn down to emphasize the point.

Courtesy of K. Krewer.

¹⁰ Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress*, 346.



“Although the fashions in make and material of the bride’s dress are continually varying, yet there are certain unchangeable rules in regard to it. Thus a bride in full bridal costume should be dressed entirely in white from head to foot.”¹¹

Above left: Clever piecing transformed a silk-satin low-necked evening gown into a $\frac{3}{4}$ -length sleeved dress with shoulder straps, probably for wedding use in the early 1860s. The bodice features three darts on either side of the center front, a style that began to appear ca. 1853. It laces in the back via hand-sewn eyelet holes. The skirt is fully lined and faced. Provenance: Van Rensselaer estate, NY. Courtesy of K. and B. Bohleke.

Above right: Edith Elliot Chapman sewed her sumptuous silk-satin wedding gown with two bodices for her wedding to Archibald S. Weaver on January 3, 1901 in Ashbourne, PA (near Philadelphia). S1985-76-006 Smith.

Shoes: Another bride, the donor’s mother, wore these canvas and leather shoes at her wedding in 1897. S1984-42-022 Meyers.

¹¹ Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress*, 345.



“The bridegroom should wear a black or dark-blue dresscoat, light pantaloons, vest and necktie, and white kid gloves.”¹²

Left: Mary Viola Liebegott Tussey, the donor’s mother, wore this wedding dress in October, 1910. Its style is that of a fancy dress for summer wear and could be used for multiple occasions beyond the wedding. Her elder sister, Flora Liebegott, made the gown for her. S2008-15-001 Tussey.

Right: Because of the oversized sleeves, the bride looks almost overwhelming in comparison to her husband in this ca. 1894-1895 cabinet card photograph from Harrisburg. His black wool suit is eminently reusable as a best suit in the years to come, which seems to be the reason grooms quite often opted for black for their weddings, even when etiquette permitted a few other possibilities. Upon examination of multiple nineteenth-century wedding photos, it is clear that grooms’ freedom in selecting their clothing was limited: some wore black cravats, other white; some wore white vests, and others wore black. There is another suit in the SUFAM collection which served first as a wedding suit and thereafter as the gentleman’s best suit for attending funerals, creating an fascinating juxtaposition of *eros* and *thanatos*.

¹² Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress*, 345.



Above left: Shippensburg tailor Link Sherar clothed two generations of the Fogelsanger men in high-quality black wool for their weddings. E. B. Fogelsanger wore the suit on the right for his wedding on February 14, 1888. His son David Raymond married Lydia wearing the suit on the left in 1914. The shirt is also his, but it is no longer known if it was his wedding shirt. S1984-45-018, 023, 024 Fogelsanger.

Above right: An unidentified couple from Hinsdale, NH, pose for their wedding photo, ca. 1885.

Below left: A message on the back of this real photo postcard reads: "Taken on our wedding eve. / September 23rd, 1912. / To Cousin Clinton from Cousin Ethel / 211 Harrison St. / Lestershire / N. Y." Someone added in pencil the names Clyde Merritt and Ethel Boswell.



*"The fashionable woman is certain this year to have at least one bewitching white toilette in her warm-weather wardrobe. Last Summer the fondness for all-white costumes was so marked that observant folks knew it would be continued to the present season. In this prophecy they were most correct, for this Summer my lady favors white more strongly than ever. To produce the all-white effect, the dress, hat, gloves, parasol and shoes must all be colorless."*¹³

*"White is cheerful and gay-looking, and very becoming; therefore ladies should wear as much of it as is possible in their toilets."*¹⁴

*"White is very much worn—a pretty, cheap dress, that is, cheap in every respect, except with regard to labor, for, to be beautiful, the toilet should always be perfectly fresh."*¹⁵

Right: A young lady enjoyed this exquisite white dress with a deep embroidered hem, ca. late 1820s-early 1830s. Note the visible watch pocket where the bodice meets the skirt. Different weights and grades of white cotton were combined to create a washable dress suitable for summer and evening wear. Courtesy of B. Manifold.

Gentlemen enjoyed the benefits of summer whites as well. These lightweight linen trousers, still shining with their old starch, illustrate the fall-front closure method in use before the advent of the buttoned fly. Note the extremely high waistline: the waistband of the trousers sat well above the navel, creating the effect of longer and leaner legs. Waistcoats were cut proportionally shorter. Ca. 1830s. S2004-01-075 Thompson.

Left: Construction detail on drop-front trousers.

Center: Man's three-piece suit of cotton duck for summer wear, ca. 1940s-1950s. S2007-20 McLean.

¹³ *The Delineator* LXII:1 (Jul. 1893): 93.

¹⁴ "Fashions for April," *Peterson's Magazine* XLIII:4 (Apr. 1863): 326.

¹⁵ "Fashions for August," *Peterson's Magazine* XLVI:1 (Jul. 1864): 151-2.

Why Black?

- 1. *It hides stains.***
- 2. *It detracts from poor tailoring and general wear.***
- 3. *It goes with all colors.***
- 4. *Even the cheapest of fabrics look decent in black.***
- 5. *It dresses up.***
- 6. *It dresses down.***
- 7. *It can be elegant, classic, sexy, funky, or mournful.***
- 8. *It imparts timelessness to clothes.***
- 9. *It has an impressive pedigree—nuns, Audrey Hepburn, beatniks, and Morticia Addams—and is the uniform of fashion editors worldwide.***
- 10. *It can go summer or winter.***
- 11. *It has a unique ability to stand out, blend in, seduce, repel.***
- 12. *What other color does all this and takes off ten pounds?***

Kim Johnson Gross et al., *Chic Simple Women's Wardrobe*
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 44.

A man who has subdued himself to an arduous training, and who shows by his dark suit that he denies himself still, is clearly the servant of his hard-earned skill: which is then his power and gives him power, however humble his manners may be..... You may not understand all the professional says, for every profession has its necessary jargon, serving, as had Latin in the past, to make command manifest, through command of a language the layman cannot speak. But, however powerful, he can also be relied on; his black also tells you that, for it says he is unseduced by cheap pleasures and temptations. A man in black is a man you can trust. He is a man ... you can trust with your money.

Harvey, *Men in Black*, 146-147.

How frequently again do we see the dimensions of a tall and *embonpoint* figure magnified to almost Brobdingnagian proportions by a white dress, or a small woman reduced to Lilliputian size by a black dress! Now, as the optical effect of white is to enlarge objects, and that of black to diminish them, if the large woman had been dressed in black, and the small woman in white, the apparent size of each would have approached the ordinary stature, and the former would not have appeared a giantess, or the latter a dwarf.

Merrifield, "On the Harmony of Colors," [Jul. 1852]: 51.



"Black, however, not only suits the complexion of all forms, and is becoming to all figures, but is at once piquant and elegant; it has a surprising effect in imparting grace and elegance to a well-turned form." ¹⁶

Left and center: A small black-on-white print makes a cotton summer dress look cool and refreshing, and an airy black horsehair and lace cloche combine high fashion, lightness, and beauty. Both ca. 1925. Courtesy of B. Manifold.

Far left: Black straw is highlighted by a bright band of white on this late 1950s hat. S1983-02-021 Hubley.

Right: A small white-on-black print creates understated elegance for a daytime professional, 1970s. The high-buttoning double-breasted bodice front is reminiscent of military style, transformed for feminine attire. S2004-04-002 Bronstein. To the right, a bold "Mr. John Jr." brand black and white felt and plush hat, originally owned by Mrs. Alice Dorman, an elementary school teacher in Shippensburg, 1960s. S1990-37-001 Roche.

¹⁶ Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress*, 352.



Left: A sheer floral dress, late 1930s-early 1940s, proves that springtime blooms look lovely against a black background. Worn by Alice Virginia Danzer Fletcher of Hagerstown, MD. S2008-09-065 Luetscher. Early twentieth-century morning suit illustrates the subtle shifts between gray and black which were permitted the true gentleman. S2007-20 McLean.

Above right: Fine black wool with a crinkled texture makes bright pink and yellow flowers stand out, ca. 1893-1894. The same colors, now slightly faded, form a dainty feminine bow on the side of the stiff collar. S1991-45-194 Darnell.

Below right: The correctly attired woman of the nineteenth century usually had a brooch at her throat when dressed for the day. This particular cameo design is named "Day and Night." 1860s. Courtesy of K. and B. Bohleke

*“As a rule women attempt too much in the way of colors, and spoil that which otherwise would be a harmonious combination. In passing a well-dressed woman on the street it is not an easy thing to describe the dress she wears; harmony and a general sense of fitness is the impression received, and we think of it as a perfect costume, no special part attracting us. The quiet and studious select grays and blacks, while the frivolous will affect the gaudy; hence the rule that a man or woman’s dress is a fair index to the mind.”*¹⁷

*“Effort should be expended upon securing good material, good fit and freshness, rather than color.”*¹⁸

An exquisitely tailored woman’s wool suit, ca. 1914, from the *Au Louvre* store in Paris shows Parisian fashion sensibility at its best. Details in the black ornamental stitching and the use of bias-cut self-fabric and self-fabric buttons create subtle variety. S1991-45-040 Darnell. Machine-embroidered linen shirtwaist, ca. 1910-1914, S1984-38-008 Brewer. Black silk velvet hat with large white plumes and black glass beadwork, ca. 1912. Courtesy of B. Manifold. Bold black and white spectator pumps, 1960s, worn by Mary Jane Humphreys of Hanover, PA. S2007-05-003 Trescott.



¹⁷ Georgene Corry Benham, *Polite Life and Etiquette or What is Right and the Social Arts* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1902), 301.

¹⁸ Mary Randolph, “Color in Dress,” *McCall’s Magazine* XL:8 (Apr. 1913), 94-95.



*"An inevitable part of the smart wardrobe is a black dress so fashioned that it may serve as either a dinner or an evening gown and thus solve the problem of what to wear when one is in doubt as to the nature of some function one contemplates attending."*¹⁹

Left: The understated simplicity of the taffeta Ceil Chapman cocktail dress belies its complex construction. The skirt is fully lined with heavy interfacing to make it stand out boldly. Bias self-fabric binding has been sewn in open patterns with utter precision on the neckline, sleeves and hem. S2008-09-086 Luetscher.

Right: Arnold Scaasi is renowned for his bold use of color that was sometimes disconcerting to fashion commentators, but was usually an announcement of combinations soon to be adopted by fashionistas. However, his collections always featured key black-based pieces such as the dress on the right from 1993. Here, a sumptuous bridal lace bodice has a flirty black ruffled skirt, and the two are anchored by the bright red belt, making the dress a genuine stand-out. S1997-03-025 Scaasi.

Center: The black wool felt hat from the 1940s shows the same understanding of the value of a bright splash of red when combined with black and an additional touch of gray. S1987-59-002 Bonebrake.

¹⁹ Mary Brooks Picken and Alwilda Fellows, *Fashion Service Prepared for the Exclusive Use of Students of the Woman's Institute. Fall & Winter 1922-1923*, (Scranton, PA: Woman's Institute of Domestic Arts & Sciences, Inc., 1922), np.



Above left: A man's formal wardrobe allowed him the choice of black or white evening vests, depending upon the occasion and vagaries of social dictates, which did nuance from time to time which type should be worn for an occasion. On the left, a black silk low-cut double-breasted evening vest has a fine pattern in the weave, ca. 1920s. S1982-07-093 Nickles. On the right, a hand-embroidered cotton piqué vest, suitable for a wedding or for evening, 1890s. S1981-11-054 Edwards.

Below left: Gleaming strips of black celluloid create a shimmering bodice that has been further enriched with black lace, black *point d'esprit* netting, black silk velvet ribbon, and fine white lace, ca. 1900. The petersham band inside has the name "R. Dean Harrisburg" stamped in gold ink. The matching skirt is no longer extant. S1982-64-099 Wm. Penn.

Below right: Silk velvet has been woven with a barred pattern of gleaming silk to create a sumptuous little black shoulder cape trimmed with silk ribbon, ca. late 1880s-early 1890s. The red lining provides a flirtatious flash of color that would be glimpsed as the wearer moved. S2004-01-067 Thompson.



“Black and dark dresses have the effect of making the persons wearing them appear [sic] smaller than they really are; for this reason they are suitable to stout persons. The same may be observed with respect to black shoes, which diminish the apparent size of the foot. The contrary effect takes place with regard to white and light colored dresses, which make people look larger than they really are. Very stout persons should, therefore, dress in black and dark colors.”²⁰

Left: The expectant lady who wore this wrapper ca. 1890-1891 was following Mrs. Merrifield’s advice: she opted for black to help reduce her apparent size. Her pregnancy was a sumptuous one: the black silk has a small woven pattern of pink and green flower sprigs. This contrast was further emphasized with the pink silk chiffon front panel and the green ribbon trim. Wide Cluny lace provides an added touch of luxury. S1982-64-117 Wm. Penn.

Right: Sheer black chiffon was layered over a pink lining for both rich contrast and subtle shading. The black velvet ribbon bow adds additional texture. Jean Porter Kuszmaul Anchors wore this gown in the late 1940s and early 1950s when she performed as a member of a singing duo. For a touch of sparkle, she added the silver platform wedge shoes that have always been stored in their original box, and which she thoughtfully dated 1949 for posterity. S2008-11-003, 014 Kyle.

²⁰ Merrifield, “On the Harmony of Colors,” *Peterson’s Magazine* XXII:4 (Oct. 1852): 184.



*“Black may be worn with any color, though it looks best with the lighter shades of the different colors. White may also be worn with any color, though it looks best with the darker tones. Thus white and crimson, black and pink, each contrast better and have a richer effect than though the black were united with the crimson and the white with the pink.”*²¹

Left: A black background highlights the bold pink roses, printed *à disposition* (meaning that the pattern as woven or printed has been calculated to form different patterns on a garment when cut) on crisp silk, 1960s. S1991-45-216 Darnell.

Above right: A black and white silk check has been highlighted with pleated rosettes of pink silk taffeta on this mid-1920s cloche hat from the *Au Printemps* department store in Paris, worn by a lady of the prosperous Danzer family of Hagerstown, MD. S2008-09-008 Luetscher.

Center: Pink and black are common color combinations throughout the decades. Hand-embroidered shoes, 1960s, S1980-17-001 Heiges. Embroidered neck scarf, 1950s, S2008-09 Luetscher. Young lady’s black and white polka-dotted hat with bumblebee, 1950s. Courtesy of B. Manifold. White synthetic straw hat with pink velvet ribbon loops, 1950s. S1989-43-56 Carey.

Below right: Detail of internal construction of maternity gown from preceding page. The deep gussets cut into the lining, combined with the laces, make the gown infinitely adjustable for all stages of pregnancy and subsequent recovery.

²¹ Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress*, 350.



"Black and orange, a rich harmony." ²²

Virtually the same black and orange taffeta created two dramatically different outfits several years apart. The ca. 1947 cocktail suit on the left, boldly uses the stripes in a variety of ways: cut on the semi-bias, the resulting diagonal stripes create chevrons on the skirt; the sleeves are cut on the cross-wise grain to create vertical stripes, and the jacket is cut on the grain with its horizontal stripes. S1986-23-005 Bowman. The 1950s cocktail dress on the right is more consistent in its use of the horizontal stripes on the main body of the dress, but also features sleeves cut on the cross-wise grain to produce vertical stripes which are edged with cuffs cut on the semi-bias for a slight diagonal effect. The conservative use of the stripes highlights the large, shining buttons and the dramatic oversized shawl collar. S1985-35-004 Basler.

²² Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress*, 358.



In the creation of this dress in 1993, Scaasi illustrated the subtle richness a touch of orange can bring to black. He paired voided velvet woven on a black net base with a flesh-colored lining for a nude effect. The illusion of nudity is consequently contrasted with the otherwise modest cut of the dress with its long sleeves and full draped skirt. Tiny orange rhinestones gleam on the center of the flowers. S1997-03-001 Scaasi.



Left: Alice Virginia Danzer Fletcher of Hagerstown, MD, wore this beautifully draped evening dress in the 1930s. The black rayon ribbon and rhinestone buckle add a shining highlight. The high draped neckline is a modest element that is confined to the front of the gown. The back is open to the waist in a deep sexy V shape, forcing viewers to ask themselves, “Is she wearing a bra?”-- an essential element in the eroticism of backless gowns. S2008-09-073 Luetscher.

Center: Tuxedo, 1940s. S1987-56-002 Laffey, shown with formal white scarf, 1970s, worn by Shippensburg professor Dr. Brindaban Chaubey. S1990-19-082 Chaubey.

Right: Shippensburg State Teachers School (now Shippensburg University) alumna Dorothy Myers wore this gleaming bias-cut rayon velvet dress to dances at Penn State and Dickinson College, as well as to her graduation from Shippensburg in 1928. Sparkling rhinestone buttons draw the viewer’s eye down the curves of her figure. S1988-53-019 Myers.



Left: Comic superhero Spiderman of course has his Spiderwoman counterpart. This fancy dress evening gown is composed entirely of layers of black neck embroidered with sequin cobwebs. A separate black taffeta slip keeps the gown from being entirely transparent. Late 1940s-early 1950s, S2008-09 Luetscher.

Right: Pink and gold sequined flowers cascade diagonally down the bodice of this fine black ca. 1944 crepe evening dress. Dressmakers of the 1930s and 1940s were masters of cut and drape, and knew how to get the maximum effect from the clinging crepe fabric. Thus a modestly cut dress, such as this one and others on preceding pages, skim the body and hide nothing of the figure beneath, creating an alluring mix of “revealing cover.” S1981-26-011 Garland.

"Black and white a perfect harmony." ²³

"The present fondness for unions of black and white (the magpie colors, as they are called) originated in Paris, and it is too early to venture a prediction as to its duration. Black-and-white effects are both striking and pretty when used in moderation, but an excess of such conspicuous contrasts would be trying and in questionable taste." ²⁴

"The combination of white and black is even more showy than the black and gold. The contrast is more violent, and consequently more noticeable. It is very beautiful, however...." ²⁵

Black combined with a touch of white has been a fashion mainstay literally for centuries, yet it is infinitely renewable in the hands of capable designers. Here, Scaasi combined black Dupioni silk over a black net crinoline. Then he topped the strapless gown with an oversized bow, turning a beautiful woman into the ultimate gift. The bow itself is constructed from the same Dupioni as the rest of the gown, and bands of white grosgrain ribbon have been carefully applied to create the striped effect. S1997-03-023 Scaasi.

²³ Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress*, 358.

²⁴ "Stylish Garnitures," *The Delineator* XLII:3 (Sept. 1893): 325.

²⁵ "Fashions for January," *Peterson's Magazine* XXXIX:1 (Jan. 1861): 95.





"The mixture of black and white is as popular as ever, and, where it is used with discretion, it is very becoming." ²⁶

Left: A cream lace yoke and plastron forms a lightweight top to this 1940s evening dress, the lace creating a nude effect on the arms and shoulders, while at the same time providing coverage. Chiffon over a black taffeta lining combine for a very full skirt, and the black velvet at the waistband provides another element of rich texture. S1981-30-026 Barron.

Center: A neo-classically draped white ca. 1948 gown is highlighted with white and silver beadwork at the neckline to create a look that flatters many figure types. S1984-39-002 Myers.

Right: A plunging décolleté plain black bodice is combined with a bold abstract black and white rose print on the skirt of this 1960s evening gown. S1991-45-213 Darnell.

Shoes: White satin shoes are highlighted with large rhinestones on the straps, 1960s. S1986-21-031 Kaluger. Black ponyskin "Pappagallo" brand shoes feature spiked heels and a thick textured plush surface, 1960s. S1990-32-004 Farrell.

²⁶ "Fashions for October," *Peterson's Magazine* XLVI:4 (Oct. 1864): 300.



*“Black and white for accents are always safe. One is often much more effective than the other; however, if a gown lacks character, try both—one or the other will often cure the trouble.”*²⁷

*“Black and White are still favorite combinations for dresses. But if the dress is black, white should be sparingly used, as otherwise the effect will be muddy; but if the dress is white, more black can be employed, as a warm color always looks better on a cold color than a cold color does upon a warm one.”*²⁸

Two dresses illustrate perfectly these fashion principles:

Left: Satin stripes and sheer crinkled chiffon or a black silk lining were combined in this rich yet subdued dress highlighted with lace flower motifs and narrow velvet ribbon, ca. 1902. S1991-45-056 Darnell.

Right: Black lace, net, beads and velvet over a white silk lining create a stunning evening gown for a woman of means, ca. 1900. Courtesy of B. Manifold.

²⁷ Randolph, “Color in Dress,” 95.

²⁸ “Fashions for November,” *Peterson’s Magazine* XLVIII:5 (Nov. 1865): 382.



*"In regard to a gentleman's dress for the dance, we may add: white gloves, white vest, light colored cravat, dress-coat, black pants, and patent-leather gaiters or light calf-skin boots well polished, constitute the proper ball-room or soirée costume.... The ordinary dress-coat, which is in no respect in the way, and which leaves the limbs perfectly free to move gracefully, is the only proper coat for the party and dance."*²⁹

*"The toilette of a gentleman, at this time, allows of but little choice of colors. In this country, nineteen-twentieths of all coats are black.... Dress pantaloons must also be black, or white...."*³⁰

*"The dress of gentlemen will not detain us long. Up to nearly the close of the last century, their dress was characterized by as many colors and extravagancies as that of ladies; but for the last fifty or sixty years, colors, as an appendage to male costume, and except as regards military or naval uniforms, are now, by common consent, almost entirely banished to the servants' hall."*³¹

Left: An Underwood & Underwood stereoview dated 1902 entitled "Before Marriage—a Dude" illustrates the black tails that were the essential component of the most formal of men's attire throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries before the tuxedo became more commonplace. To the modern eye, the young man preparing to go out for the evening is beautifully attired and exquisitely groomed. His sexual freedom and aggression is signaled by the objects that surround him: the hookah on the floor, the sensuously posed young woman in the picture on his wall, the suggestive curves of his corner couch, and the phallic guns and swords (one conveniently lodged behind a shield) that decorate the walls. The hookah, because of its Eastern connotations, immediately calls to the viewer's mind the stereotypes of the decadent sexual lifestyle of a man with a harem at his disposal. The stereoview signals a fundamental dilemma of society: the gentleman's uniform may be merely an outer shell that allows a cad to enter into fine company. But the title of the scene also explicitly points to freedoms lost upon the matrimonial altar.

Right: Cabinet card, 1890s, of an unidentified man in his evening tails.

²⁹ Beadle's Dime Book of Practical Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen (New York: Irwin P. Beadle & Co., 1860. Rpt West Chester, PA: Sullivan Press, 2001), 36-37.

³⁰ The Illustrated Manners Book: A Manual of Good Behavior and Polite Accomplishments (New York: Leland Clay, & Co., 1855), 466.

³¹ Merrifield, "On the Harmony of Colors," (Oct. 1852): 185.



*"...[B]lack is more popular than ever. There was a time—true, long ago—when the sole fact of wearing a black dress out of mourning was sufficient to call forth reprobation, and to cause the wearer to be classed as eccentric."*³²

*"When considering the Winter wardrobe, it is well to remember that a black satin skirt will give a good return for the money it costs. For evening wear, a black chiffon waist will give a festive tone to the gown, while for teas and calling generally a black satin coat will complete an elegant outfit. For theatre wear of the day at home, a fancy silk waist will suffice with the skirt, thus making several combinations possible with this one useful garment."*³³

As the above quotations indicate, the mere fact that a dress is entirely black does not automatically make it an example of mourning attire. They illustrate the nineteenth century's negotiations between the concepts of black for mourning, black for its conservative connotations, and black for evening elegance. The complexity of the shifts in discourse and fashion make the labeling of a dress without provenance as an example of mourning attire a potentially hazardous endeavor. Thus, while it is tempting to label these two particular ensembles as mourning dress, such may or may not be the case.

Left: Black silk-satin gleams in the light in three-piece bodice, skirt and cape set, ca. 1890-1891. It is further highlighted by cascading black glass trim. S1982-64-099 Wm. Penn.

Right: Black net with a pattern of intertwined rings woven into the netting is lined with black silk taffeta and further supported by a brown cotton lining in the skirt and bodice, ca. 1890. It was worn by Mary Reid Aikman (b. 1858), of Pottsville, PA. S1981-08-004 Beck.

³² "Fashions for November," *Peterson's Magazine* LXXVII:5 (Nov. 1879): 411.

³³ Edna S. Witherspoon, "Around the Tea Table," *The Delineator* XLVIII:5 (Nov. 1896): 655.

At funerals, it is an evidence of sympathy with the bereaved family to dress in black or dark colors.

Mourning dress should be severely plain and exquisitely neat. Dressy mourning lacks dignity and betrays the wearer's interest in her clothes.

A widow, during her first year of mourning, wears only woolen fabrics trimmed with crape, or with folds of the material, and, for the street, a jacket or wrap of cloth, a crape bonnet with tiny white ruche, if desired, a very long crape veil, suède gloves, and black furs in winter. In the house many wear collars and deep cuffs, or white organdie, with broad hems.

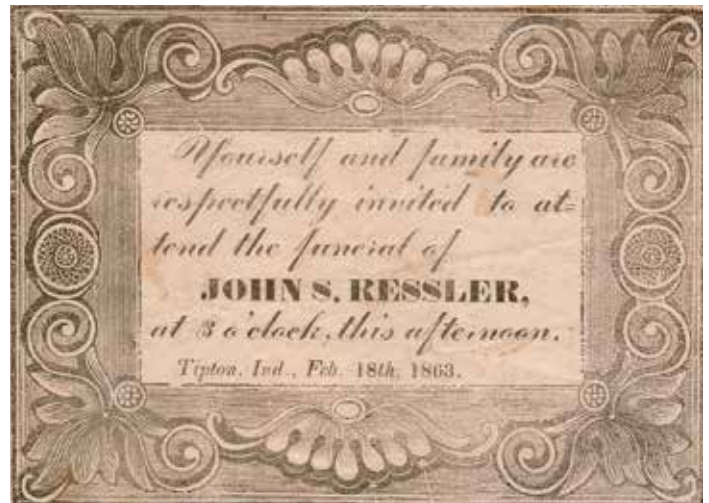
Only immediately after a bereavement, when the control of the emotions is uncertain, is it now customary to wear a long veil over the face. A face veil of net edged with crape is worn and the long veil thrown back. Silk veiling sometimes replaces crape.

The widow's cap is left off after the first year, and the veil shortened. At the end of two years, the veil is discarded and lusterless silks are worn. Much is left to the option of the wearer.

Two years is the usual period of mourning for parents, adult children, brothers and sisters. Close mourning, with the veil, is worn for a year, for parents and children, while for brothers and sisters it is usual to wear it but half that time. In all cases the mourning is lightened at intervals of six months. For a young child, the mother wears plain black for a year—and soon lightens it for the sake of her other little ones. Young girls rarely wear veils, but crape toques, or hats trimmed with crape, and cloth or woolen gowns, with a touch of white at neck and wrists. Children under twelve wear mourning only for a parent, when white or gray frocks and coats are worn—with all-black hats.

For relatives, not of the immediate family, black is worn for six months—and for relations-in-law convention prescribes the same degree of mourning as for one's own people, but circumstances alter cases.

A bride lightens her mourning after her marriage, and at the wedding, bride, bridesmaids, and all others concerned discard it for the occasion. It is in good taste to make the transitions from mourning to colors very gradually.”³⁴



"It is a characteristic of Victorian society that its formality and its grief wear nearly identical clothes." ³⁵

"The variety of material for traveling and walking dresses is wonderful, still the color is always some shade of gray, or black and white. There are stripes . . . small black and white plaids, etc., etc., of all qualities, from eighteen and three-quarter cents to one dollar and twenty-five cents a yard. The black and white plaid is by no means confined to persons in mourning; in fact, some of the most fashionable and stylish dresses of the season are made of it. Silks of this description are very much in demand...." ³⁶

Above right: Detail of the black net with interlocking rings from Mary Aikman's gown on the preceding page.

Below right: A rare surviving funeral invitation for John Samuel Ressler, b. ca. 1802. Mr. Ressler was the head of a busy household: his first wife Rebecca Eshelman died giving him a child in 1850, leaving him the father of seven children. He wasted no time that year, marrying Elizabeth Teasel, who also in 1850 gave him the first of six more children.

³⁴ Kingsland, *Correct Social Usage*, 146-148.

³⁵ Harvey, *Men in Black*, 200.

³⁶ "Fashions for June," *Peterson's Magazine* XXXIX:6 (Jun. 1861): 509.



Above left: Black silk bonnets from the 1850s and 1860s for full mourning (all black) and suitable for half mourning (with white face trimmings). Courtesy of K. Krewer and K. Cogswell.

Above right: Mourning brooch with hair of the deceased set in a silver frame. The initials "H.C." and the date 1856 are engraved on the back. Courtesy of K. Cogswell.

Below, left to right: A young woman from Ramsgate, England, wears full mourning with heavy bands of crepe on her skirt, ca. 1859-1860. Another young woman from Newton, NJ, wears fashionable high mourning in the form of a Garibaldi blouse with a black collar and black ribbons combined with a black skirt, ca. 1864-1865. A young man from Philadelphia illustrates the minimal signs of mourning worn by men in the nineteenth century: he has a black crepe band around his silk top hat, early 1860s.

*"Then come the different kinds of purples, grays, lilacs, and mixtures of black and white. Or black may be trimmed with purple, white, or gray; or these colors may have trimmings of black, according to the relationship of the person, or the length of time the mourning has been worn. For deep mourning, such as for a parent, husband, or any other near relative, the trimmings should be of crape only, and but little of even that. It is totally inadmissible to have much trimming in 'deep black.' The plainer the dress is, the more suitable. Black collars and sleeves are indispensable in such mourning, as well as black crape bonnet and veil. But when the relative is not so near, or when the deeper mourning has been laid aside, thin, plain white collars and sleeves are permitted, more trimming can be worn on the dress, the skirt may be ruffled or otherwise trimmed, and purple or white flowers worn in the face of the bonnet. With this lighter kind of mourning, a silk coat or sacque may be worn, or even a black shawl with a colored border, provided the colors are not too gay. As the season advances, white straw bonnets may be worn, trimmed with black, or even with white or purple, with purple pansies or violets in the face; but if the mourning is deeper, the bonnet should be of black straw, trimmed with crape or ribbon."*³⁷



Above right: Jewelry containing the hair of deceased persons was a common and beautiful accessory. These brooches and charms date from the late-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. Pearls symbolize the tears of the mourner. Courtesy of K. Cogswell and K. and B. Bohleke.

Below left: A young woman from Syracuse, NY, poses in her second stage mourning attire in which she has adopted a white collar and cuffs. Cabinet card, mid-1870s.



³⁷ "Fashions for Mourning," *Peterson's Magazine* XLI:5 (May 1862): 426.



Mrs. Alice Virginia Danzer Fletcher of Hagerstown, MD, carefully labeled her mother's 1920s hat as "Mrs. Danzer's Mourning Hat" when she packed it away for safekeeping in 1939, thus definitively fixing the mourning association with the garment. It is a complex combination of straw, buckram, wool crepe, and an intricate interweaving of picot grosgrain ribbon. The dress corresponds to her mother's approximate size based on other garments, and by extension is thought to be the very high fashion mourning dress worn with the hat. It, too, is of very intricate construction: the outer fabric is a sheer black silk with floral vines woven in a striped pattern, and it is layered over a soft shining China silk lining. A system of hooks and eyes fastens the lining and its dog-leg opening. Then snaps running from the neck to the waist fasten the sheer outer layer independently of the lining, but then connect it to the lining at the waistband. The sheer layer's dog-leg skirt opening fastens independently of the lining. When everything is fastened, all closures are completely invisible, and the dress appears to be identical in the front and the back. The wrists pass through the loops seen hanging from the sleeves to keep them in place at all time. The dress shields feature a guarantee that expired in October, 1923. S2008-09-040, 072 Luetscher.



Above: Beautiful examples of mourning hair jewelry from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most with the abbreviation Ob! to indicate that the person is deceased and that it is not a piece of sentimental jewelry exchanged during a lifetime. Additional typical phrases include “Alas” and “He/She blooms in life eternal.” The ring on the index finger of the right hand contains hidden springs that can open to reveal the hair protected underneath the outer metal layer. One band has been sprung open for the viewer, while the other remains closed.

Far right: A mother and daughter from New Brunswick, NJ, are perhaps in mourning for a soldier husband and father who died during the Civil War. The mother wears a black enameled hair brooch; the little girl has a similar, smaller piece on a long necklace. Note that the little girl’s mourning is marked by her jewelry and her black ribbons on her shoulders. Children did not always wear full mourning as it was thought to be too distressing for them to be swathed all in black.



Right: Mrs. Berry and Winfield Berry from Salem are also perhaps mourning a fallen soldier husband and father from the Civil War. Mrs. Berry has a black enamel hair brooch at her throat, and there is no indication in her son’s attire that he, too, is in mourning. The tight coat sleeve on her dress dates the image to ca. 1864.



“One large pocket is almost always put on the left side, the very tight skirt making it impossible to use a pocket inserted in the dress.”³⁸

“[Grey] was a further un-coloured colour the Victorians valued. It was a virtuous colour, associated in Christian use with the faithful conjugality of doves. In menswear it figured especially in trousers—the trousers one might wear with a black frock coat. And in women’s wear, the grey dress was clearly a precious item.”³⁹

Above left: Gray silk taffeta dress trimmed with gold silk fringe, ca. 1876, with a double skirt and tight-fitting cuirass bodice. Courtesy of B. Manifold.

Above right: Detail of sleeve trimming. One of the hallmarks of 1870s women’s fashions is the elaborate cuffs and trims on the lower sleeve.

Below right: Detail of the pocket in which handkerchiefs were prominently displayed. Such large pockets were a relatively short-lived fad of the mid-1870s, but they were frequently as elaborate as the sleeves.

³⁸ “Fashions for March,” *Peterson’s Magazine* LXIX:3 (Mar. 1876): 236.

³⁹ Harvey, *Men in Black*, 212.



Above right: A rich black gown combines silk satin, voided velvet, beaded lace, and plain lace for a textured visual feast, ca. 1880. The skirt's narrow front and full profile in the back is ensured by means of three horizontal bands of fabric-covered whalebone that pass essentially behind the wearer's thighs, knees and calves. S1982-64-095 Wm. Penn.

Above left: As is the case with the gown on the preceding page, this dress also features beautiful trim on the lower sleeve.

Below left: A young lady from Gettysburg was photographed in the Tipton studio ca. 1876 wearing a fashionable gown very similar to the grey dress on the preceding page.



Left and center: A stunning silk coat and bodice ensemble are elaborately trimmed with blue silk braid and fringe, lace, net and tucks, ca. 1905-1907. S1982-64-038 Wm. Penn.

Right: Gray silk taffeta mantle, 1850s-early 1860s, trimmed with intricate self-fabric ruched trim. Courtesy of K. Krewer.

Accessories: Gray plush hat, 1950s. S1983-51-066 Thrush. Gray leather clutch purse with moiré lining, 1920s. S1983.02-051 Hubley. Spiked high-heeled "DeLiso Debs" shoes in shades of gray, 1950s. S1990-12-012 Drake.



*"The old, but beautiful mixture of gray and black is still in high favor...."*⁴⁰

*"Combinations of black and gray are again noticed. . . . They are stylish in effect and comparatively inexpensive. . . . Black gloves, and a large hat of gray beaver trimmed with gray plumes shading into black, finish an artistic and quiet costume, one that the most conservative of women would pronounce 'perfectly good form.'"*⁴¹

Left: Two shades of clinging gray wool knit show off the wearer's fine figure. Worn by Alice Virginia Danzer Fletcher of Hagerstown, MD, 1940s. S2008-09-080 Luetscher.

Center: A woman's tailored walking suit in fine gray wool trimmed with black lace, ca. 1905-1907. S1982-64-189 Wm. Penn.

Right: A figure-hugging gray wool jumper, late 1950s, is trimmed with three buttoned ornamental pockets. S1980-10-055 Russell. Shown with cream-colored turtleneck sweater. S1981-10-044 Taylor.

Accessories: Bright gray patent leather "Nanette Imperials" shoes, 1960s. S1984-09-006 Laughlin. Two-tone gray wool hat with netting, 1950s. Made by Mrs. Sarah Trafford, a milliner in Williamsport, PA. S1984-59-009 Pepperman.

⁴⁰ "Fashions for November," *Peterson's Magazine* XLVI:5 (Nov. 1864): 385.

⁴¹ *The Delineator* XVIII:6 (Dec. 1881): 380.



"There are many women who are engaged in business of some sort that it seems necessary that they should have a distinct dress suited to their special wants.... Its material as a rule should, be more serviceable, better fitted to endure the vicissitudes of weather, and of plain colors, such as browns or grays.....This costume should not be made with plain simplicity, but it should at least dispense with all superfluities in the way of trimming. It should be made with special reference to easy locomotion and to the free use of the hands and arms. . . . Black has come to be adopted very generally for street-dresses; but while it is becoming for most individuals, it gives to the promenade a somewhat sombre look".⁴²



Above left: This gray silk taffeta waistcoat, ca. 1902-3, would have been paired with a coordinating skirt which has not survived. The rich combinations of multiple trims are typical of the first decade of the twentieth century. After applying the trims entirely by hand, the manufacturer left the lower hem completely unfinished, which is another common feature in Edwardian clothing. If it did not show, then it did not matter. S1991-45-202 Darnell. Shown with white cotton and lace shirtwaist (as blouses were then called), ca. 1902-1905. It belonged to Mrs. Lillian Birch Wertz of Abingdon, VA. S1981-23-010 Wetzel.

Above right: Graeta of Astoria, OR, dated her photo: 11-1-1900. Note the rich texture of the seersucker weave of her skirt and bodice, which are probably of fine wool.

Below left: A chic woman shows off her tailored wool walking suit, ca. 1908. No backmark.

Below right: Someone signed Mrs. Moore's name on a real photo postcard that has no other markings.

⁴² Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress*, 330-331.



*"Blue and white (or gray) harmonize."*⁴³

*"A dingy complexion seems to become dingier from contact with dull-gray or a bluish shade of purple; but dove-gray (a tone of gray showing a pinkish tinge) makes the complexion seem fairer, especially when primrose, baby-pink or crimson is deftly and reservedly combined with it."*⁴⁴

This rich silk dress, ca. 1892-1893, combines plain silk satin, silk woven with cream stripes and tiny pink and gold floral sprigs, lace and glittering glass beads. The bolero jacket is an integral part of the bodice construction and cannot be removed and worn separately. The bodice fastens by means of hooks and eyes in the center front lining. The center front drapery was held in place by straight pins. S1982-64-135 Wm. Penn.

⁴³ Wells, *Manners, Culture and Dress of the Best American Society*, 355.

⁴⁴ "Dress: Its Morals, Fitness and Care," *The Delineator* XLI:5 (May 1893): 555.

“The black and white mania . . . has raged so long. . . .” ⁴⁵



⁴⁵ “Fashions for February,” *Peterson’s Magazine* XLIII:2 (Feb. 1863): 172.



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